

February Work Session –

Trees – The DDA applied for a tree grant (\$2000) that required a \$2000 match, for downtown trees. There were two options to planting trees downtown – one to remove sidewalk blocks and physically plant trees, or to use large planters to locate trees. The planter cost was significant – around \$1500 each, and would need to be removed for winter weather as they would not protect the tree roots from freezing. This means we would need DPW equipment and labor to move them each winter, and a heated place to store them until warmer weather returned. The planters and trees would have allowed placement of possibly two (2) trees downtown – not much of an impact and not very cost effective. The grant was “re-purposed” to a project along the River Walk and the tree issue essentially abandoned. I suggested that trees be considered as part of the South Washington/North Channel Outlet Street Scape when that project takes place, so it can be designed into the development and not be treated as an afterthought.

Fireworks – A previous effort to regulate fireworks beyond the regulation provided by Michigan State Law was defeated last fall. State law basically allows for the use of fireworks every day of the year, with restrictions in public areas and on the hours (generally from 10:00 PM to 8:00 AM). Some members want to restrict the use of fireworks to the day before, day of, and day after National Holidays, with a five (5) day window, before and after, for the 4th of July Holiday. In 2014, there were 28 complaints concerning fireworks, seven (7) warnings issued, and no citations. In 2015, there were 24 complaints, with two (2) warnings issued, and again – no citations. The majority of the complaints are during the 4th of July, at the beach. This is an issue of an ordinance that is difficult at best to enforce, with no citations issued in the past two years. How will visitors, who likely know the State of Michigan law, know that we are more restrictive? It makes little sense to me.

Strategic Planning – We spend a lot of time creating flowery documents that don’t say much and provide little direction for the future. For example, our Vision in the current plan states:

“Manistee will be the community of choice on the northwest Michigan coastline with a strong, diversified economy providing opportunities for all...a city whose prosperous past continues into the future.”

Why not something simple, like:

“Manistee – a great place to live, work, and play.”

Then, how do we get there? Goals listed in the Strategic Plan are not real goals – goals must first be Realistic, second Attainable, and last Measurable. I find it difficult to see that in any of the goals listed in the current plan. We need to re-think the process, and I find it difficult to believe we lack the talent in our City staff to work through the process without being “facilitated” by an outside agency. The City of Manistee appropriates \$46,500 a year to the Alliance of Economic Success (AES) for services each year and what value is received for that appropriation? We paid additionally for a failed Ramsdell study (that has been studied extensively before). If we get a grant through AES efforts, an administrative fee is normally paid (in the neighborhood of 15%) to AES on top of the appropriation. We certainly have the talent is City Staff to write grants, without paying a percentage of what we receive to someone else.

City Council needs to dedicate some time to sitting down with City Staff to update our plan to include a detailed road map of how we are going to get there. It is not “rocket science” and we don’t need

outside assistance to accomplish it. Just my thoughts – but I'd rather see the appropriation go into roads or other citizen services.

DDA – I know little about the DDA Director issue, but have been asking questions. Council got a news release from the Acting Board President that stated “the board mutually agreed to the separation of Executive Director Patrick Kay on Monday, February 8.” There will be a DDA Strategic Planning Session at Blacker Airport on February 18th. There was no posted meeting for the DDA, agenda, or minutes on this issue (meeting on the 10th was cancelled, as well as the Public Input session). I've been asking questions and will share what is discovered when I get some answers. By State Law, the City Chief Executive Officer (Mayor) is a member of the DDA Board and appoints Board Members (with consent of Council), so it will be interesting to see how this process evolved without a formal meeting. I've also requested a copy of the Separation Agreement.