

Business Development Commission

MEETING MINUTES

APPROVED

MEETING DATE: Thursday, May 26, 2016
LOCATION: City Hall
CALLED TO ORDER: 8:10 AM
MEETING ADJOURNED: 9:08 AM
NEXT MEETING: Thursday, June 23, 2016

Name	Present	Absent
Pat Richards, Chair	X	
William Alverson	X	
Tim Eichholz		X
Pam Neihaus	X	
Rebecca Now		X
Chalgne O'Brien	X	
Mike Pincus	X	
Nicole Roach		X
Jon Spiesman	X	
Mayor Gerry Welch, Council Liaison	X	
Mara Perry, Staff Liaison		X
Joan Jadali, Staff Liaison	X	

Also in attendance:
Fran Sudekum – Administrative Support

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion to approve the April minutes was made by Mike Pincus, seconded by Jon Spiesman, unanimously approved.

Opening a WG Business Brochure

The brochure has been passed off to printing. The Customer Service Desk has used it to make a better checklist for their use.

Focus Groups

The first focus group has taken place. Joan Esserman was the facilitator. The session was taped and is available to Commission members if they wish to listen to it. Gerry Welch listened to the tape and transcribed some notes from the session; the notes were handed out to Commission members in attendance (See Appendix, Handout #1). Only two businesses were able to attend due to conflicts in schedules. The two attending businesses are both stable businesses that have been in Webster for a while; one is a retail business and the other a professional services business; both relocated their business to Webster Groves.

A few items of feedback from the session:

- a recurring theme was pulling the business districts together; all spending their resources on the same things
- people only shop in Webster when they don't have time to go someplace else
- there's not a critical mass to go shopping in Webster Groves
- there are a lot of mom and pop buildings in Webster; they need help filling them
- online shopping is taking away business

- visual improvements need to be made
- Webster has a reputation for making it difficult to do business
- takes too long to get things done
- the explore website is inadequate
- there is a great deal of after-school chaos from unattended minors

A suggestion was made to share the Forum Notes with the City Council.

Commission members should read the notes from the session, digest, make notes, and bring back their thoughts to the next meeting.

All agreed the focus groups should be continued and Joan Esserman should continue as the facilitator.

The BDC should foster an open policy to hear feedback from businesses on a real-time basis. Not sure how to do that, but the effort is necessary.

Figuring out what the various business districts are doing on their own, would be valuable to start pulling things together. The Chairs of the three Webster Groves business districts should be invited to next month's meeting.

BDC Budget Cut

The budget for the BDC has been cut. The \$12,500 portion allocated for contracting a PR firm/consultant, currently Insight PR St. Louis, has been cut by Steve Wylie, City Manager. The \$7,000 portion for the new brochure and mailings has not been cut. City staff had issues with the work the current firm has been doing and felt the PR work could be done better in-house.

Staff is also uncomfortable with the BDC's PR Sub-committee handling the PR efforts. They would like to see the PR work brought into the whole BDC and not reside with the sub-committee; members didn't feel that would be a problem. A sub-committee was put in place to address time and resource issues; members are volunteers and it's difficult to carve out more time for additional meetings. Gerry Welch handed out information on accomplishments the BDC/PR Sub-committee to Commission members (See Appendix, Handout #2).

Questions were raised about the process of cutting the BDC's budget. Commission members were not brought in on staff concerns with how PR is handled and how much money is allocated for those efforts. Commission members felt these issues should have been put on the agenda to discuss and work out. They would like to give input directly to the City Manager on the importance of keeping money in the budget for PR needs. Joan Jadali stated she is his representative; he does not attend Commission meetings.

Going forward there are two items to address; first, keep the money in the budget for PR and second a discussion on how PR is handled and who will do the work. The Commission has a fiduciary responsibility to look at the budget and how the money is spent and therefore, should be a part of that process to effectively make recommendations. The Boards and Commissions are an arm of the City Council; they are established by ordinance and members are appointed by the Council.

Based on the mission of the BDC, Commission members feel it's important to use PR efforts to help the business districts thrive; bring in business to Webster Groves, and bring in more sales tax revenue, especially in light of changes and potential additional changes in the distribution of sales tax revenue in the St. Louis Metro area. As a result of changes in distribution, it is so important to "go out

and seek” business and sales tax revenue. Neighboring municipalities have recognized this need to actively seek out new business; Clayton has a staff person doing that job, Kirkwood is about to hire someone, and Wildwood is looking to hire someone. There’s a lot of competition to bring in business and sales taxes; Webster is at risk if we don’t recognize this.

The final budget has not yet been approved; Joan will tell the City Manager Steve Wylie the BDC recommends the \$12,500 be put back in the budget recommendation going to City Council for approval. There is a public hearing on the budget at the June 7th City Council meeting; Commission members could attend and voice their views. Unfortunately, many members are out of town on the 7th and not all will be able to attend. Several members will write a letter to City Council. A letter from the Commission as a whole will also be sent to City Council. Pam Neihaus has already sent an email letter to City Council; she handed out a copy (See Appendix, See Handout #3).

A discussion was held on how to handle PR efforts. Commission members are concerned having City staff take on the various PR responsibilities in addition to their normal daily work load would be a burden and increase communication issues since it will end up being split between departments. It was brought up, a professional PR consultant has media connections and networking that City staff does not. A PR firm has a reach into the St. Louis Metro area that City staff does not; it is their profession.

Specifically, the connections Insight PR St. Louis affords to Webster Groves and the work they have done is worth much more than the \$12,500 and would cost much more with other firms. “It would be short-sighted to cut them out.” That amount is “a drop in the bucket.” It was decided to have Insight PR St. Louis at the next BDC meeting so all Commission members could meet them.

When you look at Insight’s client list, St. Louis CVC, Confluence Greenway, Greater St. Louis Book Fair, for example, these existing relationships can only be a benefit to the City of Webster Groves; anyone in-house isn’t going to have those relationships. The cross pollination of clients is invaluable; these type of connections can’t be quantified by a dollar amount.

Real time example of valuable connections: Thru Insight’s connection with the CVC, Gerry Welch was invited to give a presentation that connected her with the marketing person at the Regional Arts Commission (RAC); one of the results of that connection is a full-page ad in the Opera Theatre of St. Louis’s La bohème program (paid for by the RAC) for the arts in Webster Groves and Kirkwood; an ad that would have cost a great deal if we had done that for ourselves. The Opera Theatre of St. Louis is getting an international reputation. It brings in people from all over the country to Webster Groves for about six weeks.

Joan put forth the method Maplewood uses to bring in business; their business district pays for their PR/Communication person. A part time communication person on staff is another idea; however, when last purposed City Council did not approve this idea. Commission members felt they didn’t have the whole picture; was the \$12,500 simply cut out or moved somewhere else; could it be put toward the salary of a part time communication person, or used in some other manner; it’s hard to process things in a vacuum; they need more information. The Commission needs the opportunity to discuss and be a part of the decision; it’s why they were put in place.

NEXT MONTH

- First BDC Forum Session Notes: Read, digest, make notes and bring back to the table next month.
- Have Insight PR St. Louis attend next month's meeting so all Commission members can meet them.
- Bring in the Chairs of all three Business District Commissions to explain BDC's mission and the efforts that have been made and get their feedback on whether it's been successful or not, is there value or not. As well as find out what each is doing on their own.

ADJOURNED

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 AM.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, May 26, 2016 at 8:00 AM – City Hall.

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Appendix

BDC May Meeting Handout #1 – Notes BDC Forum, May 18, 2016

1. What are your expectations?
 - Learn more about Crossroads needs
 - Just learn from others
2. Why did you choose WG?
 - Safe environment for employees; free and accessible parking for clients and employees; looked at other communities
 - Lives here; kids go to school here; open in my community; built company here and wanted to stay here
 - Parking can be an issue in Old Webster when the parking deck fills up; people pass up the businesses because there is no parking spot; parking ticket for \$25 in Crosswalk at Breadco; won't go back for a while; hard to get to free parking for employees; takes chances on tickets for \$10 rather than buy a permit; waiting list for a parking space; hard for employees; long walk to employee lot in bad weather
3. Are there any solutions for the visibility problems in Crossroads and OW?
 - Saved money for traffic study of Big Bend and Elm for two years; ideas coming from a firm; Crossroads functioning fine; slow government
 - OW trade association – good; active; holiday open house and other activities; finally fixed directional signs; year and a half to get a sign; slow government; other cities implement things faster – Maplewood; City hall helps in other cities
 - Need to pull the business districts together to work together; problem with segmented distinct areas – some want to get together, some don't; not a competition among the areas; need to figure out how to get the three districts together ; process for unification;
 - Idea: classic car competition with driving around the districts;
 - Should the BDC take some leadership in bringing the districts together? Try to find a way to get folks together; OW Trade is starting to make efforts toward reaching out
 - Chamber of Commerce – expense that wasn't beneficial; wanted to support, but not beneficial; nice folks in Chamber, but interaction was with people who are in the same realm
4. How do the vacant buildings help/hurt you? How can we attract?
 - Not any around us. Maplewood is young and hip and exciting; WG is more traditional and old school; no action at night; more family venues
5. Talk about the image of WG.
 - Surprised that we are not more hip. Reputation for being a sleepy bedroom time – which is what people want. Difficult for businesses. People go to Kirkwood to shop. Downtown Kirkwood is bigger and more robust.
 - People go to Maplewood and Kirkwood to shop. Not a critical mass for shopping in WG. Perception is to go somewhere more fun, just here if they have no time.
 - Architects business is out of town; work in Clayton and Chesterfield. Location is good for them.
 - Retail clients are mainly from WG; customers from around but limited from west; good chunk of business is selling in other stores, etc.; walk in traffic is slow; Leopard location on corner is better

- Is online business taking business away? Online shopping is taking away business; decline in retail not good.
6. What stores around you would help to feed your business?
 - There are people in Crossroads that don't have to pay business taxes because they are exempt. Lessens the collection of taxes for the business districts.
 - Restaurants help as people walk around after hours
 7. What would you do with more money?
 - More parking; add to Katie trail with biking.
 - Get rid of telephone poles; cool stop lights; clean up the "junk" of lines, etc.
 - Need to fix Elm and Big Bend which is a bit of an eyesore; cosmetic face light of a few of the businesses in Crossroads
 - People don't take advantage of the Crossroads grant
 - City could buy a house and add more parking
 8. Reputation for making it difficult for new businesses
 - Notoriously bad to get a liquor license
 - Signage issues are taxing and the worst; plans for submission; logo is great sign but business owner told to take down her logo and sign because it was an inch to big
 - Feels like the City tries to make this as hard as possible while other communities try to welcome you
 - Need to know the stuff ahead of time
 - City takes a long time to do stuff; business called about needing a change of address after three years in another location; no coordination among departments; people don't talk to each other in City Hall
 9. Work together
 - Need email list of other businesses in the districts
 - Share some information about crimes, events, etc. Active Facebook in OW
 - OO seems like no one knows/cares
 - NEED a unified brochure – BDC should do this
 10. How does expansion/threats deal with your future?
 - Need to revise many of our rules; causing issues; hurting reputation
 - Railroad station issues – no money; help volunteering; help your neighbor; poor guys
 - Historical landmark
 11. Where do the rules hinder you?
 - Focus on rules rather than the underlying issues; City is here to make it hard and enforce the rules rather than deal with an issue.

- Business made many trips to City Hall and couldn't get help from City; Needed many trips to figure things out
- City needs to welcome businesses; you are out on your own; no liaison; city hall is not perceived as helpful
- Weird issue with changing address
- Many mom and pop buildings in WG; no commercial brokers; city hall needs to be more helpful

12. Do you feel nurtured or what can we do to nurture them?

- General advertising
- Need an updated website; explore and others; not putting it in directory because it is so bad
- No local business; City has never referred us to anyone; not even on website

13. What have we left out?

- The City could be more warm and welcoming and helpful and help them grow. City Hall is where you pay taxes and parking tickets and not more.
- Love Webster.
- Crime stuff – need notification of crime issues. Security cameras are catching kids urinating and sniffing white stuff on the trash cans; pants with debris left behind businesses
- No issues with crime, but OW is chaotic after school on Friday; stuff stolen; had to keep out kids under 14; kids running rampant screaming F word; stealing Yogurt; kids are congregating; playing on train tracks.



BDC May Meeting Handout #2 – Highlights of Accomplishments of the BDC PR/Com Subcommittee

**Highlights of Accomplishments of the BDC PR/Com Subcommittee
May 10, 2016**

The goal of the BDC/PR Subcommittee has been to enhance the visibility of Webster Groves to attract residents and visitors to shop, dine, and attend events in Webster Groves in order to increase the success of our local business community.

The following lists many of the accomplishments of this committee.

Establishment of professional standards and consistency in colors and design of PR related materials.

Development of brochures for external usage, including racks at regional information kiosks.

Created a valuable relationship with the Civic and Visitors Commission (CVC) that has resulted in

- Extensive annual coverage in the 400,000 plus Visitors' Guide
- Placement of brochures in tourist and event-related locations throughout the region
- Attractive website coverage of WG through ExploreSTL
- Recent presentation to over 100 event and tour businesses that has led to further valuable media coverage of WG

Twice yearly mailer to WG addresses that focuses on shopping local, local news worthy coverage, and events that drive people to WG

Created an extensive holiday campaign under the "Webster Wonderland" banner for the past few years.

Insight Marketing has implemented this campaign with the following.

- Determined the best package of spots to feature WG on 102.5 and written the spots
- Created a one-page mailer for every WG address featuring shopping, dining, and events
- Created 4 ads for the WKTimes
- Brought extensive media coverage of WG businesses over the holidays including an entire morning of Fox 2 visits in 2015 to local shops and restaurants as well as previous year's coverage ranging from Show Me St. Louis to reindeer coverage at various stations
- Sought out and been available for media coverage during the season

Been responsible for media coverage of many events over the past four years from the opening of the WG Farmers Market with coverage by both Fox 2 and Channel 5, community days, the reopening of the Murdoch Bridge, holiday events, and more.

Themed "Shop Local" in all mailers and events with heavy emphasis on the WG Gift Certificate created by the BDC which to date has resulted in selling over 6,100 certificates bringing potential buying power of \$61,000 for local businesses to date.

Created and implemented the "Snap Happy Digital Photo Contest."

Provided a monthly "News You Can Use" email for local businesses.

Worked with Opera Theatre and the Rep to "swap" coverage in programs.

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BDC May Meeting Handout #3 – BDC Commission Member Pam Niehaus Letter to City Council

-----Original Message-----

From: pniehaus <pniehaus@aol.com>
To: citycouncil <citycouncil@webstergroves.org>
Sent: Mon, May 9, 2016 10:34 pm
Subject: Letter for City Council

May 9, 2016

To Members of the Webster Groves City Council:

As a member of both the Business Development Commission and the BDC's Public Relations subcommittee, I'm expressing my deep disappointment that the current budget proposal has eliminated funding for communications projects and the services of Insight Marketing & Communications. I believe that it would have been beneficial to discuss this proposal with the BDC or the subcommittee that has led these promotional efforts successfully for the past few years.

Members of the BDC and the Public Relations subcommittee represent various professions and expertise in: real estate law, small business ownership, area Chamber of Commerce management, strategic planning consulting, marketing, communications, and financial services. Over the years, the Commission and its subcommittee have considered and developed many projects to promote retail businesses, such as:

- Informational brochure on starting a business (in progress)
- Regular email newsletter to interested businesses
- Events/news mailer to all WG households (Fall/Winter, Holiday, Spring/Summer)
- "Shop Small" information and materials
- Coordinated holiday radio and print advertising (with consolidated funds from WG's business districts) centered on "Webster Wonderland" theme.
- Various brochures on Webster stores and attractions
- On-air programming on local television stations (no cost)
- Feature placement in St. Louis Convention and Visitors Commission publications
- Personal visits to new businesses

In addition, the BDC and the Public Relations subcommittee have discussed other projects, including historical plaques on buildings, more signage throughout the business districts, and increased promotion of Webster Groves' concentration of extraordinary arts institutions. The group also has delved into the issue of landlords and their role in shaping the business community and character of Webster Groves commerce. The BDC has encouraged the City to hire a part-time business development liaison to improve relations with landlords and encourage retain expansion.

The core of the Commission's work is **communications**--whether in person, on social media, in traditional media (television, radio, print, web), through branding and coordinated messaging, in signage, or in overall marketing strategies. Our target audiences are local and area shoppers, current and potential business owners, landlords, tourists, and WG residents.

In the absence of a communications function or professional on the City Hall staff, the Commission has depended on Insight Marketing, a small local company which charges a very modest amount--\$1,000 per month--to consult, help formulate marketing and media strategies, produce copy, work with local television producers and reporters, make presentations, and assist in other communications functions. One of Insight Marketing's two principals is Mary Hendron, a long-time resident of Webster Groves.

Insight Marketing has deep creative roots in the St. Louis area, and some of its clients include: St. Louis Convention and Visitor's Commission, Confluence Greenway, Dance St. Louis, Greater St. Louis Book Fair, Miriam Foundation, City Museum, Missouri Department of Tourism, St. Louis Science Center, St. Louis History Museum, Washington University and its School of Medicine, Moonrise Hotel, Metro Theatre Company, Disney on Ice, and Wizard World/ St. Louis Comic Con.

Their work is of the highest quality and has moved Webster forward in defining and promoting its business community. Webster is fortunate to have many terrific businesses, but the City must be strategic in both supporting existing enterprises and attracting new ones. I hope the Council will restore funding for Insight Marketing and our communications projects to next year's budget.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns.

Pam Niehaus
131 Portland Terrace