



MINUTES

President and Board of Trustees
Village of Arlington Heights
Committee-of-the-Whole
Community Room
Arlington Heights Village Hall
33 S. Arlington Heights Road
Arlington Heights, IL 60005
September 15, 2015
7:30 PM

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: President Hayes; Trustees: Farwell, Glasgow, LaBedz, Rosenberg, Scaletta, Sidor and Tinaglia

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Blackwood

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Randy Recklaus, Diana Mikula, James McCalister, Charles Perkins, Michael Mertes and Becky Hume

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Chamber Small Business Report

President Hayes thanked the Board and the community partners who worked to ensure a business friendly Village. The success of businesses will help lower taxes for property owners. He said it was a good example of a public/private partnership.

Mr. Recklaus said municipalities and Chambers of Commerce do their best work when they work together. He said the Chamber is a force multiplier for staff. Tonight's presentation is part of the agreed-to reporting process to the Village Board which is the client.

Mr. Jon Ridler and Mr. Jim Platt of the Arlington Heights Chamber of Commerce summarized the Small Business Development Report (Exhibit A). Fifty two successful case studies were created. They said that after conversations with local State Representatives Harris and Nekritz, there may

be an opportunity for matching funds from the State.

Mr. Platt said his focus was: retention visits, businesses with expansion plans, education and development. He said he tried to keep visits balanced and proportional to kinds of businesses and locations within the Village. He was able to have further conversations in the second year, but as they were more involved, there were also fewer of them. Mr. Platt was pleased that he was able to help businesses open sooner which put more dollars into the economy more quickly. He said that pathways found in the Planning and Building and Health Services Departments were identified for new businesses. He developed a way to better explain Village processes and as a result he was able to help expedite the processes sooner for follow-on businesses.

Mr. Platt said centralized marketing is a resource that businesses are looking for and he would like to expand that issue. He said many businesses are concerned with confidentiality; they are reluctant to voice concerns or ask questions.

Mr. Platt said at the beginning of the program, he primarily listened; many businesses were surprised that there was a representative from the Village/Chamber dedicated to small businesses. He said the goodwill was invaluable and powerful.

Mr. Gerd Loeff of Signs by Tomorrow said they just opened in a new, larger space in the Village. He said they almost moved to a neighboring suburb as there was only one property that would work in Arlington Heights and there were too many unanswered questions at this new location. Mr. Platt helped to find answers to the questions and helped them find resources like an architect, a tax consultant and construction companies, who could offer advice on how to make the Davis Street property work. Jim helped trouble shoot the zoning and building permit issues and arranged for him to meet with the proper Village staff. Mr. Loeff noted that Trustee Sidor gave support. He said he is confident they have made the right decision to stay. He said he felt much more comfortable because of the support from Mr. Platt and the help from the Village staff and that he could not have relocated within the Village without the relationships Mr. Platt brought.

President Hayes thanked Mr. Loeff for staying in the Village.

Dr. Martin Matis, an optometrist in the Village, said he was looking for space to expand his business. There were a number of difficulties regarding a proposed new location on Arlington Heights Road. He contacted the Village but was told that staff could not give input as he did not own the property. He said he seriously considered moving his practice near his farm residence out of town. He said the property had a zoning variance, so he moved forward. He said resistance he got on signage and other issues made it difficult for him to stay, so he considered selling the building. Out of the blue, Mr. Platt called and helped with the signage problem. Dr. Matis said Mr.

Platt brought the necessary people together to work it out. As a liaison, Mr. Platt knew the process and helped so much. He said moving to a new location is really hard for a small business owner as it is typically a one-time situation and understanding the process is challenging. He said, if not for Mr. Platt, he would have moved to the country.

Larry Huber from Salsa 17 said he was struggling to get the outdoor patio opened when Mr. Platt appeared. He said had Mr. Platt been involved earlier, it could have shaved a year off. Prior to Mr. Platt's involvement, he felt like he was banging his head against the wall. Mr. Platt played the mediator between him and Village staff. Mr. Huber said the Village is benefitting as are the business owners.

Jason Miller of Fitness 19 said he used the Chamber as a resource to help understand the sign variation process. Mr. Platt helped him understand the Village's perspective. He said Trustees Sidor and Tinaglia also reached out with offers of support. He said Mr. Platt is a great resource and he might have been able to bring the sign variation request sooner if Mr. Platt had gotten involved earlier. He said the program is a great resource to help businesses navigate, expedite and better understand the Village perspective.

Mayor Hayes read Trustee Blackwood's comments. Trustee Blackwood said she took an informal poll and said the overwhelming sentiment of business owners was positive. She said the combined pairing of the Chamber and the Planning Department was to the Village's advantage.

Trustee Tinaglia said that as a user of the system, he understands it well, but his clients often do not. To have someone to "hold the hands" of people navigating the system is valuable. He said he would be okay with giving the program more financial support.

Trustee Farwell asked where the leads come from. Mr. Platt said phone calls come to the Chamber, and a lot of the leads are word of mouth from conversations with other business owners. Trustee Farwell said it appeared the position has evolved from liaison to expeditor. He asked what the Village can do to help facilitate the path of information to new businesses. Mr. Ridler said they have monthly conversations with Village Staff where opportunities for improvement are presented. Mr. McCalister gives them lists of businesses that have applied for permits, but haven't been back. Trustee Farwell said he would like to hear more of the stories to help the Village continue to improve. The reports don't tell whole story.

Trustee Scaletta said more narrative would be helpful. He asked what questions are asked at the visits. Mr. Platt said he tries to engage the owners by asking about their business and how long have they been there. When they talk about themselves, they are happy to give them their time. Not every call is great. Not every owner wants help but he still lets them know the resource is there. Mr. Platt said he receives updated business license application lists from the Village. He then runs a report to efficiently visit

businesses based on location.

Mr. Platt said he breaks down his list into the following categories: type of business issue, what his involvement can be, long term prognosis, recommendations to Village/Chamber to get ahead of issues, and what staff involvement is. Trustee Scaletta said he would like more information without jeopardizing confidentiality. He asked if there was a way to share common themes. Mr. Platt said they had identified common threads and attached case studies to them, to explain why a thread and not an isolated issue. He said they need to start having those discussions in the monthly meetings with staff. Not all 52 cases have common threads. Trustee Scaletta suggested explaining common issues at breakfast meetings and working with the Economic Alliance. He said a spreadsheet isn't sufficient as it doesn't tell the whole story. He said sometimes the process is there for a good reason, but streamlining and better understanding would be helpful. He did not want businesses trying to get around regulations; the Code is there for a reason. Mr. Platt said businesses want clarification; they're not looking to get around the Code. Usually they are good people trying to do things the right way.

Mr. Ridler said when its Code related, they help translate what the owners are hearing. He said that is when they hand off the contact to the Village. It is often the first time they are opening a business. Sometimes tradesmen are not reputable and are not forthcoming to the businesses. Mr. Platt said they have not been able to attend the Plan Review meetings as of yet. Mr. Recklaus said there have not been any qualified businesses. Trustee Scaletta said the more information the Village gets, the more beneficial this is, since the numbers don't always tell the story.

Trustee Rosenberg asked if the Trustees could see the case studies. He wants to see if the Village is doing everything they can do. He asked about the visits. Mr. Platt said he leaves each business with a packet of resources, database links, Chamber information, Village contacts, Postal information and a follow up letter. He encourages them to self-advocate.

Trustee Rosenberg asked if there were help sheets for the Village. Mr. Platt said no, but it would be a good thing to work on, if the Village has something, they would like it. Trustee Rosenberg asked if the trend seemed to be with larger businesses versus smaller ones. Mr. Platt said they brought those who were willing to share their stories on common threads. It's harder for smaller business to step forward because they don't want their name mentioned. They are terrified. Having the Chamber helping business owners helps them understand that they are not alone.

Mr. Ridler said the Chamber does not get involved with bigger businesses and are not pursuing businesses outside of the agreement; they must qualify within one of the criteria. A lot of handing off to staff has occurred. Trustee Rosenberg asked if there were comments available post hand off. Mr. Platt said yes, getting in touch with the right person makes the difference. Just knowing where to begin is helpful. Mr. Platt said that Village customer

service has shown a marketable difference in the last 6-8 months. Being recognized when you walk in the door is important.

Mr. Recklaus said a lot of businesses may have a connection with one department, but not another. Often the connection can help facilitate a meeting. By having Mr. Platt, there is one more person advocating for that business. When issues come from Mr. Platt or Mr. Ridler staff talks about how the Village can be more clear or helpful. In addition to input from the Chamber, Staff also regularly discusses feedback received directly from applicants and possible improvements and efficiencies that could be implemented. These ideas are discussed at weekly meetings and a handful of things have already changed internally. As an example, Mr. Perkins, Mr. McCalister and Mr. Massarelli are working on trading ownership of projects like fences so that only one department owns a process.

Trustee Rosenberg asked about the ownership issue when people ask for advice on a property. Mr. Recklaus said staff does not like to spend a lot of time when there is no attachment to property. Mr. Perkins said that they deal with this issue every day. The challenge is that someone is looking at a building, but doesn't want to hire an architect, and because there is no plan, staff can't give a specific answer because projects have so many contingencies. Sometimes they can answer questions, but many times they cannot. A list of architects has been provided to the Chamber for them to refer to clients. The Village is not allowed to make referrals. Recently the Village had an inspector go to a site to see if something was possible, so the business would know it was not wasting money. Mr. Recklaus said when questions are asked without an architect or plans, often all of it depends. Sometimes a hypothetical answer is given, then the plans come, and the client comes back saying that something was promised, but it no longer works because of some other issue. Mr. Recklaus said Mr. Perkins is correct, staff is tempted to give an answer, but it comes back to bite the Village and staff has to be really careful.

Mr. Ridler agreed that it is difficult. He said having staff come to the site is very valuable.

Trustee Rosenberg asked if the businesses were being pressured to join the Chamber on these visits. Mr. Platt said he downplays the Chamber connection so that it is seen as a resource. It's a building process, business owners need to see value before they invest.

Trustee LaBedz asked why business owners would be afraid to speak. Mr. Platt said the perception is that the Village is "the man." They are worried that they are going to be told they are doing something wrong. Trustee LaBedz asked if the fear abates. Mr. Platt said an advantage of being a former small business owner is that he is able to relate to these owners and help people relax. Trustee LaBedz asked about the centralized marketing. Mr. Platt said they are working to try and link neighborhoods with their nearest businesses so that people shop locally.

Mr. Ridler said some multicultural owners sometimes have fear of how government works; this perception gets portrayed onto local government. Trustee LaBedz said she would appreciate more narratives in the reporting, the more that can be shared the better.

Trustee Glasgow said he needed some quantification to support the program or increase it. The numbers appeared to him to be going in a downward trend. Mr. Platt said the initial surge won't be replicated. Calls take more time now because advocating takes more time, and more referrals to Village staff will need to occur. Mr. Platt said the Building Department has been very helpful. Knowing the client can move forward with staff is helpful. A more prioritized program to the most vulnerable businesses will be important moving forward.

Trustee Glasgow asked how many new Chamber members have resulted from these visits. Mr. Platt said the Chamber has grown 10% in the last two years. Trustee Glasgow wanted to make sure that since tax dollars were being used that there was a quantifiable reason to keep the program going. He needs more meat in the report to justify to voters and residents that this is working. Trustee Glasgow said there was a swing in the numbers between downtown/south-town/north-town. Mr. Platt said many of the downtown businesses were approached when the sandwich board sign issue was in play. There is more activity in the south end because of the density; it is easier to get through more businesses in a short amount of time. On the north side getting in/out can take a long time and the small business density is not present.

Mr. Ridler said they have more detail and want to find the right way to share the stories and opportunities.

Trustee Sidor said this program has been invaluable as far as the education it has provided. He said one issue learned is that the Building Department is integral to the process. He asked staff what their thoughts were. Mr. McCalister said that it has been positive and they have gone on visits together, the Village and the Chamber want the same thing and getting the word out is helpful. Their suggestions on how to make things easier for businesses have been helpful. The relationship is working well. Mr. Perkins said they spend a lot of time in their monthly meetings. There was a recent case where a business contacted Mr. Platt because it was looking to relocate. Mr. Platt put them in touch with staff that were able to help with the zoning process. The client called and thanked the Village for their help. Mr. Perkins said the program has improved communication by discussing cases, and understanding the issues. Trustee Sidor thanked Mr. Platt for putting people at ease.

Mr. Ridler said finding balance with this part-time initiative is an ongoing challenge. There is a great opportunity to grow this depending on resources available. There are a lot of businesses in town that have not been contacted.

It will take more resources to reach them and to continue the work to retain businesses. Trustee Sidor said it is hard to put a dollar amount on the program as the intangibles are what the program is about. He said businesses are happier, things are getting done more quickly, there is improved outreach, it is a great program, and he witnessed it first-hand.

Amy Philpott, Chamber of Commerce President, said she wished this program was there when she started. She said sometimes she just didn't understand what the Village was looking for. The Village is lucky to have Mr. Platt in the role. Ultimately, if the community wants to grow as business friendly, it must roll up its sleeves and find out how to make it happen.

Mr. Recklaus said there is an intersection between development and governance which is difficult. Arlington Heights is fortunate to have a robust business market with a lot of success. Standards go up. The Village has high standards. Every code added, solves a problem, but makes things a little more difficult and technical. The other element is resources. Mr. McCalister and Mr. Perkins have seen a 10% cut in staff and work is up to pre-recession levels. If each department added a few people they would be able to get things done quicker and have better conversations. The Chamber brings people who are afraid of talking to the Village. Most people don't have problems.

Mr. Recklaus said any increase spent on outreach has to be proportionate. The Village's departments are busy and struggling to process the thousands of permits they handle. The Village needs aggregate data, not just storytelling, individual case studies and general observations. From a staff standpoint, there is value in summarized anecdotes. He said he wouldn't want to overplay singular issues, and focus more on the forest and less on the trees.

Trustee Scaletta asked for the Village to provide some direction to the Chamber for reporting so that some specific ways are identified to improve processes. Mr. Recklaus said staff would meet with the Chamber to provide a more useful format and forward this to the Board members for input.

Trustee Farwell said in looking at the forest for three years, he is seeing improvement in the departments. He asked for a framework of the Chamber suggestions, then have that information given to the Board and staff and between the three entities come up with a report. Usually consultants come up with deliverables, and he would like this situation to be the same.

Mr. Recklaus said the difference is a lot of the Chamber's work is parallel to what staff is doing. He asked if the Board wanted a similar product from staff to balance it out. He said it is a question of how the information is weighed; some businesses go through the process with no problems. The Chamber's information would not be a representative sample.

Trustee Farwell said some improvements in process could improve workload

for staff. He wanted to make sure staff learned how to work smarter before more people are added.

Mr. Recklaus asked if the Board would like to see a case study in the monthly report with response, data and observations. Trustee Farwell said he wanted a pulse.

Mayor Hayes said he did not want 100 different case studies; he wanted to see common threads.

Mr. Ridler said the Chamber can pinpoint common threads and show them with staff's input, and work to get that tool out there.

Trustee Scaletta said he wanted different deliverables than was shown tonight. He asked for Mr. Recklaus to identify what it is the Chamber should provide to the Board.

President Hayes thanked everyone involved. He said Mr. McCalister, Mr. Mertes and Mr. Perkins were critical to the process, as it is difficult to give up control of responsibilities. Without their support and participation this would not be successful.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Trustee Glasgow moved to adjourn at 9:47 p.m. Trustee Scaletta seconded the motion. The motion carried.