



City of Grand Island

Tuesday, November 19, 2002

Study Session

Item -2

Presentation by Progress for Grand Island Regarding Economic Development Program

Each year the City Council goes through a day long process discussing community needs and identifying City goals and priorities for the upcoming year. It is always exciting to celebrate the accomplishments, identify changes in needs from year to year, and reiterate the importance of working on goals that went unmet throughout the year. The Retreat is an opportunity for some real soul searching by not only the elected officials but for the professional staff and community at large. A lot of effort is put into preparing for the Retreat and ensuring accurate “pictures” of the community, as well as the City’s role in meeting the community’s expectations are presented.

For the past several years, economic development has emerged as a priority for the City Council at their annual Retreats. Even more important, economic development or JOBS, JOBS, JOBS was the #1 priority of the community during the 1997 Heartland Vision process – a strategic planning process that involved over 2,300 residents of the Grand Island/Hall County area. From a City Administrator’s perspective I believe the following to be true: 1) people in Grand Island and central Nebraska want to work; 2) People need good paying jobs to support themselves and their families; 3) Municipalities benefit from diverse business and industry in the community; 3) Those who aren’t moving ahead are falling behind.

An economic development program is a huge tool the Nebraska Legislature made available to cities across the state. The benefits of positioning a city for economic growth can not be underestimated. Most importantly, the Legislation comes with safeguards. The checks and balances required by the economic development program can help a Mayor and City Council, City Administrator and Finance Director feel comfortable that the funding allocated for economic development activities are actually used for this purpose. Specifically, the program requires three levels of approval. The first is through the Economic Development Corporation; the second by the Citizen Review Committee (of which the Administrator and/or his designee serve as advisory members) and the third, and most important, is through the City Council. This approval process means that each request for assistance is reviewed thoroughly by people who are intimately familiar with the project, the finances, and the process.

Representatives from the community and the Progress for Grand Island committee will be asking the City Council to consider holding a special election in May 2003 for the voters to consider implementing an economic development program. The question of why a special election instead of the regular elections in 2004 has been asked. In my opinion, the special election is the right time. The special election allows the Council to be responsive to the

increasingly important issue of economic development; allows the voters to really educate themselves on this single issue ballot question; and, most importantly, does not confuse the economic development program with the 1/2 cent sales tax ballot issue already scheduled for May 2004.

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