

October 2008

The Buffalo News

### Brown cites progress in making city business-friendly

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When Mayor Byron W. Brown revamped the city's economic development office this summer, he promised to make Buffalo more business-friendly.

Today, his new business assistance team reported that some early strides have been made since the overhaul was announced in July.

City lending activity to businesses has almost doubled when compared with the same period last year, economic development officials said. The 13 loans closed in recent months are valued at \$1.2 million. The loans are projected to create 134 new jobs and protect 38 existing jobs.

More than 140 businesses have received some form of help from City Hall in the past four months, while work force development efforts have created 121 jobs, said Catherine Palko, who oversees the business assistance team.

Palko was recruited from Cleveland, which has been using numerous effective development strategies, officials said. Buffalo is implementing some of these tactics.

The key goal is to create a one-stop shop that makes it easier for businesses to navigate the maze of city agencies and regulations. Businesses will be assigned a point-person to steer them through the process. When projects need the involvement of multiple players in City Hall, "roundtable" sessions will be set up where business owners can get immediate answers.

A new hot line has been set up to help businesses -- including out-of-town companies that might be thinking about moving to Buffalo. The toll-free number is 866-940-8936.

Officials said local businesses also can contact City Hall by calling Buffalo's new 311 non-emergency calling system.

Brown and members of his CitiStat accountability panel also reviewed ongoing efforts to strengthen some older commercial districts. Buffalo has a number of programs that help businesses spruce up facades, raise money for expansions and address other needs.

Buffalo must make sure it targets its assistance to business districts that still have a chance to thrive, Brown told his economic development team. He noted that the city has only half the population it had several decades ago.

"Not every commercial thoroughfare in the city is going to be vibrant again. We have to realize that," Brown said.

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