



Bethalto Business District Funds Update

by Alan Winslow

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BETHALTO - In later 2017, the Village Board created Business Districts within the Village in order to raise money to be invested within those geographic areas to enhance the business climate for existing businesses to attract new businesses.

The intent of the Board at the time of approving the Business Districts was to focus on Brick & Mortar Projects to enhance the appearance of the Districts and to provide limited Facade Grants. The Board also pledged to meet with the Business Owners for suggested uses of the BD money once we had accumulated enough money to fund a significant project.

On January 9, 2020 we did just that. Approximately 20-25 Business Owners attended an open meeting to discuss how we should spend over half-million dollars that are in the BD account. We also followed up with a survey to that those who could not attend could provide input. We will hold another public meeting with Business Owners this spring for final input before the Village Board drafts the first improvement plan. All businesses in the Districts are encouraged to attend and offer input.

Apparently the meeting in January triggered a group of business people to met for the purpose of discussing the creation of a local Chamber of Commerce to strengthen their efforts to improve the business climate in Bethalto. Your Village Government is certainly not against our business owners organizing and forming a Chamber, organizing informally, or joining the Growth Association; we see this as a positive move and would no doubt join the group. Our concern is that we've heard there is a belief that our Businesses will have a voice in the BD projects only if they are a part of this group. That is a misconception; our position is that all Bethalto businesses should have input on these projects whether part of a formal group or not.

At the Jan 9 meeting, there was interest in using BD funds for marketing. Marketing is an allowable expense under the Statute, but understand that our Board initially presented the plan to the public and business community as being for Capital Improvement

projects and Facade grants, so appropriating moneys for other expenses is going to require a strong case be made to do so. I can also assure you that our board would only consider a very detailed marketing plan with a specific budget. There is no way that we would just designate a sum of money to be spend towards misc. promotions.

Following is a list of projects / recommendations that we have received from the Business Community at the January 9 meeting and from the surveys:

- Financial help with signage, uniformity in new signage, update sign ordinance.
- Sidewalk & new lighting along 140, start where businesses are currently located, get rid of open ditches on 140.
- Upgrade to LED Street lighting
- Decorative Light Poles with promotional banners
- Enforce ordinance regarding yard signs popping up all over
- Welcome features at entrances to town i.e. a water feature or something significant
- Marketing of local businesses
- Involvement with SCORE and SBDA
- Collaboration with CVB and the Growth Association
- Pave parking over current rock parking on Bethalto Blvd.
- Facade Grants
- Improve Traffic flow on Rt 140 / Add stop lights at 140 & Airway Ct. / Widen 140
- Link Village Website with the sites of Local Businesses
- Clean up and maintain parks within the Districts
- Parking lot improvements along 140 / currently unsightly
- Form a Chamber of Commerce
- Bring in "Big Name" stores

If you have other items to include for consideration please send them to me at awinslow@bethalto.com

We are excited that we now have the means to make significant positive impact on the businesses in Bethalto and we look forward to many prosperous years together.