

Session 12-06, a Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Commission was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Wagner on July 10, 2012 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONER FAULKNER, SARNO, SCHMITT, WAGNER

COUNCILMEMBER: WYTHE (Absent)

STUDENT: DAVIS (Absent)

STAFF: COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR KOESTER
DEPUTY CITY CLERK JACOBSEN

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

There were no items for reconsideration.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. June 12, 2012 Regular Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved as amended by consensus of the Commission

VISITORS

A. Anne Marie Holen, "What makes a town a great place to live"

Ann Marie Holen, city resident, told of how she came to live in Homer, some of her travels since retirement, and how she decided on the town she will go to when she leaves Homer. She commented that what makes a town a great place to live is a subjective question and anyone who is asked will have an answer based on what they find important. She thinks the relevancy to the EDC is what they can do to preserve what makes Homer a great place to live, and look into the future as to what might threaten the quality of life, and try to take steps to avoid things that might hinder Homer's reputation or appeal as a place to live. Ms. Holen explained how, in her recent travels, she had a list of things that were important to her and ranked towns that she visited based on her criteria. She expressed her opinion of some of Homer's challenges, in that it doesn't have a downtown, and most areas aren't pedestrian friendly. In regard to looking ahead she commented about the growth of the community. She acknowledged that there are people who don't want to see Homer grow at all. As someone who likes small towns she can understand that thinking. She referenced her time in Corvallis, Oregon and explained at the time it had a population of 40,000, but it is walkable, bike-able,

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has nice parks, a downtown, a college and a river going through it. It is a nice town. A town can grow and still be a nice place to live, so what Homer can do is their best to ensure the growth that takes place contributes to quality of life and at the very least doesn't detract from it.

Comment was made that between 2002 and 2010 Homer lost 10% of its population. Ms. Holen noted that the state department of labor estimates on population was inaccurate for a number of years. The only accurate numbers are the U.S. census.

There was brief discussion about walk-ability being a positive attribute to a town. It was indicated that the city's zoning in CBD raises challenges for creating a walking district due to setbacks and parking requirements. Point was raised that zoning can be changed, and also the town center development plan calls mixed use development. It is an opportunity for Homer to create a more densely developed walkable mixed use area with the 30 acres in the middle of town.

STAFF AND COUNCIL REPORT

None

PUBLIC HEARING

None

PENDING BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

A. Transition Town Discussion

Commissioner Wagner commented about the transition town movement and highlighted some of the ideas on Community and Economic health and how they could help Homer. The movement was initiated in Kensale, Ireland as a response to the dependence on cheap oil and awareness of rising energy costs with the goal of becoming energy, food, and housing independent. A transition town uses the collective genius of the people to come up with answer, rather than waiting for the government. Transition is the framework for creating resilient communities and learning how to remove substance needs from the money economy. It is based in response to addressing peak oil production, climate change, and economic instability. Not adapting could make Homer very vulnerable. From transition we can learn how to adapt to inevitable future shocks of rising energy prices, recessions, and even tsunamis and earthquakes. Regarding a new economy, modern economic growth just looks at the bottom line. Transition economics promote local resilience, promote localization, low carbon, working with natural limits, and bringing assets into the community. The transition solution would be to grow more of your own food, and lower energy and housing costs. Money coming into Homer is leaking out through stores selling out of town goods, fossil fuel costs, internet purchases over local sales, and residents investing outside the community. Plugging the holes include local food production, local energy development, local investing, local currency, forming a local medical insurance group, local lumber, and et cetera. It is all about

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localization for economic independence. Ways to enact this in Homer could include supporting local food production, helping farmers expand to new markets and secure land, building community root cellar for food security, eliminating building permit fees for high tunnels, promoting local education tours of gardens, high tunnels, and orchards, educating about local energy, like a solar tour, energy decent plan, researching options for rising energy prices and partnering ideas with HEA, developing local housing using local materials, local currencies, town square public market, developing a local investment network, developing local entrepreneur forum for new businesses and connections for mentors. Transition has a clear message that moving toward localization and independence will best help our community's economic health.

There was brief discussion about the Transition concepts.

B. Discuss work session agenda on “marketing Homer to attract high-tech businesses

Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester commented that since the last meeting she has had opportunity to meet with other hi-tech entrepreneurs to get their perspective. In response to a worksession discussion some of their were to improve infrastructure, and social media marketing of Homer. She clarified that her limited discussions is not a comprehensive assessment and asked how the Commission would like to proceed.

Chair Sarno suggested taking some time to hear from visitors on the six priorities council gave them to work on. She thinks they will find ways they interrelate.

Commissioner Krisintu said she would do some information gathering about high tech entrepreneurs.

They discussed prioritizing the six recommendations and talking about who they want to hear from about each one for their next meeting.

C. Capital Improvement Plan
a. Recommendations from EDC on top 15
b. Proposed new projects

Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester reviewed the information and process for the Capital Improvement Plan. The Commissioners reviewed the list and discussed some projects for clarification. Comments included:

- Support for Town Center infrastructure based on the need and desire to develop a core area of town and also opposition because it was voted down at a city wide election.
- Barge mooring facility has a direct economic benefit to the community.
- Deep water dock expansion would enable barges to offload freight to the dock, but is still a long way out.
- East boat harbor is a great idea, but Army Corps of Engineers reported that from a cost benefit analysis is not strong enough to pursue it, and it would be important to have ACOE support.
- The fishing lagoon needs to be dredged to help eliminate the algal blooms. There is funding from the legislature, but not enough to complete the project.

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- Harbor improvement revenue bond projects are the three projects that the city will applying for municipal harbor grant funds, and it is important they are on the CIP to show they have been and continue to be a priority of the City.
- Dredge materials would be well used to expand the spit with its own material.
- Marine ways large vessel haul out facility is a economically beneficial project. Kodiak and Seward have them and the marine trade that develops around facilities such as this tend to have a higher wage rate and this project would directly produce jobs.
- Skyline Fire station would be a basic building for storage of fire fighting equipment for people on the hill. It would be beneficial for ISO ratings.
- The purpose behind the Bridge Creek land acquisition is for protection of the watershed.
- Deep brush wild land firefighting truck would be beneficial as the current vehicle is a conversion that is 20+ years old and this vehicle has versatility to get off road.
- The aerial truck is a necessary vehicle. There is significant danger for fire fighters to be on top of burning buildings due to risk of cave in. It would have to potential to save lives. There are a lot of buildings over 3 stories tall from Anchor Point to East Road and accessibility for those buildings is a big issue.
- Kachemak drive path way is a city supported state project. It would be beneficial as there is a lot of bike traffic. Dredge spoils could be a good start for this project.
- Ocean Drive is a heavily used road and while there is a bike lane it is right next to the road.
- The Maritime Academy would be a great deal if it ever came around.

Suggestions for new projects included:

- Recommendation for a farmer's market building as a new project.
- Consideration of a rail system.
- Alternate access across the slough.

There was discussion that a rail system has been studied and the communities are so spread out that the feasibility isn't there for our area. It was noted that the purpose of the deep water dock to bring freight to Homer.

FAULKNER/SCHMITT MOVED TO SUPPORT THE FARMERS MARKET PROJECT AND ASK STAFF TO PUT TIME INTO DEVELOPING THE PROJECT.

There was no further discussion.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT

Suggestion was raised that it could be a called a public market.

The Commission agreed to consider the projects and be prepared to rank their top five at their next meeting.

INFO ITEMS

- A. City Manager's Report June 25, 2012

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

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Anne Marie Holen commented about town center public vote in 2008. She was working in the City Manager's office at that time and she talked to a lot of people before and after the vote. She recalled the language on the ballot as authorizing the City of Homer to borrow up to \$8 million to construct a new city hall and adjacent town square. She heard all kinds of reasons the people voted the way they did. Some said they voted no because they thought the ulterior motive was to make it easier for Fred Meyer to move in. Others said they voted no because they thought the ulterior motive was to make it harder for Fred Meyer to come in. There were some who voted no because they didn't want to see any trees cut down on that 30 acres. There were some who voted no because they thought it was some kind of a greenie project. Overwhelmingly people voted no because it was allowing the city to borrow a lot of money to build a new city hall. This was at a time when the national and global economy was just starting to shudder and people were starting to feel anxious. The idea of borrowing that much money for a city hall when there's a lot of anti-government sentiment out there and city hall being the embodiment of government it was like no way was that going to happen. A few years prior it was thought that the new library was going to be the civic anchor in town center. It turned out that the library was on a faster track and couldn't wait for town center to catch up. To build the library in town center would have been very costly because there is no infrastructure in town center, but on Hazel Street the road and utilities were already there. It took a lot of wind out of the sails for town center development. If the question had been a library in town center, the vote might have been different as the people approved borrowing money for to build a library. A farmer's market wouldn't have cost \$8 million so it might have had a different outcome. City hall killed it. That is what she saw at the time. We were naive to think people would vote yes on a new city hall.

Commissioner Faulkner noted that he believed that there was a half a percent increase in sales tax to pay for the library. For the record he said he voted for the town center in the voting booth.

Bumppo Bremicker commented that he thinks the public market is a good name. He knows Ms. Holen looked at some of the public markets on her travels and may have some good input about design and maybe even cost. The project is probably not that costly. He was on the committee that worked on town center and there needs to be an anchor for the project and a public market building would really be a good start. A design and numbers would be great to present. He said barge haul is being handled by a private company. The tie up pilings are good too, but he would like to see as much as possible be done by private companies out there. If there is money to be made, a private company can do it. The same thing with the marine ways, let a private company do it. He doesn't know the details but knows they are expensive. He agrees that the marine ways is an economic engine. Harbor improvements are very needed, but keep the cost reasonable. In the winter there aren't many boats in the harbor so if they did a better job they would keep more people in the harbor breaking up the ice. Regarding Pioneer Avenue, he suggested maybe city parking down below the street might help Pioneer Avenue develop.

COMMENTS OF CITY STAFF

Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester recapped that the Commission will be addressing the CIP for next meeting, also proposed new projects and recommendations for adding new projects.

COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL MEMBER

None.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION MEMBERS

Commissioner Schmitt commented that it is exciting to some of these projects. The harbor does produce a lot and can produce more than it is with some of the projects he sees here.

Commissioner Wagner commented that these look like a lot of good projects to sort through and get the best ones. He guesses that they are supposed to be doing long term planning for the city.

Commissioner Faulkner said he has been a flip flopper before so he is going to again. He said his top 5 are 1. Port and harbor bond, 2. Town center, 3. Land acquisition for streets and roads, 4. Water storage improvements, 5. Aerial fire truck. He originally did vote for town center and he recalls getting in the booth thinking man that's way too much money to spend on a city hall but all the rest of it is good, that's why he put it as number 2 on his list.

Commissioner Krisintu questioned the direction the EDC has in its recommendations for the CIP, and what are the principles by which she should make her decision? Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester encouraged her to review "Everything You Wanted to Know About the CIP" for some good context on what it is for. She encouraged them all to look at it through the economic development lens, which can mean a lot to different people. She also suggested keeping in mind when people are looking at funding projects whether it be voters, grant agencies, or the legislature, you are looking for the greatest return for your dollar. If you can see a project that touches a lot of lives in the community it will probably have a lot more potential for success, the gas line being a great example. Chair Sarno added that reading through the CEDS document is helpful. Commissioner Faulkner explained this is an exercise by City Code to advise the Council. The Council can take the Commissions advice, or not. It's a Christmas wish list and you have to pair it down to what you really want, so this is what the Commission is trying to help Council do.

Chair Sarno thanked Ms. Holen for talking to the Commission. She commented how much better this CIP process was compared to last year, and thinks as a group they are developing very well. Lastly she commented that recently she landed herself in a controversy with Walt Wrede. She said she made a serious error and incurred his wrath, and she originally thought she might resign tonight but she is going to think about it further and invited the Commission to Council with her. If there is any way that her presence on the Commission is in any way negative she asked them to let her know, and on the other hand if they want her to continue let her know and she will make a final decision next month.

ADJOURN

There being no more business to come before the Commission the meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for August 14, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers.

MELISSA JACOBSEN, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK

Approved: _____