

**City of La Crosse
Planning Department**



**2006 Economic Development
Annual Report**

February 2007

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2006 Project Highlight: La Crosse Community Theatre

Concept courtesy of Sommerville, Inc. for the La Crosse Community Theatre facility as part of the proposed second Logistics Health, Inc. building--the Theatre is on the left-hand side of this sketch.



In October of 2006 Don and Roxanne Weber & Family and the La Crosse Community Theatre announced the formation of a partnership to develop a new home for the La Crosse Community Theatre as a part of the second Logistics Health, Inc. building on the Mississippi River, south of the current Logistics Health building. The concept is to construct the second LHI building in 2008. At that time Don and Roxanne Weber & Family would construct the shell of the new La Crosse Community Theatre facility.

2006 City of La Crosse Economic Development Annual Report

I. Introduction & Background.

The creation of a dedicated economic development position within the City of La Crosse occurred in 2002-2003, approximately five (5) years ago. A key element for 2007 will be to assess how well the City's economic development program is working on this upcoming five (5) year anniversary.

As you may recall, shortly after the City created and filled the economic development position, work began on an Economic Development Strategic Plan for the City. The Strategic Plan was adopted by the Common Council in 2004. The Strategic Plan, along with the recommendations from the 2004 City Vision 2020 Downtown Master Plan, the 2004 Downtown La Crosse Retail Market Analysis and the 2005 City of La Crosse and Downtown Marketing Strategies and Tools Report outlined a series of strategies and recommendations related to:

City Hall Improvement: In sum, this strategy includes recommendations aimed at improving the relationship between City Hall and the business community by creating a service-oriented, can-do attitude; improving communication; streamlining the Common Council process; and marketing the community.

Downtown Revitalization: This strategy includes recommendations to utilize and improve the riverfront as an activity center; to promote Downtown as a place to work, shop, live and play; and to make high priority redevelopment sites ready for new development.

City-wide Development & Redevelopment Priorities: This strategy includes identifying the areas targeted for development and redevelopment and recommends actions for preparing these sites by drafting certain key information on each site; by creating and maintaining vital neighborhoods; and by working to ensure transportation mobility.

The strategies and recommendations contained within these plans and reports comprise the "to-do" list for the economic development planner position. This annual report is important for both reflecting on what strategies and recommendations have been accomplished this past year, and also for outlining next year's tasks. This annual report and the annual meeting with the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Economic Development are critical assessment tools so that Common Council members, City Department Heads, local businesses and the public can better understand the progress of the City's economic development program and how well the City is meeting the needs of our local business community.

II. Project Updates for 2006.

During 2006 the City continued refining the economic development program by regularly hosting City-Business roundtable meetings and by emailing editions of the City Business E-newsletter. Other notable projects included work with Interact Communications, Inc. to update the Grand River Great City DVD, and with Viterbo University to raise awareness on the part of the local business community on the availability of the Grand River Great City marketing tools including the updated DVD, folders with information inserts, mailer-brochure, press kit, still photographs and web site. While the City continued work on these tasks related to the overall

economic development program, various types of assistance were provided to individual businesses that helped them to create new tax base and employment. One of these major projects included:

Kwik Trip's commissary expansion: The City worked with Kwik Trip, Inc. to create Tax Incremental Finance (TIF) District #13 and obtained a Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA) grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to complete the vacation and relocation of Larson Street. This street relocation and reconstruction helped facilitate the construction of a 73,000 square foot expansion to the commissary, which will result in the investment of over \$9 million and the creation of 75 new jobs.

Additional 2006 projects are detailed on pages 3 through 5. The report concludes with a list of proposed 2007 projects.

2006 Project Highlight: Hmong Community & Cultural Center

Work continued in 2006 by the Hmong Mutual Assistance Association (HMAA) on the purchase, renovation and expansion of the former Cerise restaurant to create the Hmong Community & Cultural Center (HCCC). The HMAA plans to relocate their offices to the HCCC in 2007. In addition to the HMAA offices, the HCCC would include the memorial hall, a wellness center, sewing and children's areas, computer and cultural resource center, commercial kitchen, dining hall, and blacksmith shop.



Concept courtesy of River Architects for the Hmong Community & Cultural Center--the photos above show progress on the building renovation and expansion project.



In 2006, the City of La Crosse economic development program:

- Provided technical assistance to various businesses regarding permitting and zoning questions, available locations, available financial resources and other forms of assistance.
 - The inquiries from 36 distinct entities were addressed in 2006. This is the first year (2006) that distinct individual inquiries will be tracked and will serve as a baseline for comparison in future years.
- Worked to improve City Hall and business relations and communications.
 - Revised the audit of City Hall processes and procedures to focus on the City's economic development program instead. The economic development program audit was recommended by several members of both the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee and Common Council. The economic development program audit will be developed and carried out in 2007.
 - Assisted with drafting the proposed City policy on providing balanced incentives for economic development. The policy was adopted by the Common Council in September 2006.
 - Coordinated six (6) City-Business roundtable meetings with the Common Council, Department Heads and the business community. Key results from the roundtable meetings included the establishment of three top priority recommendations: conducting a City economic development program audit, which, as stated, is moving forward in 2007; developing a long-range plan for the City's riverfront, which is also moving forward through a joint City-County effort; and the I-90 Exit 3 redevelopment and corridor improvement, which led to recommendations for upgrading the City's Black River Beach through the 2007-2011 capital improvement budget.
 - Created and distributed three (3) City Business E-newsletter editions via email and the City's web site.
 - Worked with Interact Communications to update the Grand River Great City DVD.
- Worked on Downtown Revitalization.
 - Attended City Vision Action Committee meetings and assisted with information gathering and putting together a tour of Downtown redevelopment sites. The CVAC identified several areas Downtown as high priority redevelopment sites.
 - Attended the Downtown Parking Advisory Committee meetings and assisted with information gathering and adoption of a Downtown parking area paving ordinance. Also assisted with preparing the request for inclusion of various improvement projects related to Downtown parking in the 2007-2011 capital improvement budget.
- Worked on City-wide Revitalization.
 - Assisted with preparing the request for inclusion of various improvement projects related to the U.S. Highway 53 Corridor Enhancement Plan in the 2007-2011 capital improvement budget. These items were reviewed and discussed at several of the City-Business roundtable meetings and re-focused attention to I-90 Exit 3 and the Rose/Copeland (Highway 53) corridor as the gateway into the City.

arts district in the immediate area around the Pump House Regional Arts Center, the La Crosse Center and proposed La Crosse Community Theatre.

- Hmong Mutual Assistance Association development of the Hmong Community and Cultural Center.
- Work also continued on the Park Plaza redevelopment project and the Transit Center.

- Continued participation in various regional economic development efforts.
 - Attended La Crosse County Economic Development/Economic Development Fund Committee meetings.
 - Attended Regional Strategic Action Committee meetings.
 - Assisted with organizing the May 23, 2006 La Crosse County Collaboration conference with David Rusk.
 - Worked with the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission's Industry Cluster Initiative.
 - Attended several meetings organized by the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission and Workforce Connections, Inc. on regional economic development capacity building and collaboration.
 - Attended Western Wisconsin Workforce Development Board meetings.

III. Projects for 2007.

Important assessment tasks for 2007 will be the audit of the economic development program, the focus group meetings with various business people modeled after those that took place in 2003 and the annual meeting of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Economic Development. The economic development program audit and focus group meetings will provide City staff with direct input and observations from local businesses about the City's efforts to become more "business-friendly," as has been suggested in various plans and reports.

In 2007, the economic development program will:

- Provide technical support and assistance to local business inquiries.
- Continue efforts at improving communication between the City and the business community by hosting City-Business roundtable meetings and by sending editions of the City Business E-newsletter.
- Conduct an audit of the economic development program including hosting a series of focus group meetings with business people modeled after those conducted in 2003.
- Meet with the Blue Ribbon Committee to review progress on implementing the City's Economic Development Strategic Plan.
- Work with Interact Communications and Viterbo University to raise awareness of the Grand River Great City marketing program by selling the various marketing tools, including the DVD and marketing folder with inserts, the still photos, media kit, and mailer-brochure to local businesses.

- Once the sales project is completed, work to develop a business recruitment strategy and process. Work with major institutions and area marketing firms to strategize about marketing the area.
- Update the City's economic profile, financial resources guide, list of available properties and coordinate with Interact Communications to upgrade the City's economic development web site.
- Organize a City Business recognition event.
- Research the creation of an entrepreneurial manual, especially in light of existing State resources. Coordinate this resource with the existing City financial resources guide.
- For City-wide Development & Redevelopment Priorities:
 - Participate with UW-Extension's First Impressions program to study and recommend improvements for the City's gateways, corridors and commercial areas.
 - Develop information packets for all of the key redevelopment sites.
 - Complete study of U.S. Highway 53 corridor zoning and land uses and make recommendations for zoning changes and urban design standards as recommended in the U.S. Highway 53 Corridor Enhancement Plan.
- Administer SBDL, UFRL, A&E, LIBP and CDZ programs.
 - Modify the A&E Analysis program to include a financial pro forma element. Update the rates and work with local architects to implement the proposed changes/upgrades.
 - Work with staff to complete various improvements to the LIBP as outlined in a meeting with LIBP businesses that took place in January 2007.
 - Work on changes to the LIBP covenants.
 - Assess program information, guides and brochures and make necessary changes and updates in order to keep the information current and consistent with the Grand River Great City marketing strategies.
- Prepare TIF project plans for several possible TIF areas.
- Continue assistance on various development projects including:
 - The HMAA HCCC project. The plan in 2007 is to finish the building renovation, relocate the HMAA offices and to begin various program activities at the center.
 - The City Arts Steering Committee and community arts complex/district as recommended in the Final Feasibility Report. The key for the project will be to find and secure a site, prepare information for a 2008 Low Income Housing Tax Credit application and to meet with local visual artists and arts groups to determine the types of space and uses.
- Develop Request For Proposals and a process for creating a Natural Step/Eco-municipality sustainable community plan for La Crosse.