

APPROVED

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ARLINGTON ECONOMIC ALLIANCE HELD ON NOVEMBER 20, 2024 AT 7:30 A.M. AT THE VILLAGE HALL

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Andrew Stengren – Chairman
Tony Guido
Terry Iverson
Heather Larson
Michael Mulder
Kerri Oots
Marc Poulos
Brian Roginski
Andi Ruhl

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Tonia Etoh
Ellen Para
John Toliopoulos

STAFF PRESENT:

Michael Mertes – Business Development Manager

ALSO PRESENT:

Keith Moens, Resident

Call to Order

Chairman Andrew Stengren called the meeting to order at 7:32 AM.

Approval of Minutes – September 18, 2024

The meeting minutes of September 18, 2024 Arlington Economic Alliance meeting were reviewed.

HEATHER LARSON MOVED AND MARC POULOS SECONDED A MOTION TO APPROVE THE DRAFT SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 ARLINGTON ECONOMIC ALLIANCE MEETING MINUTES. ALL ALLIANCE MEMBERS VOTED IN FAVOR OF THE MOTION.

Development Update

The Arlington Gateway development broke ground in October. An extension until May 2025 for Arlington 425's PUD approval was approved by the Village Board. The Board also approved a plan to engage a sign contractor on the development of two sign features in the Downtown, one in Harmony Park and the other at Clock Tower Plaza. Installation is anticipated in early 2025. Longtime Director of Planning & Community Development, Charles Perkins, retired last week after 35 years in that position for the Village. Also, Rich Casey has resigned from the Economic Alliance.

Mr. Iverson suggested future electronic signage that would capture the attention of Metra riders, in addition to the one currently at Arlington Heights Road and Northwest Highway. Mr. Guido asked if other Downtown signage is being considered, and Mr. Mertes responded not at this time. Ms. Larson and Chair Stengren like the clock tower signage concept, but Chair Stengren asked for clarification about the branding for the Harmony Park sign. Mr. Mertes explained that "DtA" is the Downtown Arlington Heights Business Alliance's brand, and the concept sign was an effort to promote Downtown in alignment with that organization's marketing efforts. Mr. Iverson suggested adding a QR code to the Harmony Park sign, allowing visitors to tag to their social media posts or access information on the Downtown. Mr. Mulder referenced a past campaign, "I (heart) Arlington Heights." as a previous effort to support the community and its businesses.

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Zero Interest Loan Program

The Village Board unanimously approved modifications to the Zero Interest Loan program, reflecting the recommendations from the Economic Alliance. This will expand the program to three options for applicants, the current Standard Loan, the Mega Loan for large projects, and the Microloan for smaller projects. Staff is updating applications and a flyer for these programs. Once complete, staff will promote via social media, e-newsletters, and other channels. Staff is also planning to present the program via an Arlington Heights Memorial Library webinar in February. Chair Stengren inquired about any feedback from the Village Board, and Mr. Mertes explained that discussed was positive and supportive of the changes.

Economic Alliance Work Plan – 2024

An Alliance-sponsored manufacturing program was held on November 13. Eight local high school students and one teacher attended. The event started at Village Hall with presentations by Mr. Iverson and District 214 apprenticeship program representatives. Attendees toured JTEKT Machinery and Hommer Tool, then came back to Village Hall for lunch and open discussion. There is an opportunity to build on this program in 2025 with Alliance support, and hopefully attract more students and parents as well. Small business profiles were part of the Alliance's work plan, but were postponed primarily due to Staff turnover and other more immediate priorities. But staff is looking to reassess this item for 2025. Additionally, notes of appreciation to businesses celebrating five-year and ten-year anniversaries in Arlington Heights were sent out after the Commission's July meeting.

Regarding the manufacturing program, the students in attendance seemed much more engaged following the tours, said Mr. Iverson. Still, proactive outreach to parents is needed to grow such a program, beyond what the schools are already doing. Chair Stengren sees the program as a step in the right direction and Mr. Iverson agreed, emphasizing the importance of attracting a diverse group of students. Mr. Poulos asked about outreach to parents. Mr. Iverson said that School District 214 does a great job, but that working professionals also need to make concerted efforts in promoting their respective industries to parents. In regards to the manufacturing program specifically, Mr. Mertes stated it was promoted through channels such as social media and the Village's resident e-newsletter.

Ms. Oots asked about setting up tables at school events, such as parent-teacher conferences, to promote career paths. Ms. Ruhl added that children don't always communicate information, and that it's more helpful when programs and resources are organized in one place easily accessible to parents. The best time to reach parents and students might be at the middle school level, around eighth grade, educating them on career options if they are looking for a pathway and unsure of their interests. Chair Stengren wondered if the manufacturing program could serve as a template to promote other industries to students. Mr. Mulder discussed the value of mentorships and determining what motivates students individually, and that a career fair might be a good opportunity. Ms. Larson feels that any program should be sure to complement District 214's efforts, not duplicate them. On another note, a "State of the Village" program in 2025 could also generate a great amount of interest.

Economic Alliance Work Plan – 2025

Mr. Mertes explained that advisory and working Commissions are asked to provide an annual letter to the Board outlining what they have accomplished over the past year and what their work plan is for the coming year. This will allow the Mayor, Village Board, and Staff to weigh in on the work plan in advance and add potential projects or provide other guidance as needed. Staff would like to create realistic expectations of what can be achieved while handling the immediate needs of prospective and existing businesses in addition to conducting year-round marketing efforts. This is so that staff and the Alliance are not overpromising and under-delivering on what can be feasibly achieved.

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Mr. Mertes asked the Commission if they would like to carry 2024 programs over to 2025. Other ideas include providing a letter to the Village Board of economic development areas of focus and a "Buy Local" program that incentivizes demand among residents and the general populace. Ms. Ruhl suggested an event where students can speak face-to-face with people who work in various industries ("career pathways"), and Mr. Mulder likes the idea of students being able to experience an actual work environment. Chair Stengren asked for specification on what staff needs for the 2025 work plan, and Mr. Mertes explained that it is a list of goals that the Commission can strive to accomplish, but are not mandatory. Chair Stengren favored carrying over small business seminars, and notes of appreciation, from the 2024 work plan to 2025, and have staff focus on small business profiles on their own. He also feels that two or three seminars are reasonable, and supports a "State of the Village". A career expo or manufacturing program would be good as well. Mr. Iverson suggested supporting existing events, that already have an established audience, and get several industries involved.

Mr. Mulder would like to highlight reasons why people come back to Arlington Heights, namely for quality of life and job opportunities. Mr. Iverson and Mr. Poulos agreed, seeing this as an opportunity to create profiles of residents and business owners. Showcasing resources available to small businesses was also suggested by Mr. Poulos. Ms. Ruhl spoke to the goal of the Commission, building community by supporting businesses, and Mr. Guido added that vacancies and what neighboring communities are doing to help businesses shouldn't be overlooked. The Village needs to retain existing businesses and help them grow. Ms. Ruhl emphasized the value of learning what assistance existing businesses need. If diversity is desired, there needs to be proactive efforts to attain it. She also referenced growth with the Library's "Coffee & Connect" program. Mr. Roginski asked about a potential happy hour event to accommodate business owners not able to attend a breakfast. Mr. Poulos referenced the Chamber's Leadership Center as another channel for business assistance. Mr. Mertes discussed a past Economic Alliance Breakfast that covered business resources, but it wasn't as well attended as other breakfast programs. But that information could work better to supplement a program, rather than being the primary focus.

Ms. Ruhl stressed the importance of having a good speaker, which attracts a larger audience. Ms. Larson has seen seminars featuring local legislators that draw significant attendance. Mr. Guido inquired about industry-targeted events. Adding to that, Ms. Ruhl sees that as an opportunity for each Alliance member to offer assistance to local businesses within their respective industry, as well as for the business owners to share their thoughts and needs. She added that the event could have a keynote speaker, with separate roundtable breakout sessions afterward. Mr. Mertes asked if smaller events, targeted to certain industries, were preferred, or if a larger event was ideal.

Mr. Guido referenced past open house breakfasts that were hosted by businesses and sponsored by the Chamber. Ms. Ruhl sees value in the Alliance members being able to introduce themselves to the business community and serve as a channel for business needs to the Village. Chair Stengren suggested the Commissioners could sit at tables prior to the keynote, and business owners can approach them individually to discuss any concerns or assistance needed. Adding to this, Mr. Mulder suggested assigning a different Alliance member to each table to generate feedback from the attending businesses, and each Commissioner can take notes from discussion and bring back anonymously to the Alliance for consideration. Ms. Ruhl has seen this with each table having a different topic, and attendees could move among various tables. Mr. Mertes suggested having general projects on the 2025 work plan, but specifics can be determined as the year goes along. This would give the Alliance flexibility on how to implement the various programs.

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Ms. Ruhl requested that any audience accessibility needs are taken into consideration. Also, if there are unused funds from the Alliance budget, that the Commission consider hiring a professional speaker for an ensuing event. Chair Stengren asked the Commissioners to consider their own industry, and any challenges it currently faces. Then action items can be created around that industry need.

Other Business and Public Comment

No other business was discussed and there was no public comment.

Adjournment

**HEATHER LARSON MOVED AND MARC POULOS SECONDED A MOTION TO ADJOURN.
ALL ALLIANCE MEMBERS VOTED IN FAVOR OF THE MOTION.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:57 AM.

Andrew Stengren, Chair
Arlington Economic Alliance

Prepared by Department of Planning & Community Development