

Town of Hammond Economic Development Committee Meeting

January 15, 2014

Hammond Village Community Center

Members in Attendance:

Erica Demick, YesterYear Vintage Doors
Mike Stock, Riverbay Adventure Inn
Shelly Youngs, Hammond Village Mayor
Howard Demick, Town Board Representative
William (Bill) Denale, Cottages at Chippewa Point
Mary Hamilton, A Moving Experience
Tom Weldon, Singer Castle
Ron Papke, Planning Board Representative
Ron Bertram, Hammond Town Supervisor
Nancy Williams, Christensen Realty USA

Absent: Larry Foster, Schermerhorn Harbor

Others: Sherry Shatraw, Morristown Mayor; Jim Pitcher, Hammond Town Councilman; David Duff, Susie Wood, Doug Delosh, Hammond Town Councilman; Amanda Purcell, reporter; Scott Ouder Kirk, Del Hamilton, Allan Newell, Van Amyot, Darlene Amyot, Hammond Town Clerk; Tom Chapman, Hammond Planning Board; Merritt Young, Hammond Planning Board; and Rosemary Demick

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm by co-chair Erica Demick.

RiverQuest Presentation:

Lynn Robarge, representing the McLellan Group based in Toronto, gave a presentation to explain the RiverQuest initiative.

RiverQuest is an initiative created and launched because of Brockville's new Aquatarium that is set to open in spring of 2014 and was developed under the direction of the McLellan Group based in Toronto. The Aquatarium is a 25,000 sq ft Discovery Center located at the bottom of the new 20-story condo unit located on the water in downtown Brockville. It is the catalyst for this initiative and is focused on promoting the uniqueness of the 1000 Islands region with a goal of not competing with the area's numerous attractions but rather drawing them together in a way that will tell the story and promote the history and environment of the area in an interactive way.

RiverQuest is an umbrella organization tying all of its *Partners* together in a way that promotes everyone's attractions, from Cornwall and Massena all the way to Sacketts Harbor and Kingston. It is working to increase the number of visitors to the area and to suggest packages that visitors can put together to visit while they are here. The idea is to increase the length of their visits. RiverQuest feels when the *Partners* all work together to promote the entire area there is much more that can be gained for all those involved. The promotion of attractions includes museums, castles, forts, theaters, art centers, environmental reserves and boat tours on both sides of the River. The overall RiverQuest experience will provide a wealth of unique and varied offerings, as well as unlimited opportunities for entertainment and discovery.

Partners have been chosen who will collaborate to form a regional campus partnership to help tell the stories of the area and offer attractions for visitors to experience thus helping to create a world-

class destination. There are 50 MILLION potential visitors to this area within a 6-hour drive on both sides of the river that RiverQuest is trying to target so utilizing marketing dollars in the biggest way possible is important. While chamber organizations on both sides of the river have been successful in the promotion of their particular areas, this partnership will push beyond those boundaries.

Another goal of this initiative is to utilize new media promotional approaches. You will not see the usual promotional tools like visitor guides and brochures but rather it will utilize kiosks, websites, the actual facility and mediums that have not been used before, thus compounding the available marketing dollars. RiverQuest wants to be sure their *Partners* are seeing them using an entertaining and informing mix of promotional materials. This past summer, the *Partners* were identified with a Banner they displayed prominently on their properties for visitors to see.

The website has been up and running since last year and is currently under going changes to make it more user friendly and to expand it's offerings. When looking at the website you will see two categories: *Partners and Friends*.

- *Partners* are attractions for people to visit (i.e. Singer Castle, River Bay Adventures, etc.)
- *Friends* are supporting organizations (i.e. townships, chambers of commerce, tourism organizations, etc.)

This year there was an initiative that Tom Weldon helped with that brought together some of the *Partners* and *Friends* as well as interested townships along the water that agreed to pay to expand a promotional piece RiverQuest initiated. The result of that effort was a 10-hour cinematography piece of the entire 1000 Islands region shot from a helicopter by a professional filming crew. This piece will be the basis for many future RiverQuest promotional pieces and because of the contribution the town of Hammond made to this initiative, it will be allowed access to this footage for their own promotional pieces. This is an example of the quality of medium that is being sought to promote the area.

Lynn went on to talk about some of the actual interactive features of the Aquatarium when it opens this spring. These features incorporate the local history and the partners and friends in many creative ways. She also spoke of the Kiosk as being the major media product to advertise RiverQuest and focus on the major attractions (*Partners*). A lot of the technology that had to be developed for the Aquatarium will be utilized in these Kiosks. They are proposing to place 10 Kiosks in high visitation areas – 5 on each side of the river, with 25 in place over the next 3 years. Utilizing this technology will allow visitors to connect with the destinations they want to visit and obtain instant information about them, directions to get to them, and a history game providing ways to learn about those destinations. One of these Kiosks will be placed at Singer Castle as well as one in Clayton and Alex Bay. There will also be a racking system connected to this for printed materials where *Partners* can display brochures if they wish. In addition to promoting the *Partners*, these kiosks will also provide links to the websites of *Friends* of RiverQuest, providing visitors with further information about a particular area.

With regard to Hammond becoming a "*Friend*" of this initiative, there will be an annual fee charged to those interested in being included in the project. The fees vary depending on the size of the attraction or business and/or the type of group or organization. Lynn felt the amount for the initial introductory fee for a smaller organization would be around \$500. So far Singer Castle and River Bay Adventures are *Partners* from the Hammond area. If the committee is interested in becoming a friend, RiverQuest is currently finishing up the information that will be placed on the Kiosks and it would be timely for us to join to provide the link to our www.visithammondny.com website

advertising the local Hammond businesses who are currently members of our business group. RiverQuest would like to see this wrapped up by next month.

Supervisor Bertram said he has been invited to several RiverQuest meetings and would like to see our area involved. He feels it is a brilliant concept and a good way to advertise the region and bring more people to visit the area. He wanted Lynn to talk to the committee to help them understand the concept and hopefully endorse the idea.

Tom Weldon feels Hammond is a portal for the castle and would like to see Schermerhorn's become a destination to get to the castle. He would also like to see antique boat runs through Chippewa Bay, people taking a kayak ride to the Castle and the Chippewa boat dock become a destination. Tom is now on the board of the Aquatarium and feels this attraction will be an important way for visitors to find out more about the river as it attempts to connect all the attractions in the region. He feels this initiative is set up so it will not go stale over time but will be constantly changing the interactive exhibits that are on display to ensure visitors will be motivated to come back to see new things. He reiterated RiverQuest is not trying to compete and duplicate efforts of chambers and businesses but rather they are targeting major attractions at this point and will offer Chambers and towns an additional avenue to promote their area attractions in a way that may not have been done before.

Supervisor Bertram will get back to get back to the committee with more information about Hammond's cost to be part of this. He hoped the committee would keep in mind that the amount exposure for the Hammond website would be like nothing else could provide.

Discussion regarding the fee followed and several members voiced their opinion. There were mixed feelings in that it is a good idea because of the amount of exposure the town will get but we can't afford to devote a large chunk of our current budget. We will also need further upgrades on our website to get it ready to link to RiverQuest and that will cost money. There will be further discussion on this issue at the February meeting after the committee has received more information from Supervisor Bertram.

Erica stated she made contact with the 1000 Islands Tourism Council and they gave her information on how we could have Hammond incorporated into their website (www.visit1000islands.com) that currently provides exposure for the towns on both sides of the river.

SASS Update

Supervisor Bertram gave us an update on the Hammond Town Board's initiative to pursue the Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) designation. The board received a \$75,000 matching fund grant last fall and is currently in the process of hiring a consultant to complete the work necessary to apply to the Department of State for the designation. He feels this initiative dovetails and compliments the RiverQuest concept and he hopes to see further cooperation and exposure for both sides of the river when this is complete. All ten river towns and villages (Morristown, Hammond, Alexandria Bay, Clayton, Orleans, and Cape Vincent) are currently cooperating to see the project proceed with the exception of the Village of Alexandria Bay. Tom Weldon agreed to look into that.

A kick-off meeting with the consultant will be held at the end of March. Representatives from the towns and villages, county and state organizations, elected officials, chambers of commerce, Save the River, Thousand Islands Land Trust, Tourism Council and the media will be invited.

Photo Contest

There were over 50 entries for the committee's 1st Annual Photo Contest. Prizes were awarded as follows: 1st Place - Lisa Eve
2nd and 3rd Places - Ryan Garris
Honorable Mention – Erica Demick, Bruce Dana, and Valerie Johnson

Slogan

Because of the short amount of time remaining, Erica suggested the committee schedule an additional meeting within the next two weeks to have a brainstorming session regarding the slogan and come to a final decision. This was scheduled as a conference call for Jan. 30th at 6:30 pm.

Goals

Goals for 2013 will be revisited at next meeting to decide which ones will be continued to be discussed in 2014.

Small Business Courses

Mike will talk to Michelle at the SUNY Canton Small Business Center to help determine the three best classes we could offer to local businesses in March. Suggestions for classes included: "Get on the Map", "Guide to Establishing your Business on Internet", and a third class that would be relevant. Mike will look into using the school computer lab. It was suggested to have minimal fees to attend with a Member fee of \$5 and Non-member fee of \$10.

River Weekend

An initial discussion and short brainstorming session was held regarding creating an annual "day or weekend" to promote the river. There are many details to look at when it comes to determining the feasibility of such an event. Bill, Mary, and Erica will meet to further discuss ideas and will get back to the committee.

Comprehensive Plan will be discussed at the next meeting... Wednesday, February 19, 2014 at 6:00 PM