

City Council Asked for Wish List of Retailers

By Patrick McDaniel
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A child wouldn't even have to be asked at this time of the year if they had compiled a "wish list" of things they would like to have for Christmas, so, too, the members of the Decatur City Council were asked this week to compile a "wish list" of the type of retail businesses they would like to see in the future opening within the community.

The time spent at this week's council meeting was only half the usual time period that is spent by council members in working their way through a regular agenda, which was relief to all who were in attendance in the council chamber considering it was a week before the Christmas holiday.

Action taken by the city council will help insure that the city will have a better understanding of what type of retail or restaurant businesses that might be interested in coming to Decatur.

The council approved the hiring of the Buxton Group to compile an economic development and marketing study for up to three possible retail sites within the community in order to provide the city with marketing data to assist it in its marketing efforts in securing additional retail businesses for the community.

The agreement secures the services of the consulting firm who will make list of possible "retail matches" based on consumer demographics within 2.5 to 3.0 mile radius area. The data will come from such sources as consumer debit and credit card and other demographic information.

The Buxton Group will look at 5,000 possible retail and restaurant businesses to see if particular businesses are really a fit for the community based on the data compiled in their marketing study, and then narrow the list down to thirty or less businesses that might fit the

"wish lists" of both the city council and citizens of the community.

During the discussion on the marketing work that the consulting group will undertake, Councilman Mike McElroy stated that, "The important part is that the city brings unique retailers to the community to make Decatur a designation site for shop pers."

Although the majority of the council approved a contract for \$35,000 to a consulting firm to study and come up with proposals for the best uses for utilizing the Decatur Mass Transit's trolleys, Councilman Dan Caulkins voted against the measure.

"Is this really necessary?" asked Caulkins as he entered into the discussion over the study concerning the trolleys, and voiced his opinion that he believed that the city already had the expertise with city staff to come up with the answers without going to an outside consulting firm. During the discussion, Mayor Paul Osborne informed the other council members that, "The study will show what we (the city) could really do with the trolleys to maximize their use," adding that the information gathered during the study would help the city make 'correct decisions on the uses of the trolleys for the future.

Mass Transit Administrator Paul McChancy informed the council that the study would be paid for from an Illinois Department of Transportation grant, with city staff time being used for most of the city's 20% funding portion required to secure the grant.

During the Other Business portion of Monday evening's meeting, Assistant City Manager Billy Tyus gave an updated report on the City of Decatur's response plan of actions during the recent ice storm that hit the community. Tyus reported that members of the city's

response committee met at 1:30 am on Friday, December 1, only a few hours after the ice storm first hit the city, with the mayor and county board chairman issuing an Emergency Declaration that same morning. The city staff also met on Friday afternoon at 2:00 pm with state officials in order to see how the state government could assist during the emergency.

Members of the city staff also met with other local and county officials to coordinate responses to the emergency, and to see that emergency shelters and medical centers were open to assist local residents who needed assistance. Response Of National Guard.

When questioned by city council members about the response time of the National Guard in arriving in Decatur to assist during the emergency, Tyus informed the council that the city requested the assistance of the National Guard during their visit with state officials on that Friday, but it took time for the state to mobilize the troops, with the National Guard arriving on Monday and hitting the streets by Tuesday.

Tyus also informed the council that the city's plan on removal of tree debris would continue as planned with the main areas of the city that were hit the hardest and major arteries receiving priority.

During the Appearance of Citizens portion of the meeting, Rev. Leroy Smith, Jr., Director of the Promise Community Center, an after school program for students, requested help from the city to repair the boiler of the center's headquarters which had been shut down since November 21. Rev. Smith relayed his belief that if the center did not open soon, "We will lose the at risk kids back to their former situation."