

**APPROVED MINUTES
OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS
TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2024 – 5:00 PM**

CALL TO ORDER:

The Work Session of the East Grand Forks City Council for Tuesday, January 23, 2024 was called to order by Council President Olstad at 5:00 P.M.

CALL OF ROLL:

On a Call of Roll the following members of the East Grand Forks City Council were present: Mayor Steve Gander, Council President Mark Olstad, Council Vice-President Tim Riopelle, Council Members Clarence Vetter, Ben Pokrzywinski, Dale Helms, Brian Larson, and Karen Peterson.

Staff Present: Karla Anderson, Finance Director; Jeff Boushee, Fire Chief; Nancy Ellis, City Planner; Ron Galstad, City Attorney; Paul Gorte, Economic Development Director; Charlotte Helgeson, Library Director; Reid Huttunen, City Administrator; Megan Nelson, City Clerk; and Jason Stordahl, Public Works Director.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM:

The Council President Determined a Quorum was present.

1. Review of Draft Economic Development Strategy – Paul Gorte & Mark Schill

Mr. Gorte reminded the Council how a meeting was held in October with City Council, staff, and businesses to discuss economic development and a strategy. He said this was an update from that meeting. Mr. Schill stated they took results from the meeting in October to identify priorities and define what work was needed. He explained they could put together the framework or developed a method to move forward. He commented how there were about 40 people at the meeting with half being from businesses and from that meeting it was determined there was a desire for action, a concern about the lack of space for businesses, a strong desire for more communications and marketing to help sell the City, and how they reviewed the positives that the City was able to offer. He said towards the end of the meeting it was brought up that housing still mattered but the Economic Development Authority (EDA) should not be a developer.

Mr. Schill said economic data was by county only, but he was also able to get information using zip codes so based on the region there had been some downturn since the pandemic but had been relatively flat. He reviewed the areas where the city was strong in agricultural production and manufacturing. He continued reviewing the other areas where the city was not as strong such as Admin Services, retail was close to average, and how the City compared to Grand Forks region. He pointed out how manufacturing was stronger on the East Grand Fork side, the region was higher for retail than in the city, and reviewed how manufacturing jobs were higher paying jobs that helped bring wealth to the region.

He stated that for most the people in any community the stores on the corners or highway were the economic development and shared information of the five state region. He said retail had been flat for the last 20 years, there was a big dip during the pandemic, it did come back, but it would be difficult to bring in retail to the community. He said there was a difference with the exchange rate was closer, more retail was wanted, but there would not be much for retail expansion which was important when looking at opportunities for the community. He asked what the goal was for economic development, when the question was asked the main answer was to improve the community, housing, and childcare along with quality of life. He said that helped to focus efforts and added one of the key takeaway points was to help with the growth and retention of existing businesses. He continued with the main items were to help existing businesses, increase commercial real estate, increase marketing and communications, continue to engage with local businesses, and lastly discontinue land and site development for residential housing.

Mr. Schill stated the core work areas were local business development, new business development, the three C's of connect, convene, and communicate, and the land and site development. He reviewed what could be included in each of the areas. He said the categories could change but this was to help create the framework to utilize when making decisions and knowing when to act. He added the next steps were to review priorities and work areas, move forward with work areas, there were limited resources, so they need to create a list to accomplish, and how this could help restructure the EDA and director position.

Mr. Gorte asked if they were headed in the right direction. Council President Olstad asked why Northland was not included in the information. Mr. Schill said the main data came from unemployment insurance, Northland was not counted, and guessed that information was reported through Thief River Falls. Council President Olstad thanked them for the information and thanked those who participated. Mr. Gorte said a follow-up meeting was going to be held on January 30th at the Eagles Club. Mr. Schill said the agenda for that meeting would be reviewing the four core work areas to get input. Mayor Gander said there had been planning efforts in the past, some good while others not so much, sometimes the plans were shelved, or no further input was gathered, so it was important to get continued input from the business community and at some point, they should also get input from consumers. Discussion followed about having regular meetings with businesses. Mr. Schill said item four was very intentional, there were people that wanted to provide input and wanted to help, and how the work would continue because it was unknown what would or would not work. He added they needed input from the community and they would be able to get people around the table to talk about this. Mayor Gander said not everyone was pleased at the meeting and some of those people have been brought into the conversation to help with the situation.

2. Update on Neighborhood Revitalization Program – Paul Gorte

Mr. Gorte said Gate City Bank started a program last year, they wanted to continue the program again this year, there were some issues with people getting permits, and they were working on a way to help correct that. He said seven loans were issued the previous year and the valuation of the home was increased from \$300,000 up to \$400,000.

ADJOURN:

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO ADJOURN THE JANUARY 23, 2024 WORK SESSION OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 5:29 P.M.

Voting Aye: Helms, Olstad, Larson, Peterson, Vetter, Pokrzywinski, and Riopelle.

Voting Nay: None.

Megan Nelson, City Clerk