



Ask SCORE for Business Advice

Help Existing Business

By Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

Almost every week, the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE meets with business owners who are doing everything they can to stay in business. Especially in the current economic downturn, it can be difficult to survive. This column is dedicated to these business owners with a plea to municipal leaders to consider the effects on existing businesses before backing new developments.

Last summer, Rep. Steve Kagen featured a business forum in Appleton. Representatives included local government and civic representatives, economic development leaders, and small business owners. Going around the table, attendees were asked to identify what they considered the most important issue facing small business. While many of the responses dealt with solid issues, much of the focus was on growth and new development. There is certainly nothing wrong with development, but there is a problem when a desire to increase the tax base becomes the primary consideration of municipalities. How about making greater efforts toward business retention?

We have seen it happen all over the Green Bay area. There are vacancy signs on a myriad of commercial properties. A new building downtown is touted as great progress while all it does is relocate tenants from an existing building. I know many property owners in the area who have faithfully maintained their properties and paid real estate taxes only to lose tenants to the newest development. How is that progress? The property owner is left with a vacant building and, although no income is being generated, must still pay property taxes. In the downtown area, more than one of these property owners has been forced into foreclosure. Others struggle to survive.

And so it goes with our local small business owners. They are members of the Chamber of Commerce and other business associations. They support the community and volunteer their time. Where is the concern for them?

To me, business owners are real people who visit SCORE and ask for help to save their business. They are people who have put their heart and soul into making their businesses a success. With a level playing field, they can succeed. But, if municipalities continue to offer developers breaks through the formation of TIF districts, there is an unfair advantage to the participants in the new development.

The proposed Ashwaubenon Boulevard would be developed by forming a TIF that will use tax dollars to help developers create a project that will undoubtedly put more shops

out of business. When municipal leaders talk about needing additional retail, do they think about the businesses located in the same area? Do they look at the vacancies in the other strip malls and consider the possibility that additional retail may not be needed?

Development makes sense when an area is experiencing strong population growth and discretionary income is climbing. However, it accomplishes nothing when it trades one business for another, and destroys someone's livelihood in the process.

If you'd like further information on business concerns, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business." Visit www.greenbayscore.org or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

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