

# Oswego looks to recruit more businesses for village

By **Linda Girardi**

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**O**swego is looking to recruit more shops and restaurants in response to the demands of a growing population.

Village trustees at a recent Committee of the Whole meeting began to take a harder look at the village's business recruiting strategy.

Oswego Economic Development Director Vijay Gadde gave a presentation to explain the retail recruitment process, provide benchmark data and future strategies which include improving the village's website to draw attention to potential new retailers.

He said around 50 new businesses came to Oswego last year, but a few dozen businesses also closed.

"There was a net gain of 13 new businesses compared to 2014 when there was a net loss of 32 businesses," he said.

Gadde said the village's sales tax revenue increased by 6.2 percent last year.

He said 256 conversations with brokers and individually-owned businesses generated 86 leads and prospects for new businesses. Gadde explained one-to-one meetings and attendance at retail conventions were also part of his work.

"It is a continuous process that involves what the community wants and what the market can support," he told trustees.

He said discussions with brokers brought in national retail chains, such as Taco Bell, [Dunkin' Donuts](#), Lou Malnati's pizza and Discount Shoe Warehouse to Oswego last year.

Trustees were recently given a recommendation to rehire retail recruitment consultant JGSC Group to update the village's retail marketing analysis, but trustees said they wanted to see what other national firms could offer Oswego before deciding.

Village President Gail Johnson and Trustees Trustee Karin McCarthy-Lange, Ryan Kauffman and Joe

West ran for election on a pro-business platform last year.

McCarthy-Lange said she already had a "grasp" of the village's retail recruitment process and data from their conversations at the February meeting.

"I am frustrated because I thought when you came back to us you were going to discuss what these other companies offered," McCarthy-Lange said.

"You have informed us of what you do, which is justifying what is happening here. I don't see what is going to attract businesses to Oswego other than a bunch of statistics. I am not seeing any kind of marketing, branding or imagery," she said.

Trustee Pam Parr said she, too, was looking for information beyond what they already know.

"I understand you want (marketing) materials and data but what I have not heard is what your plan is to do with the information," Parr said. "...From our budget discussions we essentially have two years to blossom economic development. We not only need the revenue but people who live here want certain (retail and services). While we come up with some new businesses which are always welcome, we have certain types that I don't see."

Parr said a demand for more locally-owned restaurants was identified years ago.

Johnson said they wanted specifics as far as the village's business recruitment plan.

"When you come back from a (retail convention) do you target 10 phone calls a day? Are there face-to-face meetings after the events? That's what we are trying to grapple with and we have since economic development was brought in-house," she said.

Gadde said last year 86 leads were generated and a prospect list of the top 20 was developed.

"We start with a prospect list and (establish) the top 20. That is when we begin intense negotiations with either a broker or retailer. Whether we do it in-house or hire (a consultant) the focus is on the final 20 - that is when more intense discussions begin."

He said some retailers figure in population when they expand into another market.

"Part of the equation is more rooftops to attract certain retailers (but) not all of them," Gadde said.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning has projected Oswego's population will increase from about 35,000 to up to 48,000 by 2025. The group further projects the village's population could grow to 69,000 by 2040.

*Linda Girardi is a freelance reporter for The Beacon-News*

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