

Economic Development Retail Sales Tax Board
Minutes
April 7, 2022
6:30 p.m.

The Economic Development Retail Sales Tax (EDRST) Board held a virtual meeting on Thursday, April 7, 2022. The meeting commenced at 6:33 pm and adjourned at 8:11 pm.

Voting Members Present:

Matthew Bellows
Brendan O'Brien
Byron Price
Kathleen Sorkin
Cynthia Martin

Voting Members Absent:

Brandon Bradshaw
Matthew Erker

Council Liaison:

Mayor Terry Crow

Staff Present:

Brooke A. Smith, Deputy City Manager/Dir. of Economic Development
Gregory Rose, City Manager

Others attending:

None

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the meeting held on January 27, 2022 were presented for approval.

Motioned to approve the minutes as submitted by Cynthia Martin, seconded by Brendan O'Brien, and carried by voice vote.

Public Comments

No public comments were received ahead of the meeting. Deputy City Manager Smith noted that she had received phone calls asking when we intend to start funding programs.

Mayor Comments (6:34 pm)

Mayor Terry Crow commented on the election and that four members ran unopposed and will continue to serve on Council. He noted that Proposition F did not pass and so it means Council has a pivot to determine how to make changes. He noted that staff continues to move forward with the renovation for the annex and Trinity building, briefly discussing possible financing options. He noted that Costco continues to move forward and the next project for Delmar and 170 is underway as well, the concrete is being poured and the footings. The Plan Commission is still working on the Avenir project. Mayor Crow stated that he is unsure who bought the opposite corner which used to be Lutheran Family Services and that he did not know what will be there, but considers it good news. Mayor Crow stated that Quik Trip is coming, and they paid 10 times what had been previously offered for the lot. He also noted that Washington University sold the lot at Olive and Vernon to Crescent Plumbing which is relocating from the City of St. Louis. They are building a 70,000 square foot warehouse to

sell high end plumbing equipment and that it will be a nice sales tax generator for the city. Mayor Crow opened the floor for questions. Chair Sorkin asked how plans for the Heman Park Pool and reopening up for the summer, if there would be any improvement, or anything exciting. Mayor Crow deferred to City Manager Gregory Rose who stated that staff intends to be fully operational with regular hours for the pool, noting that staff will contract with the same vendor who has done a great job. City Manager Rose that he did not have an immediate answer on whether there would be major improvements, but there are plans for minor improvements like painting.

Mayor Crow concluded his comments by acknowledged Matt Bellows, who joined the meeting, and congratulated him on his re-election to the School Board.

Old Business (6:39 pm)

Funded Projects through FY22

Chair Sorkin moved to the next item of business and turned the meeting over to Deputy City Manager Smith to discuss Funded Projects through FY22.

Deputy City Manager Smith stated that she researched the files to determine what projects were funded previously and how those programs performed. Deputy City Manager Smith stated that she prepared a memorandum with the requested information, and she provided highlights during the meeting. She noted that the annual recipients, U City Farmers Market, U City in Bloom, LSB, and Mannequins in the Loop. She noted that each year these entities are exhausting their funding. Smith said that she would discuss the LSB in more detail later as their funding amounts vary from year to year but noted that all entities that receive annual funding are exhausting their funding. Smith discussed the St. Louis Artworks project that was funded at \$11,000 and noted that those funds had been disbursed. Another project, the EMT Academy which was a partnership between U City School District and the U City Fire Department, was awarded \$68,300 of which \$36,862 had been disbursed. Smith noted that on February 28, 2022, Council approved the rollover of the remaining funds for use in this fiscal year, and that amount is for \$31,437. For the Façade Improvement Program, \$150,000 was allocated, 14 applications were approved, and the amount awarded was \$127,493. To date staff has paid out \$94,557. She stated that 3 files currently remain open, noting that when the board last met that number was 5 and that she has been able to close out 2 files. Smith is working with the remaining 3 businesses to hopefully close out the files before the end of the fiscal year.

Deputy City Manager Smith next discussed the Loop Special Business District, noting that in FY20 they were awarded \$132,000 and that breakdown was \$19,000 for a lighting study from Kingsland to Limit, \$6,000 for brochures and an illuminated directory, \$14,000 for the STL Visitor's Guide ad and promotions, and \$85,000 for special events. Smith noted that to date, the lighting study has been paid in full and that she is working with the Finance Director to determine whether those projects were actually paid for, the reason being that for some of the projects, instead of reimbursing the LSB, which is the way the program is supposed to work, the funds were paid directly out of the EDRST fund. She cited the lighting study as an example. Smith stated that they are researching to determine if the money was paid out for the brochures and visitor's guide. As far as the funding for the special events, Smith stated that the staff has not reimbursed the LSB for any of the events but that she did see a request as submitted for the Ice Carnival for \$27,000 and that she and the Finance Director are

researching to determine if that was ever paid out. The last program discussed was the Small Business Forgivable Loan program to which \$1,000,000 was allocated, noting that it was intended to fund 2 rounds, \$500,000 per round. Smith noted that she is still researching this program as there were discrepancies in the spreadsheet which will require her to go through the hard files to determine which agreements were executed, who received funding, and how much. She noted that there was a 3rd round in September of 2020 that was approved with \$850,000 allocated. Smith stated that she could say with some certainty that that amount that has been dispersed to date is somewhere between \$100,000 and \$150,000, noting that it is nowhere near the \$1,000,000 threshold. Deputy City Manager Smith concluded her presentation and opened the floor for questions. Chair Sorkin asked about the \$500,000 allocated to Relocation Assistance. Deputy City Manager Smith responded that none of those funds have been disbursed to date but noted that two businesses have submitted proposals for reimbursement but they must complete their buildout. She noted that Council agreed to reimburse those businesses for 10% of their buildout costs up to \$30,000 and noted that those businesses were Nobu's and Pho Long. Smith also noted that she included that in previously committed funds when considering the budget for FY23. Chair Sorkin asked if there were other applications and Smith answered that there were not. Brendan O'Brien asked about the salary allocated to Jessica Bueler under Administrative Costs. Smith deferred to City Manager Rose who explained that Jessica oversees some of the marketing efforts for the city and mentioned the weekly newsletter that goes out. He noted that long term the plan is to strengthen that area as Deputy City Manager begins to implement the Economic Development Strategy and she will be overseeing Jessica's efforts to better market the entire city with focus on Olive Blvd., the business district, North and South Blvd and the Loop. He noted that staff will be taking a much more broad and aggressive approach to making sure that the entire city is being marketed. Chair Sorkin asked who would be the person working on business attraction in the Loop? City Manager Rose answered that it will be a partnership between Brooke and her staff that will be working with Jessica to open office space and business opportunities throughout the city. Jessica primarily in the Loop and Brooke will focus on helping fill those locations. Brendan O'Brien asked if Jessica works for the city or for the Loop Special Business District. City Manager Rose answered that she works for both, nothing that she has contracts with both. Chair Sorkin said that she does get the weekly newsletter and that everyone should as it has a lot of information.

Winco Windows Company

Chair Sorkin introduced the next topic under Old Business, stating that the board had agreed to make a loan to Winco Windows Company but that last she heard the company did not move forward with it. Deputy City Manager Smith stated that this is correct, and that the city did not disburse the loan, noting that she was unsure why they backed out, but that the funds were not disbursed.

New Business (6:51 pm)

EDRST Fund Balance Update and Projected Budget for FY23

Chair Sorkin introduced the first item under new business, the EDRST Fund Balance Update. Deputy City Manager Brooke Smith provided an update on the fund balance and project budget for FY23. She presented Exhibit A, hereby incorporated into these minutes by reference, to explain to the board members the current fund balance, projected revenues, previously committed funds, and projections for fiscal year 2023.

Chair Sorkin asked if the LSBD will be submitting a detailed proposal on how they intend to spend requested funds for FY23. Deputy City Manager answered yes, they will have to submit a detailed application. Brendan O'Brien asked if the \$2.9 million projected fund balance was accrued over years. Smith answered yes. He then asked if the administrative costs should be 25% of the fund balance or 25% of the annual revenue. Smith answered that she understood it to be 25% of the fund balance, based on the calculations done by previous staff members. She agreed to do additional research to determine which method should be used to calculate the administrative costs and long-term economic development. City Manager Rose noted that staff will need to evaluate whether any administrative costs have been allocated from this fund in past years, but also noting that due to the management of the program, it may be difficult to determine whether the funds for administrative costs were allocated in past years. Mayor Crow noted that he appreciated the question because it is one of those things where we tend to move on to other things and forget about what the guide says and that staff should take a moment to look at it and determine what the rules of the road are. Mayor Crow also noted that it doesn't look like the relocation assistance is going to be utilized based on the number of businesses left and he asked if it was more of a place holder. Deputy City Manager Smith answered that she did include it as a place holder, noting that to date only 2 businesses have submitted proposals for relocation assistance and estimated that this would total approximately \$60,000 or \$70,000. Smith noted that a number of businesses relocated outside of the city, which would make them ineligible for the relocation assistance funds. Mayor Crow stated that there are not that many businesses left that could apply for the funding and City Manager Rose confirmed this. Chair Sorkin asked if Bob's Seafood was still operating. City Manager Rose answered that they are still in negotiations.

Deputy City Manager Smith informed the Board that if the calculations are to be based on the annual revenue and not the fund balance, that would affect the long-term economic development planning as well. Deputy City Manager Smith noted that all numbers that were calculated are based on a percentage of the fund balance and that if all categories are based only on the annual revenue, the city would have a reserve fund of \$2 million that would continue to grow. Smith noted that she did not recall what state statute required but that in previous years' budgets, calculations were based on the fund balance. She stated that she would do the research to be sure before any funding is allocated. Brendan O'Brien stated that he had a number of binders from previous years that he would drop off to Brooke for review. He also stated that, per his memory, the administrative costs were calculated based on annual revenue. City Manager Rose noted that the statutes are clear, but that execution is where staff fell short. He said he believed in the past there was an intention for the staff to allocate the entire 25% to the general fund, but staff cannot find where those transfers were made, so the general fund was covering the salaries of past Economic Development staff. City Manager Rose committed to going back and taking a look at the records to see what staff can learn but noted the record-keeping during that time was less than stellar. Deputy City Manager Smith returned to the projected budget, discussing the amounts she anticipates being requested from the four entities that EDRST funds annually and deducting that from the balance before determining what amount would be left over for other projects. She noted that she included recommendations to fund the Façade Improvement Program at \$150,000 and the Local Projects and Programs at \$150,000. Smith then went on to discuss the items included in the budget for FY23.

Chair Sorkin asked about the accounting that goes on and how is the city reimbursed for that. Deputy City Manager Smith stated that she was unsure if any for the funds would go to staff outside of the Economic Development department for work conducted, listing Finance as an example and noting that theoretically they should be able to bill back for their time spent on Economic Development items. She noted that she would be discussing in a presentation the need to hire staff to assist in the Economic Development administrative duties. Smith noted that the balance would cover additional staff and that she would have to discuss with the City Manager and Director of Finance what percentage of work other staff, like the Finance team, is conducting work on behalf of Economic Development that could be billed back as administrative costs. Smith noted that the running of the programs would be the responsibility of Smith and her team. Chair Sorkin stated that the Board does not administer the programs, but they evaluate the proposals and reports to make sure the entities that receive funding are doing what they said they would do.

Brendan O'Brien noted that in the past the Board looked at LSBSD and Olive, wanting to really focus on improvements for Olive. He noted that he believed there should be some kind of backup/follow-up on what funding is going to Olive. He suggested staff look into where there is some kind of funding based on geographically location. Deputy City Manager Smith noted that she would like to see the binder(s) Mr. O'Brien mentioned and that she would continue to do research to see if she could locate this information.

Funding Recommendations for FY23 Projects (7:17 p.m.)

Deputy City Manager began a presentation to detail the Work Plan for FY23. The presentation included information on the allotments for FY23 and Smith noted that staff would research whether the allotments should be calculated on the annual revenue or on the funding balance. Chair Sorkin also noted that staff should also look into whether the board over-allocated for the relocation assistance program (Markets at Olive Project) and if so, whether some of those funds could be re-allocated to fund other projects.

Smith then went on to discuss the four "Entitlement Organizations" that receive funding from EDRST each year. Smith noted that the anticipated total of funding for the four organizations for FY23 totaled \$325,173. She stated that the first three organizations listed have received funding each year and she estimated the funding as follows: U City in Bloom - \$50,573, U City Farmers Market - \$28,000, Mannequins in the Loop - \$15,000. Smith noted that the funding levels for these three organizations have remained static over the years. She then went on to discuss the Loop Special Business District (LSBD), which has received varying amounts for various projects over the years, but they have received funding each year. She noted that when applying, the LSBD would have to submit a proposal for each project they are seeking funding for, noting that the LSBD has included in their FY23 budget approximately \$231,600 in funding they intend to seek from EDRST. Smith noted that after deducting the amounts for the four organizations, that would leave approximately \$729,311 for other projects and programs.

Deputy City Manager Smith moved on to discuss her funding recommendations for FY23. She discussed allocating \$150,000 to the Façade Improvement Program and \$150,000 for Local Projects and Programs. She noted that she has been receiving calls from entities looking to fund various projects and programs such as workforce development and job training. Smith went on to discuss the importance of staffing to administer the programs. She stated that she was recommended the funding of 2 additional positions. Smith also noted that

she is recommending that a policy be implemented that awarded funds must be expended in the fiscal year awarded. This would require awardees to spend/be reimbursed for funds spent in the fiscal year they received the award, or the funds would go back into the pot. She noted this is important because there have been issues with projects that are still open from previous fiscal years. Brendan O'Brien stated that he thinks it a good idea and it would put pressure on the recipient to kick their project off when they said they would. However, he noted that because there are currently supply chain issues, he believes an extension should be considered if someone had a good excuse. Chair Sorkin suggested that 12 months from the date the funds are awarded might be better than going by the fiscal year, noting that the staff and EDRST board has also had delays in funding the various programs. Deputy City Manager and Chair Sorkin both discussed improving the timeline, so applications are being accepted before the start of the fiscal year. Smith noted that she believed they would get to that point, but that it would not happen in FY23. She stated that once staff implements some of the policies that are being recommended and getting staffing in place, they would be able to get to the point where applications are being accepted and reviewed ahead of the fiscal year.

Chair Sorkin noted that unlike other matching grant programs, part of the challenge is that a business struggling would not have the extra money to advance themselves. She noted that some cities escrow their funds with a title company and the funds are only dispersed when the work is done, meeting the applicant half-way. The city's money would not go in until the work is completed and inspected. It may be a barrier to participation for some business owners having to have all the money up front. Deputy City Manager Smith agreed and noted it would be up to the Board and then the City Council if they wished to tweak the programs. Smith then gave an example of a program she administered in a previous city where the business owner only had to show proof of their half of the funds. Chair Sorkin stated that it seems the board allocated the money, but it is not being used, noting that staff and the board must figure out how to get the utilization rate up. Mayor Crow commented that he liked Chair Sorkin's comments about the usage of the funds and allocation. He noted that he was intrigued that if we put that much money aside for relocation assistance and \$1 million for lending and no one took advantage of it, stating that the city is not getting nibbles on the money being put out, and therefore the relevance of the funds to the businesses, there seems to be a disconnect because they are not looking to the city for it.

Chair Sorkin stated that there is an argument that additional staffing can create a link to the businesses. She said that we were so thinly staffed during the pandemic that no one was available to knock on doors to market the programming. Chair Sorkin noted that she would not be opposing more staff and that she believed we could do more with more staff. Deputy City Manager Smith noted that it should also be taken into consideration how we are offering the money. Smith referenced the loan fund and discussed how her review of the data showed many applicants, but that recipients were only reimbursed for their portion of EDRST funds. She noted that she saw some applicants that were only eligible for small amounts which may not have been worthwhile to apply for. Smith provided examples of programs that she administered in the past that did not require business owners to put all their funds up. She noted that it can be difficult for the businesses to apply for the programs as currently administered. She also mentioned the importance of marketing the programs to reach all the businesses and not just past recipients. Brendan O'Brien stated that there are other municipalities that are administering economic development programs. Smith noted her intent to build relationships with other organizations to see how their programs are administered and connect our businesses to other organizations.

Deputy City Manager Smith moved on to discuss the city's Economic Development Strategy and the plan for beginning to implement that strategy in FY23. She began with discussing a Business Retention and Expansion Program which would include physical visits to the businesses. Chair Sorkin stated that this would be relaunching everything and starting over, noting that there needs to be a focus on the Olive corridor. Smith discussed her intent to have staff focus on different districts throughout the city and reiterated the importance of having staff to assist with this program. Cynthia Martin stated that as a new person to the group, it sounds like there are a couple of things running parallel, including cleaning up/catch up, and then the vision/enthusiasm for true economic development, and as staff talks about writing job descriptions for new staff, the board needs to think about evolving roles. She said this current strategy sounds like appropriate programming, but that it does not fit together for her. Martin asked how much catch up/clean up is there, what kind of resources/skill sets do we need in additional staff, will they be hybrid and have the ability to do this and pickup new programming or design new programming. Martin suggested the Deputy City Manager think about the roles because there will not always be catch up/clean up. City Manager Rose stated that the intention is to gauge the Board's appetite for having additional staffing and some of the different programs they have administered in the past, and also recognizing Deputy City Manager Smith's role is much broader than program management as she will be heading up the efforts for the full execution for the economic development strategy, that she has to establish priorities that he will eventually recommend to the Mayor and Council. He noted that under economic development, staff will look at business retention and expansion, business recruitment, and marketing the city as a whole, describing these as the three pillars staff will focus on initially. He noted that the most labor intensive of these will be the programming and that if the Board has a strong desire to offer or create a small business assistance program, there is a need to have people on board to administer these programs. Chair Sorkin said she thinks the board does understand this, noting that a lot of money was paid for an economic development consulting project and taking a look at that and that they came up with some strategies but there is not enough staff to implement it. Deputy City Manager Smith pointed out that one of the action items in the economic development strategy is to bring on staff to execute the strategy. Smith noted that she is providing the information so the Board will provide guidance on what programs the Board would like to see implemented in FY23, that she was trying to gauge between the Funding Priorities and Economic Development Strategy to see what the Board wants to do so the Board does not go into another fiscal year without having funded anything. She stated that even if the Board is not settled on how the programs are going to be run, she needs to know if there is a desire to fund the program. Chair Sorkin called for a poll of the Board to determine if they were in support of the Façade Improvement Program. The Board unanimously approved funding the program.

Deputy City Manager Smith asked if the Board was interested in funding for local projects and programs. Chair Sorkin said she didn't know about the local projects and programs. Smith referred the board members to their packet to review the application packet for local projects and programs. City Manager Rose interjected that he wanted to speak with Smith off record to discuss in more detail as he is concerned she might be overcommitting herself in light of other tasks assigned to her. He wanted to make sure they identify what that is and what the staffing needs are. Cynthia Martin agreed, stating that she would want to look at the opportunity costs of one over another because when she is looking at a list of all good things to do, and they are saying yes or no to each of them, it would be helpful to know what's the staffing and what's the requirement to do each one so they can put them in a logical,

consecutive or concurrent order. Chair Sorkin added to also know where they hit geographically.

Deputy City Manager Smith asked of the Board was comfortable with the recommended funding of \$150,000 for the Façade Improvement Program. Chair Sorkin asked if it was enough and stated she was fine with \$150,000 and might be happy with more if the program is designed to be easy enough for businesses to use and does not have hurdles that the program does not have the participation. Chair Sorkin noted that the board is very supportive of the Façade Improvement Program.

Deputy City Manager Smith returned the discussion back to the Economic Development Strategy, noting that the goal is to be implementing some of the action items listed as Priority 1. She discussed the Business Retention and Expansion Program, Elevating U City's Brand (Marketing Strategy/Business Recruitment), Marking of city-owned properties which will include creating a database of city-owned property and marketing them, streamlining the internal development review and approval processes which was listed under the first principle and meant to address the complaint that it is hard to do business with the city, Shop Local Strategy, and the Housing and 3rd Ward Reinvestment. Smith noted that this list is not exhaustive, but are priority items identified from the strategy that staff will focus on in FY23.

Byron Price asked if the Costco development will increase the cash flow that goes into the EDRST fund. City Manager Rose answered that it would, there is a quarter cent sales tax that is a point of sale and Costco and the entire development would collect that tax to contribute to the EDRST Fund.

Byron Price asked about staffing and noted that he would like to see it happen. City Manager Rose stated that what often happens is cities identify what they want to do, but they really don't create a strategy for the execution of it. He noted that staff is now stepping back and not just looking at the programs, but how they fit in the overall strategy for University City, and what are the resources needed to do an excellent job with the execution of the strategy. He explained that staff is looking for the Board to say what the priorities should be. If we are looking to do a Business Retention Program, what will the components of the program be. He stated that he believes the Board will start to see the formation of an economic development team in FY23 and the beginning of the execution of the economic development strategy.

Deputy City Manager Smith noted that there may be a need for a special meeting before the Quarterly meeting in July to bring recommended changes for the Façade Improvement Program and creating the two additional staff positions.

Funding for PT Trash Collection Position

Chair Sorkin opened the floor to discuss a part time position to collect trash along the Olive corridor and other commercial districts due to complaints about trash. Deputy City Manager Smith stated that staff has been exploring hiring a part time person dedicated to keeping the commercial districts clean. She noted the recommendation would be to fund all or a portion of that position from EDRST. Smith turned the floor over to City Manager Rose who noted this was initially brought forth by a member of the City Council who believes that some of the challenges with the recruitment of businesses along Olive and in The Loop is making sure people feel safe in that environment and one of the things that is a detriment to that is the

visibility of trash and debris. He noted that the idea was to create a position that would, for Olive Blvd, be the primary person for the collection of trash and emptying of trash cans to ensure that entire corridor looks appealing. For the Loop area, staff will be looking at some sort of partnership with the LSBSD to ensure that area is cleaned as well. He stated that they checked with the City Attorney who believes this will qualify as an economic development project. He also noted that this was for discussion and not for a vote up or down during this meeting. City Manager Rose raised one other issue, stating that the board previously set aside funding for conducting a study of the Cunningham Industrial Park which would look at the infrastructure needed in that park so that additional businesses can be recruited. He noted that at the next meeting he would be recommending that the Board allocate funds to conduct that study.

Brendan O'Brien asked if the trash person would be a Public Works person or a new employee. City Manager Rose answered that it would be a new employee working under the Deputy City Manager because he did not want the duties co-mingled with Public Works and instead their focus should be on the business districts. Cynthia Martin said she was having a hard time understanding organizationally as to why the role would be for a streets person reporting to Economic Development and asked if it could just be negotiated with the department responsible for those roles. City Manager Rose stated that it could be done, but what happens is that it is so easy to refer that person to other duties and their main focus gets neglected. He said he expects there will be a close working relationship with the position and Public Works, but the reporting relationship to be sure that the person is focused on the priorities set by the Deputy City Manager is best aligned under Economic Development. Chair Sorkin said she likes the idea and that she's been aggravated by trash lately in the city. She also mentioned allocating more money to U City in Bloom to do something nice at the entry points to the city, something new. City Manager Rose stated that there is a project is underway and asked Deputy City Manager Smith to let Sinan Alpaslan know of the next meeting so he could provide more information on a project already underway for the entry ways.

Chair Sorkin called for a motion to adjourn. Motioned by Byron Price seconded by Matthew Bellows and carried by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.