

Community Collaboration Work Group
Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 11, 2012; 7:30 a.m.
Room 310 - County Administration Building

MEMBERS PRESENT: County Commissioner Jim Saalfeld (Chair); Grand Rapids City Commissioner Rosalynn Bliss (Vice-Chair); President of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce Rick Baker; Attorney Jim Brown; Grand Rapids Township Supervisor Mike DeVries; County Commissioners Carol Hennessy, Dan Koorndyk, and Mike Wawee Jr.; Grand Valley State University Professor of Economics Paul Isely; President & CEO of The Right Place, Inc. Birgit Klohs; Walker City Manager Cathy Vander Meulen

MEMBERS ABSENT: President & CEO of the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan Maria Gonzalez-Cortes; Grand Rapids City Commissioner Jim White

ALSO PRESENT: County Administrator/Controller Daryl Delabbio; Assistant County Administrators Wayman Britt and Mary Swanson; Executive Assistant to the Board Jamie Groom; County Corporate Counsel Dan Ophoff; Grand Rapids City Manager Greg Sundstrom; Deputy Grand Rapids City Manager Eric DeLong; County Management Analyst Jen DeHaan; City Manager of East Grand Rapids Brian Donovan; State Business Ombudsmen MEDC Amy Banninga; Scott Atchison

NEWS MEDIA: David Czurak, Grand Rapids Business Journal

Mr. Saalfeld called the meeting to order at 7:35 am.

I. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

The minutes from June 6, 2012, were reviewed and approved.

II. **SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT –
CONTINUATION OF EMS/FIRE**

Mr. Brian Donovan, City Manager of East Grand Rapids, presented information regarding the Public Safety Department of East Grand Rapids. Officers are cross-trained in police, fire and EMT and work 24-hour shifts. During this time, they are either out on patrol or in the station assigned to fire duty. Officers on police-duty, because they are in a cruiser and patrolling the city, are the first responders to calls. Since most fire calls are false alarm responses, kitchen fires, or other small fires, the officer in the cruiser is able to respond the fastest, and in most cases, take care of the call.

By switching from separate police/fire operations to cross-trained public safety officers, East Grand Rapids was able to reduce its staff by 11 officers (currently employing 29). Administrative staff is also cross-trained. While the cost savings was apparent for East Grand Rapids, Mr. Donovan noted that for a paid-on call fire department, an increase in effectiveness would be seen, but the savings side would not be as dramatic.

To further mitigate financial stresses Mr. Donovan explained, a school liaison officer was moved to the regular 24 hour shift with part of his/her day spent at the school. Now,

many officers work with the school during their shifts to provide the same service in a more efficient way for the department. Mr. Donovan says that he believes East Grand Rapids has more flexibility to do creative things while maintaining the same number of employees out on the street and in the fire station on-call. In addition, medical response time has been greatly enhanced.

Mr. Donovan acknowledged that there were large start-up costs to take a police officer and send them to the fire academy while trying to maintain basic services, because there will be a period of one to two years where costs will be duplicated. There was some resistance to cross training and while the department lost some good people, it gave them an opportunity to pick up other good people and cross-train them.

Ms. Bliss asked what the population is of East Grand Rapids, and if there was an increase in East's use of mutual aid services.

Mr. Donovan answered that there are 10,000 people living in East Grand Rapids, and the change in staffing levels did not affect their ability to respond. They have not seen an increase in the use of mutual aid.

Mr. Donovan added that the 24 hour shift is not the most efficient; an 8 to 12 hour shift would be better. He hopes that in the future that can be worked out, but the staff favors 24 hour shifts. In recent years, East Grand Rapids has reduced its officers by two, which in a small organization, is substantial.

Mr. Delabbio asked what the amount of time it took to fully integrate.

Mr. Donovan said that the department was fully integrated by the time he accepted his position there. There were some staff who were somewhat disgruntled, but the integration had already happened. He believes it would take two to three years to transition, however. Public Safety Departments tend to hire policemen, because they are more open to getting certification in fire. There are also schools that have public safety officer programs. The willingness to perform police, fire, and EMT duties is a requirement for employment.

Mr. Koorndyk asked how many cities in the state and nationally follow this model.

Mr. Donovan believes that Michigan has about 30 departments like this and is the leader in the country. Kalamazoo Public Safety is the largest, however there are several on the East side of the state.

III. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING/ZONING, & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Klohs presented regarding the work of The Right Place, Inc. She said that in her 25 years of experience, she has felt that collaboration with every unit of government has been exemplary. The world has changed a lot.

Ms. Klohs said that 60% of inquiries to The Right Place, Inc. about doing business in West Michigan are from consultants and not the actual business owner. The consultants look at a whole host of things. The job of The Right Place, Inc. is to get past the hurdle of convincing prospective businesses that bringing their company here is doable. The main obstacle is whether or not it is easy to complete the deal; time is money.

For example, Ms. Klohs said that if her company is showing three sites to the same business and now has to go through the explanation that the tax abatement policy in each jurisdiction is different, the consultant becomes somewhat frustrated because they want these communities to be similar. Another obstacle is the variety in zoning; what may be allowed in one community is not allowed in another. The definitions within the zoning codes are also not the same; the usage may be entirely different within the same zoning code between two jurisdictions. These are hurdles that her company has to overcome when selling the region. Can this work group, as a part of this process, look at zoning regulations and make them more compatible? Can the work group look at tax abatements or other incentives? Ms. Klohs would like to see a unified zoning code across the region.

Ms. Klohs said that they have never lost a deal because they couldn't work it out with the community. All of the region's communities are open for business. How can they be more transparent and streamlined? Because competition is at the highest level she has ever seen before, everything counts (speed, transparency, ease of use, onerous incentives), and time is money.

Mr. De Vries asked what role tax rates play.

Ms. Klohs explained that most companies and site consultants always figure in a certain level of taxes, but simple is better. West Michigan is in the middle of the pack as far as tax burden in comparison with other states. Personal property taxes do play a role, particularly when a company is investing heavily in machinery and equipment. Other key factors for site selection include: workforce, infrastructure (roads, water, sewer, electricity, broadband, etc.) and incentives.

Ms. Klohs said that Michigan's incentives of \$100,000,000 are available as a whole state. Detroit recently lost a deal to Tennessee because the incentive package was much bigger. Michigan continues to make deals but runs out of money earlier. There is less to go around.

Ms. Bliss asked whether quality of life: crime prevention, crime rates, green space, etc., plays into decisions.

Ms. Klohs said that this is not considered as much as one would think; it depends on who the company is trying to attract. In the pre-selection stage, the site consultant or company does research and wants to know the bottom line. In the final selection process it will play more of a role. It also depends on what employees they will be bringing with them versus hiring locally.

Mr. Brown asked if the consultants are more interested in the region versus the particular community, and do they disclose the particular use of the company.

Ms. Klohs said that the consultants will not disclose the company name; they will speak in generics: type of business, what the business does, origin of company (ex: China) and what they are looking for.

Ms. Klohs said The Right Place, Inc. start with a site or building in mind and determines if it will fit the usage of what the company wants to do. Ms. Klohs is familiar with the zoning in each of the communities, because she's been working with these communities for 25 years.

Mr. Brown asked if, while making communities more compatible, the goal is to have someplace available for a particular kind of use in each community.

Ms. Klohs clarified that communities are different and can allow different uses, but the terminology for types of use should be the same across the communities. For example, "light industrial" should mean the same for all of the communities – versus each community having different restrictions under the same name.

Mr. Delabbio added that building inspection is closely related to zoning and planning. A number of cities and townships contract with the same firm or individual to do professional inspection services which increases consistency across the jurisdictions. There are areas for collaboration in building inspection services; and County-wide building inspection services could be a possibility. There are counties in Michigan who do this.

Ms. Bliss said that she feels aligning the codes would be most effective.

Ms. Klohs stated that her company's goal is to make this community and region as competitive as possible. How can West Michigan do the things that are in our control, better?

Mr. Baker said that unified ordinances make it easier for organizations to market their region, but also for the residential and developmental market. It is a much more business-friendly environment to have one rule book for building and zoning ordinances, though it is a tedious process to combine.

Ms. Vander Meulen said that her citizens like the way Walker has streamlined its review process. She added that it may take longer to get something approved in a larger city versus a smaller city or township.

Mr. DeLong said that Grand Rapids has planning metrics for its review process; it takes ten days. This goal is reached almost all of the time. In addition, they consult and help applicants get through the planning process. The process is quite good in getting people in, through, and open for business for a city the size of Grand Rapids.

Mr. DeLong added that economic development is a team sport, and the people who win are those who are able to put together the best partnerships. Grand Rapids survives here and thrives based on its ability to form public partnerships. The City has a variety of tools it uses and makes liberal use of them. Mr. DeLong cited the Michigan Street Hill partnership as an

example of an effort to bring the right players together with doing the right things to create thousands of jobs. This partnership has the prospect of creating thousands of more jobs since the infrastructure is already in place.

Ms. Amy Banninga, State Business Ombudsmen from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, said that a lot of the site consultants do research that regions are never aware of. She added that the *definitions* of zoning needs to be examined as well as the problems with existing land owners and where they see themselves. With a positive climate, the region can stay on the map.

Mr. DeLong said that when the State came out with the uniform building code, it was more suburban in nature and made the reuse of older buildings difficult. Uniformity is good, but flexibility is important as well; this is critical.

Mr. Saalfeld complimented the City of Grand Rapids and their speedy review process from his past experiences working with clients.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS/OPEN ITEMS

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

VI. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 1, 2012; 7:30–9:00 a.m.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Saalfeld adjourned the meeting at 8:55 a.m.