

CDA wants more active role in Port's development

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Officials say similar groups have been instrumental in revitalizing other communities

Members of Port Washington's Community Development Authority said Monday they want to take a more active role in the city as it works on everything from downtown revitalization to industrial development

"You look at what's happening in this city, and this group has to be a part of it," said Mayor Tom Mlada, a member of the CDA. "But we really need a sense of what we're doing here."

In refashioning itself, the CDA could take a page from communities such as Grafton, where the CDA has purchased buildings, worked with developers and commissioned development studies.

In Port, the role of the CDA has changed through the years, said Randy Tetzlaff, the city's director of planning and development. It was formed about 1993 to be a conduit between the former St. Mary's Hospital and the developer who would eventually turn the building into senior housing, but today functions largely to review applications for the city's revolving loan fund.

"That's not a CDA. That's a loan committee," member Ruth Lansing said. "We have an opportunity to change what we do moving forward, to build this committee to be a powerful group by becoming active. We need to take that opportunity."

Lansing suggested the CDA could begin by looking at future uses for the 2.25-acre parcel the group owns on South Spring Street directly north of the trailer park.

The CDA could come up with an idea for developing the property and market it, she said, then use the proceeds to fund other initiatives.

The city's intent was to market the land for residential or commercial development, Tetzlaff said. However, there has only been one serious inquiry about the property and that plan fell through.

Tetzlaff said that the CDA needs to fashion a role for itself that works in tandem with other city groups.

For example, Tetzlaff said, if the Economic Development Committee said there is a need for a business park, the CDA could identify potential sites, the Plan Commission could rezone those parcels and the CDA could then seek potential developers and work to create acceptable plans for the land.

Or the CDA could select redevelopment sites, the Plan Commission could define what is acceptable for them and the Economic Development Committee find acceptable businesses to locate there.

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"We need to be there at the table, at the very least, to give more input," Tetzlaff said.

Mlada, who said one of his initiatives is to revitalize city committees like the CDA, said the city should look to other communities as it seeks a mission for its CDA.

In Whitefish Bay, he said, the CDA was the force behind the master plan for Silver Spring Road.

"I don't know if that's necessarily the role the CDA needs to play, but it's one we should consider," he said.

While Mlada and Tetzlaff were asked to research other communities and the roles and missions their Community Development Authorities have, they might do well to look south to Grafton.

"The redevelopment of Grafton could not have occurred without the assistance of the CDA," Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said. "They've played a key role for us."

One of the most notable examples of the CDA's work has been the Grafton Hotel, which had fallen into disrepair and was declared blighted by the village. The CDA bought the building, negotiated with the developer and entered into a redevelopment agreement that resulted in the conversion of the building into apartments.

That's far from the CDA's only success. One of its most recent acts was to negotiate with a developer to put up a 45,000-square-foot, \$5.2 million building on Cheyenne Drive to house Regal-Beloit Corp., a move Hofland said will bring 130 employees to the village.

In addition to buying and redeveloping land, the CDA has worked with consultants to create redevelopment plans for areas of the village, including site plans that target specific uses, Hofland said.

"They recognize their job is half done," Hofland said. "They have several key parcels, both in downtown and the south commercial district, left to redevelop."