

Meeting began: 6:07 p.m.**Meeting ended:** just after 8:00 p.m.

Present in person: Jonathan Nieuwsma (chair); CM Clare Kelly; CM Melissa Wynne; CM Bobby Burns (arriving 7 minutes late); CM Devon Reid; EDC member Lisa Dziekan; City staff Katie Boden, Neal Reeves and Paul Zalmezak

Present via Google Meet: CM Krissie Harris, EDC member Eli Klein; EDC member Angela Panisi

Observer: Mary Gavin

Chair Nieuwsma called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. and established that a quorum was present. Minutes were approved unanimously by voice vote.

There were two speakers at public comment. Tina Paden made a formal request for ARPA funds, saying her family has been providing affordable housing in their building at 1507 Emerson St. for 52 years. Carl Klein spoke in favor of awarding the contract for website development and logo design services for the Legacy Business Program to Glantz, an Evanston business that has worked with many local organizations.

Items for consideration:

1. Recommendation to award a contract for \$47,300 to Glantz, formerly Glantz Design. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote. Recommendation will go to City Council. The Legacy Business Program is a city-sponsored initiative to recognize businesses that have been here for a certain amount of time and, it is hoped, entice them to remain. Recognition will be in the form of publicity and possibly a plaque or sign at the business itself. CM Burns left briefly during the presentation.
2. Recommendation to approve \$58,100 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to The Mather, Evanston, for its eMerge Workforce Initiative. This is a career-path employment program that will offer entry-level positions to Evanston residents (only), as well as internships and fellowships, presumably to a wider group. The entry-level employees could be placed in a department or division that matches their career aspirations – hospitality, CAN, etc. Mather will pay about \$19 per hour. This can be full-time or part-time employment, and Mather will also pay for tuition for the employee to obtain certification or to further his/her education toward a career. The recommendation was approved unanimously by voice vote and will go to City Council.

CM Reid left for about 7 minutes during the presentation and returned with three cups of coffee. He kept one and I think gave the other two to CMs Kelly and Nieuwsma.

Item for Discussion

Zalmezak presented information and documents about vacancies, both office and retail in downtown Evanston. He said office vacancies are at about 11%, which is a critical point for attracting new office space – it's an indication of rebound. The 10% vacancy rate in downtown ground-floor retail may in fact be a bit lower, as the former Panera Bread space on Sherman Avenue may become active again. Panera has been paying rent on the space since it vacated the property and will continue to pay until March of this year. The redesign/redevelopment of Westfield Old Orchard could present some competition, as it has since it was built in the late 1950s.

As it was nearly 8 p.m., Zalmezak said he would like to postpone discussion of the framework for the 2023-25 Economic Development Work Plan, which was on the agenda. He said preliminary comments would be welcome, and Nieuwsma agreed to 10 minutes of discussion.

Committee member Dziekan said she thought that, even if the vacancy rate for retail in downtown Evanston is accurate, the downtown area feels somehow worse from a pedestrian view. She said she hopes the committee will look at other North Shore communities to see how they do a good job of "place-making," such as clustering restaurants together. Vis-à-vis Old Orchard, there was discussion between her and CM Reid as to the effect of eliminating motorized traffic in the downtown area.

Zalmezak said there would be a report next month on the study of the city's eight business districts by Interface Studio LLC, commissioned last May. Today (Jan.27), the city sent out a notice that a meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. on Feb. 9 to review the results of that study.

The meeting was adjourned shortly after 8 p.m.