

EDA Business Round Table Meeting
April 19th, 2006 6 p.m.

Cris started the meeting having everyone introduce each other, and welcoming everyone attending.

Cris explained that the new GovOffice website for the city is up and running. We will be updating more information and making the website more user friendly. The website is the same address as the current website. The website will have information for tourism, businesses, and citizens. In the upcoming week, there will be a business database questionnaire that Cris will be sending out to be filled out and returned. The information will be posted on the website once tabulated.

Cris discussed the revolving loan fund regarding Michelle Miller situation. Cris explained that the revolving loan fund is gap financing. Loans are made to assist businesses where banks can not. They are high risk dollars. The revolving loan has loaned out almost \$500,000 in loans to local businesses from the original \$113,000 grant for DEED. The loan program has not been taxpayer supported. Cris stated that we are still in correspondence with Michelle regarding the past due amount and remaining optimistic. Cris discussed the revolving loan fund criteria changes, such as: uses of funds, cap for working capital, city will pay vendor invoices, track dollars spent with documentation, credit checks, and criminal background checks will be done.

Cris mentioned that he has been in communication with our new website provider for assistance in businesses developing websites for their businesses. As Cris gathers more information, he will schedule a roundtable meeting to discuss.

Cris handed out a housing incentive policy proposal. The EDA is currently reviewing the policy and will be recommending it to the city council for adoption. The incentive is a proactive approach to getting people to locate to Harmony or to build a new house or to improve their existing home. Part of the incentive included Harmony dollars that would be spent at the local businesses. The trees included in the incentive would welcome new people to Harmony along with a tag from the business community welcoming the residents to Harmony. Several businesses expressed gratitude for the proactive approach and said they are participating to the program through taxes that is not noticeable. A recommendation would be to change the program to a thank you or welcome, instead of an incentive. Cris mentioned that we will be talking with the school to help with the promotion anyway they can.

Cris discussed beautification projects to make the community more inviting and assist in making business traffic flow smoothly. Cris mentioned examples such as: 1) decorating buildings at Xmas time, 2) improving fronts and backs of buildings, 3) creating window displays on vacant buildings, 4) information signage (kiosks). Jerome mentioned that because Main Avenue is a state highway, that information signage would have to be outside of the right-of-way, and permitted through the MNDOT if it is visible from the state highway. Several businesses brought up having the crosswalks painted along with

pedestrian signage so visitors and traffic can recognize them. It was suggested to have the school classes assist in decorating vacant buildings. It was suggested to look at handicap issues for downtown businesses (checking for grants and/or funds) regarding access. Consider a business incentive similar to the housing incentive that assists existing expanding businesses.

Cris discussed a workforce development/business development program along with the school to show that quality of life can exist in Harmony.

Adjourned at 8:00 pm.