

APPROVED
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD (EDAB)
MEETING MINUTES
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
100 NORTH ANDREWS AVENUE
8TH FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM
NOVEMBER 12, 2008 – 4:00 P.M.

1/08 – 12/08

<u>Board Members</u>	<u>Attendance</u>	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Gwen Watson, Chair	A	8	1
Ralph Riehl, Vice Chair	P	8	1
Mark Budwig	A	8	1
Cort Neimark	P	7	2
Patricia DuMont	P	5	1
Tim Schiavone	P	5	4
Kristina Hebert	A	3	6
Adam Sanders	P	6	3
Dev Motwani (arr. 4:16)	P	8	1
Mark Krom	A	4	5
Roslind Osgood	A	5	4

Staff

Jeff Modarelli, Economic Development Director
Patricia Smith, Economic Development Secretary III
Alfred Battle, CRA Director
Linda Gee, Customer Operations Manager, Public Works
Hilda Testa, Recording Secretary, Prototype, Inc.

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Vice Chair Riehl called the meeting to order at 4:06 p.m. It was determined that a quorum was not yet present.

At the suggestion of Mr. Modarelli, the following item was taken out of order on the agenda.

V. Façade Grant Update

Vice Chair Riehl introduced Alfred Battle, CRA Director, to give the Board an update on the Façade Grant program.

Mr. Battle stated that when he had last addressed the Board, they had taken a tour to view several of the area's façades as they were being constructed or renovated with funding from the CRA. The program provides property owners

and businesses in the major commercial areas, with \$20,000 in assistance from the CRA if they are located along Sistrunk Boulevard and \$7500 in assistance if they are located elsewhere in the community. These funds do not have to be repaid.

There is no requirement for the City Commission or the CRA Board to approve these funding packages, Mr. Battle explained, as they have delegated authority to approve applications without returning before either body for approval. The money is reimbursable, however, and there is a minimum investment of 25% of the CRA's full funding amount by the applicant himself. In most cases, the façades do not require the full \$20,000 funding amount.

Once an application is approved, the CRA enters into a contract for payment. When all invoices have been submitted and signed and contractors have been paid, the CRA cuts a check for the applicant.

Mr. Battle referred the Board to a book he had provided for them, showing that often the façades are made to appear very interesting. Particularly along Sistrunk Boulevard, this was accomplished through the involvement of an architectural firm that had entered into the program out of a desire to do community-based work. They had attempted to develop several iconic buildings in this area, including the 6th Street Plaza, Negro Chamber of Commerce, and Justice for All in Broward (JAB) Building, among others. These structures were part of an Afrocentric design plan that had resulted in the CRA being awarded the Out of the Box Award at the most recent Florida Redevelopment Conference in October 2008. The organization had recognized that the façades in this area were unlike those to be seen anywhere else in the City, Mr. Battle pointed out. He identified many of the specific structures featured in the book.

In these instances, the architectural firm had acted as a partial lender, he said, noting that most of the façades cost between \$25,000-30,000. Instead of the usual percentage of contribution required by the owner, the lending firm had only required that the business or property owner contribute \$500. The firm had loaned all of the money for any remaining improvements and had come up with the remaining equity amount. Their funds were reimbursed by the CRA when the project was finished, Mr. Battle said.

The program is continuously funded each year by the CRA, which puts approximately \$150,000 into its budget for this purpose, usually creating or renovating some 20 façades in a year. Their average is four to five applications per year. In many cases, businesses apply for the \$7500 for landscaping,

painting, and other improvements along Andrews Avenue, he noted, including some building murals.

Mr. Battle felt the return on the CRA's investment was a worthy one, as the buildings not only looked nicer but often addressed Code and other maintenance issues by making these improvements. The CRA encourages owners to make changes at a higher standard, through use of the funding, than they might seek out on their own. Quality of materials and longevity of design are also concerns.

Mr. Battle offered to answer any questions from the Board at this time.

Mr. Neimark asked if the CRA enforces any continuity or design standards from one building to the next, or places limits on the diverse types of architecture that may be found among nearby or adjacent buildings. Mr. Battle advised that the CRA strongly desired to avoid this kind of proscription, wishing instead to allow for creativity in architecture. When they examine applications, the CRA encourages some consistency in architecture depending upon the location, but do not feel they should ask that all buildings have the same look.

He noted that the CRA reserves the right to approve a façade, and asks for a high standard of quality, but does not treat the program as an entitlement. They also ask for a rendering of the requested structure as part of the application.

Ms. DuMont asked if information about the program was available on the City's website. Mr. Battle affirmed that it was available on the CRA's website, where the application may be downloaded. Mr. Modarelli added that the CRA website is accessible through a link on the Economic Development website.

Vice Chair Riehl asked for a description of the current residential rental market in the CRA. Mr. Battle advised that their market was different between the Western side of Andrews Avenue. On the Eastern side, the existing stock is well-rented, and new stock is primarily condominium units.

Andrews Avenue has always had high occupancy on its Western side, he continued, mainly because its housing consists mostly of multi-family "green" apartment units. He noted that many of these are owned by the Fort Lauderdale Housing Authority, which is currently taking steps to upgrade its properties. He recommended that the Board take a look at the Dixie Court property to view the kind of upgrades the FLHA has in mind, and added that they are the largest property owner within the CRA, with thousands of units and acres in the area.

Responding to a question from Ms. DuMont, Mr. Battle stated that he had received an application for an upgrade to The Pantry in the Northwest area, and has met with the applicants. He noted that it was located in a very active residential neighborhood.

Vice Chair Riehl thanked Mr. Battle for his presentation.

Mr. Motwani joined the meeting at this time (4:16 p.m.).

II. Approval of September 10, 2008 Minutes

Motion made by Ms. DuMont, seconded by Mr. Sanders, to approve the minutes of the September 10, 2008 EDAB meeting. In a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

III. Lockhart Stadium

As Chair Watson was not present to speak to this issue, Mr. Modarelli suggested that the item be tabled until the Board's next meeting.

IV. Director's Report

Mr. Modarelli recalled that the Community Service Board had asked other Boards, such as the EDAB, to take on some duties associated with Cultural Arts and Tourism. At the CSB's most recent meeting, that Board had discussed asking Director Phil Thornburg of the Parks and Recreation Department to speak at its December 2008 meeting, to give a broad perspective on the City's efforts to promote cultural arts, while Mr. Modarelli would speak to the tourism aspect.

In January, the Convention Visitors' Bureau plans to present an overview of tourism in Broward County as relates to Fort Lauderdale, he continued. He had recommended that the CSB take a tour of the City to view locations such as the Performing Arts Center, as well as those areas in need of improvement or greater opportunity, such as 13th Street. This idea was inspired by the tours the EDAB has taken in the past, he said.

As new ideas related to Cultural Arts and Tourism are generated by the CSB, Mr. Modarelli stated he would pass them along to the EDAB as part of the Director's Report. He reaffirmed that Cultural Arts and Tourism are interrelated with the goals of the EDAB.

He announced that he would also, per a request from a previous meeting, continue to inform the Board of filming taking place in the City. In October 2007, Fort Lauderdale had only issued seven film permits; in October 2008, they had issued 15, he said. The revenue brought into the City as a result of October permits was estimated to be \$381,000. The numbers were provided by Elizabeth Wentworth, Vice President of the Creative Industries and Film Commission of the Miami/Fort Lauderdale area.

Year-to-date for 2008, 112 film permits had been issued between January and November, Mr. Modarelli continued. In all of 2007, only 91 film permits had been issued. He noted that film permitting was an especially attractive economic incentive, as it was a “green” business with little downside that generated a large amount of overall revenue.

Mr. Neimark asked what a film permit allowed one to do: for instance, blocking off streets or other specific liberties. Mr. Modarelli explained that it usually allows for particular arrangements with the Police Department or other groups.

He described the application process for the Board as follows: Karen Reese, Director of Economics and Business Development, determines what an applicant will need, based on the information included in their application, and contacts all pertinent Departments, such as Police, Fire, and Parking. If, for instance, a street is to be blocked for any period of time, another application process is required, according to City ordinances. If it is to be done on a temporary basis, however, the Engineering Department becomes involved to determine the best manner in which it may be done.

The reason permits go through the Economic Development office, Mr. Modarelli explained, is that filming on City property affects the right-of-way and causes service and transportation interruption. Filming to be conducted on private property does not require a permit.

Some of the permits issued in October involved soap operas, a short film, still photos, television commercials, a television series, and a public service announcement. Many of these took place on Las Olas Boulevard and the Beach area. Mr. Modarelli reiterated that he would advise the Board if a major production came into the City, so the maximum amount of business productivity could be leveraged from it. He recalled that the presence of film crews often means a great deal of money was spent in the area, on hotel rooms, catering, and other resources and services.

Aside from the film permit update, Mr. Modarelli stated that Economic Development is keeping an eye on the City's occupancy rates, to compare how different areas of the City are faring compared to last year's performance. When a report is available, he said, it should show how the economic downturn has affected tourism in Fort Lauderdale.

VI. EDAB Discussion of Goals

Mr. Neimark noted that the Las Olas Boulevard area looks "bare" at the moment, as much of the area has been closed down prior to construction but the construction process has not yet begun. He suggested that some signage advertising what will come to the area might raise some interest.

Mr. Modarelli stated that he usually walks along Las Olas once a week and looks for ways to "activate" the unused space there; however, ordinances related to right-of-way prohibit many of these.

At this time Vice Chair Riehl introduced guest Kathryn Barry, representing the 13th Street Alliance.

Ms. DuMont asked Mr. Modarelli for an update on the Business Expo recently held at War Memorial Auditorium, as well as on the Boat Show.

Mr. Modarelli replied he did not yet have figures for the Boat Show, but stated that retail was down significantly all across the nation. He replied that he would get back to the Board when numbers were available.

Regarding the Business Expo, he stated he would contact one of the individuals who had put the event together for a comparison of 2008 against 2007.

Ms. DuMont suggested that the EDAB develop a calendar with events of this nature listed on it, so they could put some focus on upcoming events with one or two months' notice.

Mr. Modarelli felt this was a very good idea, and pointed out that the City's website shows an Event Calendar, with listings for programs at various sites. This calendar includes events held by the Parks & Recreation Department, as well as events scheduled at War Memorial Auditorium, the Aquatics Complex, and other sites of interest.

He felt these events, as well as Cultural Arts and Tourism events, could all be linked through the Economic Development website, to make them accessible from a single page.

Mr. Modarelli also noted there was interest in publicizing City events in a more comprehensive fashion – for example, putting all City events together on a single calendar, such as Beach events, Arts events, Parks & Recreation events, and others.

Ms. DuMont agreed with this, although she remained primarily focused on the EDAB keeping a list of all events related to economic development. She felt an EDAB-related calendar might help them get the word out early for various events.

Mr. Schiavone agreed with Mr. Neimark's concern regarding a lack of signage on the empty space at Las Olas Boulevard, adding that he feared so many empty buildings would give out-of-town visitors the wrong impression about the state of business in Fort Lauderdale.

He requested clarification regarding Mr. Modarelli's mention of a calendar combining cultural events with tourism-related events, stating he was not sure what was meant by this proposal. He recalled that he had once suggested, particularly in difficult economic times, that perhaps the City should be more willing to "green-light" events rather than requiring the level of permitting that is now in place.

He recommended that certain areas of the City be designated and granted a 6-month or so weekend "pass," which would allow street vendors and others, such as entertainers, more leeway on weekends. This sort of people-friendly activity, he believed, would bring more traffic to some areas of the City. He felt that a greater level of permissiveness might be more stimulating to the local economy during economically difficult times, such as the present.

Regarding the business climate, particularly regarding loans from banks, he asked how some projects, such as the Ocean Wave, had been affected – whether they had been revisited or scaled back due to the state of the economy or the overall cost.

Mr. Motwani addressed this, noting that the long-term plan for a project such as the Ocean Wave remained the same, but adding that banks simply did not want to grant loans at the moment. He felt almost every kind of development was on hold due to this, and did not believe any stimulus from the recent Congressional rescue package aimed at banks would be seen until late 2009 at best.

He continued that he had just returned from the Royal Travel Market in London, a major international travel show, and informed the Board that despite the economic climate, a good deal of interest remained in Fort Lauderdale. Tour operators were having difficulty filling private charters, but as these had been increased from 2007 to 2008, it was difficult to tell whether this meant an actual decrease in business.

Many groups from overseas were interested in visiting the City during the summer, Mr. Motwani noted, which would bring in business during an otherwise relatively slow time period. He did not feel that Greater Fort Lauderdale was as negatively impacted as many other potential destinations, and remained hopeful that travel-related business in 2009 will be flat in relation to 2008.

Mr. Schiavone asked if anyone could give an update on the status of resort-related business, as some businesses might have had difficulty obtaining loans or managing their portfolio during the current economic climate. He stated he wanted to know when some of the new resorts were expected to open and bring more business into the area.

Mr. Modarelli suspected that credit and lending must be freed up before it was reasonable to expect any further progress, and added that the buyouts between banks stalled the process even further, as this created further delays in lending. Regarding incoming developers, he pointed out that Development Review Committee (DRC) agendas remained full, new construction continued, and more developers were coming into the area.

He noted that there were significant changes, such as buildings initially intended to be condominiums being opened as rental units instead, but reiterated that the City could remain "cautiously optimistic." He did not feel he could give an accurate assessment of the lending situation, however.

Ms. Barry of the 13th Street Alliance pointed out that there seemed to be more vacant storefronts than usual, and asked if figures were available regarding the number of businesses closing and/or leaving town, with respect to this status in 2007 or 2006.

Mr. Modarelli reiterated that new numbers were difficult to obtain, and that the retail market was being hit fairly hard all over the country, not only in the area.

Ms. Barry asked if there were recommendations or strategies that Economic Development could make, such as incentives to bring business to the City.

Vice Chair Riehl cited the recent marketing opportunity under development by the Beach Business Improvement District, which is an attempt to bring more business to that specific area.

Mr. Modarelli explained that the BID had begun by improving the cleanliness of the Beach area in general, later adding the "Holiday Lights" program as well. More recently they have undertaken a marketing effort specific to the Beach area, which was made possible due to funds generated by an increase in property values in that location. He felt this was representative of what the City would need to do in order to attract more economic development.

Ms. DuMont suggested that they could get an idea of how many businesses were actually leaving the City by looking at the City Occupational License Renewals. Mr. Modarelli agreed to bring this information to a subsequent meeting.

The renewals could be categorized according to their occupants, such as retail or service industry, although Mr. Modarelli pointed out that a single business could have multiple occupational taxes, which meant it might be counted more than once. He also noted that there has been a slight decrease in businesses failing to renew these licenses from 2007 to 2008.

Ms. DuMont recalled that the Board had discussed, in the past, the failure of developers to appear before them and speak about their projects. She proposed inviting contact persons representing developers to speak before the Board in order to encourage them to seek out the Board.

Mr. Schiavone added that even an email response from a developer would be a positive step, although Ms. DuMont stressed the value of "face time" with advisory boards of the EDAB's nature.

She returned to the subject of easing the restrictions on street vendors and other forms of entertainment, stating that she hoped to hear more information on this possibility.

Mr. Modarelli informed the Board that he had attended meetings at the City Attorney's office and felt that their concern regarding the easing of restrictions would lie in the idea of giving one area a break and not another. He noted that this only occurs at present in the entertainment district, and there only in the manner of a change in hours.

Changing restrictions to accommodate vendors and/or performers would involve a “wholesale Code change,” he explained.

Vice Chair Riehl suggested that they recommend to the City Commission that an ordinance be passed allowing a “temporary reprieve,” or a pilot program, to allow certain actions in certain areas. It was noted that a pilot program, in particular, could serve as a test for whether or not it would be beneficial to request a formal Code change.

Vice Chair Riehl felt the beginning of such an endeavor would mean an individual or group would need to craft a mission statement explaining what they hoped to accomplish, then ask for it to be placed on the City Commission’s agenda for formal discussion.

Mr. Motwani proposed that it might be simpler to come up with a plan, then have it enacted by way of a series of event permits over a time period, such as six months. This would allow such a program to be tested under the current Code, one weekend at a time.

Mr. Modarelli pointed out that the DRC process is an open process, so any interested party could access the DRC agenda online and see what projects are in what stages along the way.

Ms. DuMont explained that what she hoped to achieve by asking developers to speak to the Board was a more global view of where the industry felt the economy stood as regards the Beach area. She felt the larger developers, such as those handling the Trump project, could provide a broader scope on the subject.

Mr. Motwani felt the bigger picture could more easily be accessed by attending a Beach Council or Beach Redevelopment Advisory Board meeting.

Ms. DuMont felt that larger developers should be interested in attending an EDAB meeting in order to find out how their business will affect the business community in Fort Lauderdale.

Mr. Motwani referred to a recent article in the *Sun-Sentinel* which he said had implied many businesses in the City were failing. From a public relations perspective, he felt this was an inaccurate portrayal, and he recommended that the Board be “proactive,” reaching out to local businesses and developers to correct this impression.

He asked if the EDAB had a schedule of locations they plan to tour at future meetings, and suggested that the Aquatics Complex be considered, as they had plans to redevelop the complex along with the land across the street from the actual facility.

Mr. Modarelli noted that the concept of redeveloping the peninsula where the complex was located had gone before the City Commission and been approved. He agreed with Mr. Motwani that it could be an educational opportunity for the Board.

It was decided that the Board would try to meet at the Aquatics Complex in February 2009.

At the next meeting, Mr. Modarelli noted, the Board would meet and give its recommendation on BCIP.

VII. Old/New Business – “Light Up Sistrunk”

As Chair Watson had wanted to discuss this item, it was tabled until a later meeting. Ms. DuMont requested that Mr. Modarelli have Chair Watson provide him with some of the details of this project and forward it to the rest of the Board, as she felt they should be aware of the project and attempt to participate in it. Mr. Modarelli agreed to send this information to the Board.

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 5:11 p.m.

[Minutes prepared by K. McGuire, Prototype, Inc.]