

Mayor: Elmhurst benefiting from development

 dailyherald.com/news/20180109/mayor-elmhurst-benefiting-from-development

Robert Sanchez



When it comes to economic development, Elmhurst Mayor Steve Morley says his philosophy is to keep your foot on the gas.

"If you don't work hard to create a fertile business environment, somebody else will," he said Tuesday during his state of the city address to the Elmhurst Chamber of Commerce and Industry. "It's a competition. And it's not a fair playing field out there."

Morley pointed to several projects officials hope will benefit residents and businesses, including a downtown luxury apartment development and construction of a high-end fitness center.

During his 36-minute speech, Morley said development gives residents the services they want while broadening the city's tax base.

"I'm a firm believer that with good planning we can broaden our tax base and hopefully reduce the burden on everybody," he said.

Examples include the Elmhurst 255 luxury apartments downtown and incentives the city gave Elmhurst Auto Group to keep its BMW, Jaguar and Toyota dealerships.

Construction also has begun on a 165-unit luxury apartment complex with first-floor retail across from the Metra station.

"The great thing about creating density in our downtown with ... commuter developments is they generate a lot of tax," he said, "but more often than not, they're a smaller burden to our school system."

That's because the apartments are expected to cater to empty-nesters and young couples without children.

Morley said one of the ways to maintain a vibrant downtown is by creating foot traffic, so officials are looking forward to the opening of Fitness Formula Club, a high-end fitness center along Addison Avenue. The three-story facility is expected to bring 800 to 1,000 people a day downtown.

"We're going to be able to keep those mom-and-pop shops downtown because we created the density and we created traffic," he said.

New office space also is taking shape downtown, including the York Building. Morley said the three-story brick structure at 128 N. York Road will have 20,000 square feet of office space and 10,000 square feet of retail space on the first floor.

In the coming year, Edward Elmhurst Health is planning to rebuild the Elmhurst Clinic along Schiller Street next to the building it eventually will replace, Morley said.

Meanwhile, the city is making progress toward its goal to someday rebuild its train station.

The city received a \$10 million grant in October from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program to help pay for the estimated \$17 million project. On Tuesday, Morley said the city got another grant of \$2.4 million.

Built in the 1960s, the station last was renovated in the 1990s and since has become obsolete.

"It's not that attractive," the mayor said, "so we want to remodel it. We want to rebuild it."

The plan calls for a 2,400-square-foot building on the inbound side of the tracks that would feature a 1,100-square-foot waiting area, American with Disabilities Act-approved accessible washrooms, and a small office for ticket sales. A building on the outbound side would cover 450 square feet with a waiting room.

While the city has received \$12.4 million in grant money, Morley said officials are continuing to pursue other funding options.

Construction is expected to begin in 2019.

Morley also talked about efforts to reduce flooding. In 2017, the city completed seven projects that provide nearly 60 acre-feet of additional stormwater storage -- 60 acres holding 1 foot of water -- and has two other projects slated for this year. The city bought land behind Messiah Lutheran Church south of Butterfield Road for a project that will provide about 21 acre-feet of storage and acquired land near Van Buren Street and Swain Avenue for a project that will provide 11 to 14 acre-feet of storage.

"Our goal is to help mitigate stormwater in a 100-year flood," Morley said. "We're getting there. It's just a lot of hard work, and it's lot of money."