

HERMITAGE

City reviews its sales campaign Panel praises marketing effort

Sharon-Herald – Friday, January 06, 2012

By Joe Pinchot, *Herald Staff Writer*

Hermitage city officials believe their marketing campaign has made an impact but acknowledge it is difficult to measure its effectiveness. The city does not have a product and can't compare before and after sales figures, said community planner Jeremy P. Coxe.

Still, website hits and requests for the promotional DVD indicate an awareness of the city that officials hope reflects their efforts. Members of Hermitage Community and Economic Development Commission urged officials Thursday to keep up their work and offered suggestions for new marketing avenues.

"For not having a marketing department, you're doing a great job," said commission member Angela Palumbo. Coxe said he and Assistant City Manager Gary M. Gulla are the closest thing the city has to a marketing department. "We are not marketing experts at all," he said. Their focus has been to promote city activities, quality of life and business development opportunities. With much of their time in the past year devoted to the eCenter business incubator at LindenPointe technical business park, officials want to update their citywide marketing plan and lean more on quality of life.

Officials spent \$28,084 last year on marketing, with \$13,000 provided by grants. The money was spent on advertisements in The Herald's Business Chronicle, the OH-PENN Interstate Region Economic Development Guide, Youngstown Business Journal and the Mercer County Convention and Visitors Bureau; updating the DVD, which can be seen on YouTube; and LindenPointe pencils, note tablets and water bottles.

"We try to get outside of the region," Coxe said. "We don't want to market to our residents because they typically know what's going on." Commission Chairman Rex Knisley said he thought the ads were attractive and well placed. Commission member George Kraynak suggested a billboard advertising campaign, which other commission members supported. They discussed placement, copy and graphics, and Gulla said the idea intrigued him.

Commission member Michael P. Walton said he has had success in his business working with a consultant to optimize the company's presence in Web searches, and that it is inexpensive to set up such a program. Officials also suggested redesigning the city's website. Coxe said he updates the site daily and is happy with its content, but it could use a new look, something he does not have the time or expertise to undertake.

Knisley told officials to keep up the marketing effort in whatever way they see fit. "The main thing is to keep your name out there," said commission member Robert A. Cucitrone.