

Session 12-02, a Special Meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Commission was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Davis on February 14, 2012 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONER DAVIS, FAULKNER, NEECE, SARNO, WAGNER

COUNCILMEMBER: WYTHE (absent)

STUDENT: DAVIS

STAFF: COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR KOESTER
DEPUTY CITY CLERK JACOBSEN
IT MANAGER POOLOS
CITY PLANNER ABBOUD

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus of the Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no public comments.

RECONSIDERATION

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. January 18, 2012 Special Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved by consensus of the Commission

VISITORS

STAFF AND COUNCIL REPORT

A. Staff Report on what it would take for the City of Homer to connect to the marine fiber optic network that lands in town. (Nick Poolos - IT Manager)

Information Technology Manager Poolos reviewed his memorandum and answered questions from the Commission. He explained that before the City could qualify to connect into the line, it would have to establish some form of a utility and establish recognition that it is a carrier. He explained in his memo is an estimate of what the utility would look like for next generation connectivity for the next 20 to 50 years. Municipal funded fiber plans are wholesale only and attract private enterprise to take on the retail space and retail risk. Given our geography, it isn't likely we could attract enough subscribers for a third party to take on that risk, even in a borough wide utility. It discussion it was acknowledged that there are organizations, especially in the public sector, that would benefit from the bandwidth.

B. Report on business incubator/mentor day. (Katie Koester)

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Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester reviewed the memorandum she presented as a laydown. The group discussed the concepts of organizing the event and members discussed previous experiences they have had with events like this. Mrs. Koester asked the Commissioners what areas they suggest focusing for an event and responses included natural resources that can be turned in to small businesses and also marine trades.

C. Invite extended to Marine Trades Association for March meeting.

Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester advised that Kate Mitchell and other members of the Marine Trades Association will be at the March meeting to give a presentation.

PUBLIC HEARING

PENDING BUSINESS

NEW BUSINESS

A. Review of Sign Ordinance 12-01(S)(A) and EDC Recommendations

City Planner Abboud reviewed his staff report provided in the packet and gave an overview of the Planning Commissions work regarding temporary signs.

FAULKNER/NEECE MOVED THAT THE EDC SUPPORTS THE SIGN ORDINANCE AS SUBMITTED TO THE COUNCIL BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION.

Commissioner Faulkner expressed his reasoning for supporting the sign ordinance as follows:

- There are so many sixty day businesses on the spit that don't care to read and follow the sign ordinance.
- When one business displays a sandwich board, neighboring businesses do the same and the signs proliferate.
- The Planning Commission prepared a good ordinance that addresses issues that needed to be changed.

Commissioner Sarno questioned if the signs work and if they are taken away will it harm businesses? City Planner Abboud commented that we are at the end of the road and businesses don't have to stop people before they get to Fritz Creek, as an example. A temporary signs take a market share from another local business, and then when everyone has one their returns diminish. He posed the question do the temporary signs make more people come back to our community? Commissioner Sarno commented regarding safety

Chair Davis and Commissioner Wagner felt that the issue is finding a way to allow them but make it enforceable. Chair Davis questioned the legality of prohibiting commercial temporary signs but allowing them for charitable events. City Planner Abboud explained that the City Attorney advised that the restriction is allowable as long as non commercial messages are given more leniency than commercial messages.

VOTE: YES: FAULKNER, NEECE
NO: DAVIS, WAGNER, SARNO

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Motion failed.

The Commission had discussion of options. Comments included a city issued decal that includes a date to be displayed on temporary signs; changing the 14 days out of 90 to 14 days out of a quarter; designating different zones with separate rules; and seasonal allowances.

Comments were reiterated that if you allow one sandwich board on the spit or along Pioneer Avenue you are allowing 200. That's the way competition works. Allowing 14 day temporary commercial message signs, the city could hire a full time sign person, but it will never be enforced and the business community will be riled up as their signs are piled in the back of a pick-up. It puts planning in the position of being the bad cops. It seems more appropriate to say no to commercial sandwich boards.

Regarding different rules for zones, City Planner Abboud explained that different districts have different sign rules, but in relation to allowing temporary signs in one zone and not another, it is an issue of competition and the majority of the Planning Commission felt that the temporary sign rules in town should be the same on the spit.

Point was raised regarding safety and the high winds that blow on the spit, the signs can cause harm to property if they hit buildings, cause injury if they hit a pedestrian, and on the spit, they can end up in the bay. It was expressed that the only way to resolve the problem is to fix it to the ground with posts on the businesses property and then it becomes a permanent sign.

Commissioner Faulkner pointed out that what is legal in the sign ordinance as submitted. Sandwich board signs are the only controversy being stirred up by a half a dozen business owners. The ordinance has a lot in to allow people to do legal signage. City Planner Abboud noted that changeable copy is allowed, for example so business can display their special of the day.

Commissioner Neece added that a lot of times you can't see the sandwich boards because people are crowded around them or people move them out of their way. They are more of a hindrance than a help. There are many communities that don't allow sandwich board signs. They are prolific and dangerous, and something permanent on the side of a building is a better approach.

WAGNER/SARNO MOVED TO RECONSIDER COMMISSIONER FAULKNER'S MOTION.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: YES: NEECE, SARNO, FAULKNER, DAVIS, WAGNER

Motion carried and the following motion was back on the floor:

FAULKNER/NEECE MOVED THAT THE EDC SUPPORTS THE SIGN ORDINANCE AS SUBMITTED TO THE COUNCIL BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION.

Question was raised if this is wise. City Planner Abboud commented that the Planning Commission considered all of the same issues and it isn't as simple when you are considering

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it for the whole community. There are a lot of businesses that didn't and won't show up because sandwich boards aren't their thing.

VOTE: YES: DAVIS, FAULKNER, SARNO, NEECE, WAGNER

Motion carried.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

Franco Venuti stated he is a city resident and a planning commissioner. He also served for six years as a member of the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, so he is pro business. He appreciates the EDC supporting the Planning Commission, but they didn't do what City Council asked of them. The Planning Commission worked on it for about year. Last year a city in Brazil made an ordinance that eliminated all signs, imagine the bloodshed over that. He explained the Planning Commission held a public hearing and business people in town argued for sandwich board signs and had good arguments. If he is looking for a hair cut he looks for his barbers sandwich board sign. He said he his talking for himself and not the Commission and many of them may not agree with him on this. He thinks sandwich board signs could be done through a permit and enforceable with a date on the sign. The Council said they wanted the EDC to come up with a solution and they haven't. They shot themselves and the Planning Commission in the foot because now he doesn't think they will have a sign ordinance this year. Things move at a snails pace and change doesn't happen quickly. He doesn't think the EDC did the right thing for the common good. He thinks it would be helpful if the EDC could meet with the PC to have a discussion to hash out the sign ordinance. We can't just say no and have it go in circles.

Commissioner Faulkner asked what his solution would be. Mr. Venuti said that speaking on his own behalf he thinks it should be a permit-able sign with an obvious date attached, not allowed in right away, not within 50 feet of an intersection, readable from 50 feet and provided they haven't exceeded their allotted signage, and to institute a business license and make it self policing. His concern with sandwich boards is safety at intersections.

Chair Davis expressed some frustration in that Planning worked on it for over a year, and then Council asks the EDC to come up with a solution in one night. He would be willing for the commissions to have some discussion if the opportunity arises.

Bumppo Bremicker, city resident, remembers when the sign code got started over the golden arches. This is not a new issue; it's been going on for years and for Council to send it to EDC and say "fix it" is unreasonable. Brad's motion was the only reasonable solution. The sandwich boards have been dealt with, you can have a sign of an allowable size permanently mounted on the property or building, it's been fought out for years. He noted Maura's sign and while he loves to go there, they aren't even open and the sandwich id board on the corner blocking the intersection. It's ridiculous. There has to be a rule. Don't pass rules that can't be enforced. Make it fair, clear, and enforce it. He said he is against sandwich boards. If you have a business you need to have a reasonable plan for a sign on a building or a pole. We've gone through this.

COMMENTS OF CITY STAFF

COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL MEMBER

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION MEMBERS

Commissioner Neece remembers the first battle over the signs in '84. This has been going on for a while.

Commissioner Wagner commented that he is working on a LION investment group based on a model out of Port Townsend. He has been involved with local loans for 7 years and later in March hopes to put it out. It's a legal way to introduce people with money to people who need money.

Commissioner Faulkner commented the message they are sending Council is that the Planning Commission wrote a good sign ordinance and the EDC is against sandwich boards. If the Council wants to change it, that's fine, but if you need a sandwich board you can put some pole in the ground make it a permanent sign, with changeable copy, that isn't a hazard. He also commented that he attended the gas line working group meeting. It seems the City is leaning toward financing the low pressure lines in the core area with reinstating of the seasonal sales tax. This would be everyone else in Homer paying for the highest density people to have their gas lines laid. It's like skimming the cream off the top, and we all pay for it. His advice to the group was if they are going to tax groceries to put gas in, the line should go up West Hill, across Skyline, down East Hill and taxes us to put the trunk lines in for the whole town. If they don't, everyone already paying for the core area will have to pay for the low density, which will cost more, and no one will be helping them out. He hopes the Commission can have it as an agenda item at the next meeting so the Commission would look at funding the gas line and whether the sales tax should facilitate gas for the core area or city wide. The gas line is probably the biggest thing going right now in relation to economic development.

Commissioner Sarno commented the entire group probably feels the pressure of being the nexus of the economic pressure in town. It is not an easy Commission. She encouraged them to do more work and thinking about the signs. She hopes the group stays together to deal with these serious issues. She isn't comfortable with what happened today, but feels like the discomfort can get the Commission towards where they want to be.

Student Representative Davis had no comment.

Chair Davis expressed that this was a lose-lose situation for the Commission. He doesn't know what else they could have done, there is no silver bullet or they would have found it. He feels good about the Commission's work tonight. They did have a recommendation to Council, that they take a strong look at the hard work that's already been done by the Planning Commission. He agrees that what they do is important and it isn't easy. He appreciates when people bring the history out.

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ADJOURN

There being no more business to come before the Commission the meeting was adjourned at 8pm p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for March 13, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers.

MELISSA JACOBSEN, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK

Approved: _____