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Economic development leaders: Growth doesn't just happen

Alexandria continues to flex its economic development muscle. City representatives on the Alexandria Area Economic Development Commission (AAEDC), Kevin Kopischke and Corliss Stark, presented the commission's annual report to the city council at its meeting Monday.

By: **Al Edenloff**, Alexandria Echo Press

Alexandria continues to flex its economic development muscle.

City representatives on the Alexandria Area Economic Development Commission (AAEDC), Kevin Kopischke and Corliss Stark, presented the commission's annual report to the city council at its meeting Monday.

Kopischke noted that the AAEDC is celebrating its 20th year and its mission remains the same: driving the economic wealth and stability of the community.

Alexandria's "pull factor" – a measure of a community's ability to draw customers to its retail industry – is impressive, according to Kopischke.

Pull factors are determined by dividing the local per capita dollar sales by the state average. A pull factor of 1 indicates that the locality has the same amount of dollar sales activity per capita as the state of Minnesota.

Alexandria's pull factor, Kopischke noted, was 4.36 last year – more than twice that of similar-sized communities such as Bemidji, Fergus Falls and Detroit Lakes.

According to the report, local companies invested more than \$17.46 million in start-up or expansion projects in the Alexandria area in 2009. New construction projects totaled 254,645 square feet. A total of 540 jobs were retained and 36 new jobs were created.

Although the numbers aren't as high as the record activity in recent years, the area still experienced positive economic growth through its business investments and initiatives, the report stated.

"These things [pull factors, economic growth] are not just accidents; they're planned for," Kopischke told the council. "It's driven by hard work, our small and medium-sized businesses and realizing how important it is to invest in economic development."

In 2009, the AAEDC focused on the following key areas of service – business planning, providing demographic information, site selection assistance, commercial tax incentives, revolving loan funds, financial packaging and community stewardship.

Stark noted that a recent highlight was Alexandria being named a top 10 micropolitan (see related story).

One of the AAEDC's notable achievements last year was its involvement in developing 12 "destiny drivers" through the Alex Area Stewards initiative. The AAEDC set two goals through the program – start or expand 12 businesses each year and strengthen the area's industrial park.

The council thanked the commission for the report and their hard work during the past year.

In other action not previously reported in Wednesday's newspaper, the council:

Ditch repair

bid approved

•Accepted a low bid of \$7,760 from Central Specialties of Alexandria to repair a drainage ditch near Backhaus Appraisals on Nokomis Street south to 22nd Avenue.

The bid was well under the city's estimate of \$11,395.

Pollution prevention plan

at airport awaits update

•Agreed to update the city's stormwater pollution prevention plan at the airport.

The state agreed to provide grants to update the plan. The total cost is \$6,500 with the state covering 70 percent and the city covering the rest, \$1,950.

Work session will discuss

police station plans

•Scheduled a work session with the police station task force.

Plans for the new police station will be reviewed on Monday, June 7 at 6 p.m. in the large conference room at City Hall.

Council members suggested adding other topics to the work session, including discussing security at city buildings and an update of committee work.