

**MINUTES OF THE JULY 8, 2024
MEETING OF THE MORTON GROVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
MORTON GROVE VILLAGE HALL, 6101 CAPULINA AVENUE, MORTON GROVE, IL 60053**

Pursuant to proper notice in accordance with the Open Meetings Act, the regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission was called to order at 7:04 p.m. Secretary Zoe Heidorn called the roll.

Commissioners Present: Dahlberg, Fernandez, Hardegree, Laliwala, O'Connor, Pandit

Commissioners Absent: Khounani, Mathew

Village Staff Present: Brandon Nolin, Community Development Administrator; Zoe Heidorn, Assistant Village Administrator

Village Trustees Present: Trustee Witko

Chairperson Fernandez made a motion to approve the draft minutes from the meeting of May 13, 2024. Commissioner Pandit seconded the motion. All present at the May meeting voted in favor. Motion passed.

The Commissioners and Trustee Witko provided introductions, including where they live, their professions, and why they joined the Economic Development Commission. Brandon Nolin stated that he joined the Village as the new Community Development Administrator in January 2024, taking over for Zoe Heidorn, who moved into Administration. He said that as part of the transition, he is now the staff liaison to the EDC. He said that he previously worked at Houseal Lavigne, a Chicago-based planning firm.

Chairperson Fernandez complimented the recent Morton Grove Days event and posed some questions to staff regarding the American Legion's operations during the event. Staff said that they would follow up with him. The Commissioners agreed that the event was a success and reflected the quality of the Morton Grove community and Village services.

Chairperson Fernandez noted that there were no Morton Grove restaurants at the event, with the exception of Culver's. Ms. Heidorn responded that Morton Grove restaurants have been invited and participated in food service in the past. Participation remains low because restaurants find the event to be less profitable than expected, because staffing is challenging, or because they do not have the equipment to sell food at an outdoor event.

Chairperson Fernandez responded that the Village should consider purchasing outdoor food vendor equipment for restaurants to support local businesses that don't have the capacity to invest in equipment. Ms. Heidorn responded that staff could certainly consider this, but that there would be concerns with funding, logistics, and how such a program would be made equitable to all businesses.

Commissioner Laliwala said that there was no Halal food offered at the event, which was disappointing. He said that not offering Halal food excludes a large portion of Morton Grove residents. He said that the Village should try to identify Halal-certified food vendors at future events.

Mr. Nolin said that the opportunity to be a food vendor at Morton Grove events could be communicated to local restaurants through the annual Business Compliance Certificate renewal process. The Commissioners agreed that this would be helpful.

Ms. Heidorn reviewed the updated EDC meeting schedule, which moves meetings to occurring every-other-month. The next meeting will be held in September.

Mr. Nolin provided an update on active projects, including:

- 8350 Lehigh Avenue, an 89-unit townhome development by Lexington Homes
- Napleton Honda at Waukegan and Dempster
- Aldi expansion at Washington Commons shopping center
- New Metra station at 8501 Lehigh Avenue
- Dempster Street Corridor Plan

Chairperson Fernandez asked about the status of the property at the northwest corner of Austin and Lincoln Avenues. Ms. Heidorn responded that there is a well-documented history of environmental contamination at the site due to its previous use as a gas station. She attended a meeting with the previous owner's environmental consultant and understood that there is a path forward in redeveloping the property but that it requires certain actions by the owner. The Village is supportive of redevelopment but cannot purchase the property or lead remediation or redevelopment efforts.

Commissioner O'Connor asked if other tenants at the Joe Donut site at Birch Avenue and Dempster Street have been identified. Mr. Nolin responded that they have not at this time.

Mr. Nolin reviewed the Morton Grove Business Survey. He said that there were 52 responses and provided an overview of the response rate by sector. Generally, he said the feedback was very positive. The largest issue identified was the availability of a quality workforce. Commissioner Laliwala said that the results should be used to inform the future Dempster Street Corridor Plan. Mr. Nolin responded that staff and the consultants will certainly look at flow of workers into and out of the community. Commuter data is an untapped resource.

Mr. Nolin noted that Morton Grove has a good diversity of businesses. Commissioner Laliwala asked if there are a large number of manufacturers in Morton Grove. Ms. Heidorn responded that there are a lot of manufacturers, especially along Lehigh Avenue and Oakton Street. Trustee Witko named several local manufacturers. Ms. Heidorn noted that there are many workforce development programs in the Chicagoland area that could be tapped to assist in workforce development at the local level.

Commissioner O'Connor said that it might be helpful to have employers subsidize employee transit passes. She said that employers should leverage Morton Grove's proximity to Metra and Pace service lines. The Commissioners discussed transit and worker transportation. Mr. Nolin noted that the "last mile problem" is typical and that solutions should be identified in future planning efforts.

Commissioner Pandit asked for staff to define "workforce training" and asked how the Village might be responsible to train workers. Mr. Nolin responded that the Village would not undertake actual training activities, but would connect the dots between resources and businesses in need of workforce development. Chairperson Fernandez mentioned his use of the Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program, which provided him with \$10,000 worth of training for free when he was out of work. Mr. Nolin said that this type of program could be shared through the Village's communication channels.

Chairperson Fernandez noted that businesses reporting as being "stable" in business activity were not an indication of good economic health. He said that any business with stable productivity is a dying business, especially with rising costs of doing business. He asked which industries are becoming more or less productive in Morton Grove. Mr. Nolin said that they would have to cross-reference the data.

Commissioner Pandit said that they need to think carefully about what to do with the data and consider reaching out to specific businesses. Mr. Nolin said that the survey was anonymous, so they cannot reach out to businesses, but

that the results would inform future policy and planning efforts. Ms. Heidorn said that a more formal report would be crafted by staff for the EDC's review. The final report would be presented to the Board of Trustees for their review.

Ms. Heidorn provided an update on the Cumulus marketing campaign. She said that the first portion of the campaign was directed toward advertising Morton Grove Days, the second portion would be directed toward advertising the Sustainability Expo, and the third portion would be directed toward marketing Morton Grove generally. The campaign would run through summer and into early fall.

Mr. Nolin said that he was aware of the EDC's intent to hold a business workshop and discussed some potential ideas. The Commissioners agreed that they could discuss the workshop in greater detail at their next meeting.

Ms. Heidorn reminded the Commissioners that the Sustainability Expo will be held on Saturday, September 14, at the Morton Grove Civic Center. The EDC will have a table at the Expo to promote the four Greener Morton Grove Award winners and provide educational materials on supporting local eco-friendly businesses and operating a green business. She said that Mr. Nolin would be seeking volunteers to sit at the EDC's table.

Mr. Nolin reviewed the three Facade Improvement Program applications with the Commissioners:

1. **FIP 24-02: Kappy's Sign (7200 Dempster St.)** – Mr. Nolin reviewed the application with the Commissioners. He said that there would be \$25,000 left in the program fund if all three applications are approved. Commissioner Pandit made a motion to approve FIP 24-02 as presented. The motion was seconded by Chairperson Fernandez. The motion was unanimously approved by the Commissioners.
2. **FIP 24-03: Variegated Design Facade (8732 Ferris Ave.)** – Mr. Nolin reviewed the application with the Commissioners, explaining that the property is next to Equipment International on Ferris Avenue. The painting does not qualify as an eligible expense, but the windows and brickwork needed qualifies. The property is in the Lehigh/Ferris TIF District, so the applicant is eligible to receive \$15,000. Chairperson Fernandez made a motion to approve FIP 24-03 as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hardegree. The motion was unanimously approved by the Commissioners.
3. **FIP 24-04: Poko Loko Sign (5641-49 Dempster St.)** – Mr. Nolin reviewed the application with the Commissioners. Commissioner O'Connor asked if there is currently a sign in the same location. Mr. Nolin clarified that they are not required to use the lowest bidder. The low bid just informs the Village's maximum level of assistance. Chairperson Fernandez made a motion to approve FIP 24-04 as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Dahlberg. The motion was unanimously approved by the Commissioners.

Chairperson Fernandez asked whose job it is to maintain a property. Ms. Heidorn responded that it is the property owner's responsibility. She said that he or anyone else should let the Village know of any property maintenance issues they observe.

Hearing no further business or public comment, Commissioner Laliwala moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner O'Connor.

The motion to adjourn the meeting was approved unanimously pursuant to a voice vote at 8:12 p.m.

Minutes by: Zoe Heidorn