

Carolyn Schofield
Candidate for Crystal Lake City Council

In these challenging economic times it is essential that Crystal Lake work to retain existing businesses as well as encourage the redevelopment of vacant properties. There are several key areas we can focus on to promote economic growth and vitality within our community. We must strengthen the level of customer service offered to businesses, offer a new, tiered incentive program aimed at business retention and development, enhance and expand the existing economic development programs, and alleviate congestion along the main roadways to provide more convenient access to core retail and commercial areas.

In order to retain businesses, strong customer service is necessary to build a solid relationship between the City and local businesses. From newly developing properties to well established businesses, the needs of the business community should be clearly understood. Collaboration, organization, and integrity are key to providing efficient and mutually beneficial service. For new businesses and developments, a designated staff member should be assigned to provide guidance. The development phase requirements and any anticipated obstacles should be clearly outlined to streamline the process. The adoption of the proposed Unified Development Ordinance will also assist in facilitating improved customer service by establishing consistency through clearly outlining city ordinances, guidelines, and procedures.

A new program should be formally developed to provide tiered incentives for businesses in areas outside of the existing TIF districts. The goals of this program would be to retain existing businesses and to encourage the redevelopment of vacant properties. The incentive levels would be weighted based on taxes generated, employment opportunities provided, alignment with target businesses, beautification considerations, and other benefits provided to the city. For example, points could be awarded to each of these desirable areas. An amount budgeted within the city's general fund could be utilized to fund this program. Monies could then be allocated proportionate to the number of points received or through a petitioning process similar to other existing programs, such as the hotel tax.

Existing economic development programs should be utilized and upgraded as needed. The City's Economic Development Committee has created unique programs and is encouraged to expand their creativity. The existing "I Shop Crystal Lake" program should be advanced to draw customers to the retail areas of Crystal Lake. This program should incorporate public education not only on services available but also on the benefits that are provided to the community through the use of sales tax dollars. The Vulcan Lakes recreational facility and the conceptual community/senior center are some examples of key projects with great benefit to the community, which could be funded through sales tax dollars. Highlighting uses of sales tax dollars may encourage residents to make a higher proportion of purchases within Crystal Lake thus giving back to our community.

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Along with programs to retain and attract businesses, it is crucial to focus on traffic improvements to minimize congestion and allow easier access to local businesses. Utilizing sensible planning and design tools, such as cross access between properties and limiting curb cuts, during the development phase will help to reduce congestion and provide safer roadways. Route 14, Rakow Road, and Route 31 are heavily traveled roadways that are in need of improvements. Intergovernmental coordination to fund and execute projects along county and state roadways is vital. Expansion along Rakow Road will provide convenient access from the south end of town to the retail and commercial center of Crystal Lake. This is an important area whose business is at risk of being lost to the retail corridor located in adjacent communities along Randall Road.

It is currently a difficult time for our economy. Therefore, it is critical for the City of Crystal Lake to strengthen its focus on promoting economic development within our community. We need to continue working with our business customers to build stronger relationships by offering superior customer service. We need innovative ideas, like the tiered incentive program, to retain existing businesses and to attract new ones. We need to advance the existing development programs that are successful. And finally, we need to work to curtail the impact of traffic congestion. All these efforts will help our local businesses thrive and establish themselves for the future. Thank you for this opportunity to share some of my thoughts and ideas. For more information about my campaign, please visit www.carolynschofield.com.