



# DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

## *Economic Development Division*

### m e m o r a n d u m

**TO:** Laurel Lunt Prussing, Mayor

**FROM:** Elizabeth H. Tyler, Community Development Director

**DATE:** February 2, 2015

**SUBJECT:** **Economic Development Activities Report for January 2015**

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### **Business and Development Activity**

#### **Downtown Urbana**

- Action Jackson Comics, a comic book store in Bismarck, ND, is relocating to Downtown Urbana. The shop will open in February inside the business mall at 123 West Main Street which is also occupied by Error Records, Farm League Skate Shop, and Muris Technologies.
- Work continues at Lord & Lacy BBQ restaurant at 115 W Main. The owners announced that they would like to have the restaurant open by Valentine's Day.
- Demolition and stabilization work is resuming at 204 W Main for the creation of an outdoor market.
- A Certificate of Occupancy has been issued for Emma's Eatery, the new diner and video gambling establishment to be located in the Urbana Crossing strip at the former Quizno's location.
- The Request for Proposals for the redevelopment of 200 Vine will be issued in February.
- Work is underway for a second-story karaoke bar expansion of A-Plus VIP Lounge at 214 West Main Street.
- The Strawberry Fields business and building have both been purchased by Mohammad Al-Heeti, the owner of World Harvest international food store in Champaign. He plans to reopen the business this spring using the same name and to continue operating it with an emphasis on natural foods. Al-Heeti also plans to expand the operation of the café with a new emphasis on Middle Eastern foods.

#### **University-Medical**

- Construction of a new building shell at Gateway Shoppes at 110 E University Avenue is nearly complete. Multiple tenants have expressed interest in the space which will be finished to suit.
- Work continues for the Campus Circle apartment complex on University Avenue.

#### **North Lincoln Avenue**

- Work is complete for the \$1.6 million renovation of the new Illinois American Water office and service distribution facility at 1406 N Cardinal Ct.
- Work is complete on the new catering kitchen for Hendrick House at 801 W Killarney St.

#### **Cunningham Avenue**

- Renovations are underway for the new Urbana True Tires, a Goodyear tires retailer, at 608 North Cunningham Avenue.
- Staff held a closing on the Hanford Inn property at 2408 N Cunningham Avenue. The new owner, Kelly Dillard, plans to begin demolition of the building in the spring per his agreement with the City.

## **East Urbana**

- Metro PCS has opened a new cell phone store at 1511 East Washington Street. This is the former location of the Exclusive Fashion uniform store.

## **Marketing and Events Activity**

- The February edition of “It’s All About U” became available on Monday, February 2.
- Staff attended the USD #116 District Expo and the Campus Community Connection Resource Fair.

## **Urbana’s Market at the Square**

- Urbana’s Market at the Square hosted the First Annual Market at the Square Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Fair on Wednesday, January 21. There were 13 vendors in attendance and well over 100 potential customers that came out to the fair. The first-time event was a tremendous success with each participating vendor receiving at least one new CSA or buying club member.
- The Market at the Square Director appeared on WCIA’S Ag Answers program and ciLiving program. Staff also participated in Inspire a Child to Dream Day at Yankee Ridge School program and with three K-2 classes to talk about working in local government and running a farmers market.

## **Public Arts Program**

- The 2015 Urbana Arts Grant Program received 44 applications. Staff has invited members of the community to serve as jurors, who will meet on February 14 and February 21 to review applications and give recommendations.
- An event to celebrate the Boneyard Creek Improvements Project is being planned for April 11, 2015. It will feature performances, arts activities for kids, food trucks, and more. Staff is working to have artist Jack Mackie attend the event.
- A call for entries, titled The City of Urbana Raises Your Art, is being promoted through social media and printed materials. This call invites all visual artists in Champaign County to submit their designs for street pole banners on Broadway, between Water Street and University Avenue. A winner will be selected through a juried process, and his/her work will be displayed on the banners before the Boneyard commemoration event in April. Staff also invited arts teachers from local elementary schools (Wiley, King, Prairie, Leal, Thomas Paine, and Yankee Ridge) to submit works by their students, which will be displayed on street pole banners around Race Street and Griggs Street.
- Staff launched a naming contest for the Boneyard Creek Improvements Project. Ballot boxes have been placed at the Urbana Free Library, the lobby of City building, and Phillips Recreation Center. Participants can also submit their ideas online at [www.urbanaininois.us/naming-contest](http://www.urbanaininois.us/naming-contest) . Jurors will meet on February 12 to select three finalists, and the contest will then open for a final vote by the public.
- The current Artist of the Corridor exhibition, which features the watercolors of Carol Farnum, ends on January 30, and is followed by a costume design exhibition by students at Wiley Elementary School. Wiley’s art teacher, Rusty Clevenger, is working with staff to organize a fashion show by the students at the City building. Staff is also preparing for the expansion of Artist of the Corridor to the Urbana Free Library.
- Staff is working with city planners to create a marketing brochure, and redesigning the Urbana Public Arts e-newsletter to make it more attractive and user-friendly.
- The January episode of ArtNow! featured painter and sculptor Harry Breen. In February, ArtNow! explores the works of watercolor artist Sandra Batzli.

## **Other Updates**

- The State of Illinois has postponed the announcement of licenses for medical cannabis dispensaries and cultivation facilities. Four applications were submitted for dispensaries in Downtown Urbana; all applicants hold either a lease, a purchase agreement, or title to a downtown property. The state law allows for the issuance of two licenses for this state police district which also includes Champaign, Danville and Decatur. Unofficial scoring which was released by the governor's office showed the two top-scoring dispensary applicants in this state police district to be two of the Urbana applicants. Again, these results were not official and Governor Rauner has indicated that the application scoring process will be subject to a review before any licenses are issued. Staff has communicated to the governor's office that the City is interested in seeing a resolution of the licensing question in order to settle the disposition of four vacant or underutilized downtown buildings as well as to allow significant private investment in up to two of these properties to proceed.
- In February, Economic Development staff held site visits with Connections, McCallister Audio, A Plus VIP Lounge, and Urbana Adult Education.
- Staff is in the process of conducting a review of the Curbanas Pilot Program and plans to present results to Council on February 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- The Urbana Business & Development Luncheon will be held on February 17<sup>th</sup> from Noon to 1:30pm at the Urbana Civic Center. This quarter's luncheon is *Pitch Perfect: Quick-Takes on Urbana's Commercial Properties* and will feature real estate pitches by local brokers as well as an announcement on the City's RFP for 200 Vine.
- Staff expects to start a search for a new Economic Development Coordinator in the coming days.
- Planner Kevin Garcia and Economic Development Manager Brandon Boys both achieved AICP certification from the American Institute of Certified Planners, the professional institute of the American Planning Association.

# Memorandum



**TO:** Laurel Lunt Prussing, Mayor  
**FROM:** Cynthia Chandler, Executive Director  
**DATE:** February 1, 2015  
**SUBJECT:** Urbana Business Association Activities Report for January 2015

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## Membership Growth

The 2015 membership year kicked off with 189 member businesses. Renewal invoices went out the last week of December. To date we have received one cancelation and 61 renewal payments (of 157) accounting for 39% of the membership. The UBA has seen the addition of two new member businesses bringing our member count to 190.

## Holiday Market

The 12<sup>th</sup> annual Holiday Market was an incredible success, far exceeding all previous years. We finished the year breaking records in both vendor participation and attendance. We had a total of 110 vendors throughout the seven weeks compared to 103 last year. With 77 vendor booth spaces available, this year saw an average of 67 vendors per week (compared to 61 per week in 2013) filling the market to capacity (several vendors rent two booth spaces). Four of the seven weeks of market resulted in a waiting list for vendors. The final market offered the largest vendor participation with 73 vendors present. There were 43 vendors new to the Holiday Market this year. Attendance has greatly increased over years past with an average attendance of 2,245; the high was 2,846 and the low was 1,524. This far exceeds last year's attendance average of 1,867 over the seven week period. Promotion of the Holiday Market included radio ads on seven stations, television ads on WCIA, multiple articles in the News-Gazette and online, web presence with SmilePolitely and ChambanaMoms.com, a Twitter chat, and a variety of live interviews on both television and radio. We placed 100 posters and distributed 1,000 flyers. Banners were up and several yard signs were placed around the downtown area.

## Middle Market

Middle Market kicked off on January 17 with 25 vendors in attendance, 12 of which are new vendors to Middle Market. Marketing for this event includes 100 posters and 500 flyers distributed around Champaign-Urbana, radio ads on seven stations, online advertising with Smile Politely and ChambanaMoms.com, as well as on air interviews with Brian Moline and Jim Lewis on WDWS. Attendance exceeded last year and all vendors were pleased.

## Boneyard Connect

The UBA will once again host a Boneyard Connect event on Thursday, February 5, in the back room at Pizza M. This event is a venue for businesses and artists to connect in advance of the Boneyard Arts Festival and is held in partnership with 40 North 88 West, the Champaign County Arts Council.

## Urbana Restaurant Week

The third annual Urbana Restaurant Week will take place March 2-9. UBA staff is in the process of recruiting participating restaurants and developing a promotional campaign.

## Uncork Urbana Wine Festival

The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Uncork Urbana Wine Festival will be held on Saturday, June 13. UBA staff are in the early stages of planning for this event and have started receiving sponsorship commitments from area businesses.

## Sweetcorn Festival

Scheduled for August 28-29, planning for the 40<sup>th</sup> year of the Urbana Sweetcorn Festival has begun. UBA staff will be making some changes to improve the flow of the festival as we work toward reducing expenses and increasing revenues. The first task is to create new and improved sponsorship levels and benefits. UBA staff have started discussions with our larger cash sponsors from last year to initiate conversations for this year's event. In addition, we are looking at our expenses to see where reductions can be made without impacting operations.

## 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Marketing Update:

The fourth quarter of 2014 saw a tremendous increase in visibility through social media.

<b>Facebook</b>	<b>New Likes</b>	<b>% Increase</b>	<b>Total Likes</b>	<b>Reach</b>	<b>Impressions</b>
Urbana Business Association	46	3%	1,415	9,362	20,858
Holiday Market	210	45%	677	14,907	29,922
Middle Market	51	9%	405	554	1,197
Sweetcorn Festival	18		6,133	17,181	35,420
Uncork Urbana	4	1%	390	0	0

<b>Twitter</b>	<b>New Likes</b>	<b>% Increase</b>	<b>Total Likes</b>
Urbana Business Association	188	10%	2,059
Holiday Market	77	33%	308
Middle Market	51	22%	278
Sweetcorn Festival	82	7%	1,258

Radio ads are currently rotating between Shop Local, Shop Urbana and Middle Market. A series of Shop Local, Shop Urbana ads ran in The News-Gazette between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The UBA has maintained a web presence on Smile Politely with three ads placed throughout as well as weekly SPlogs (online blogs).