

Session 12-07, a Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Commission was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Sarno on July 10, 2012 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONER FAULKNER, KRISINTU, SARNO, SCHMITT, WAGNER

COUNCILMEMBER: WYTHE

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**

Meagan Murphy, MAPP coordinator, commented that a group of people representing the city, farmers market, chamber of commerce, hospital, and sustainable Homer have been meeting since May to talk about a public market in the town center area. They put forth a pre-proposal to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that addresses the importance and benefits of this project. She read an excerpt from the pre-proposal that outlines how beneficial a permanent public market would be in the town center area. It would provide economic opportunities to a growing sector of local food production, agriculture, and provide needed infrastructure to support year round local business. A year round location provides increased access to healthy food choices. Interviews done in 2009 of 99 community members who identified economic issues such as lack of winter jobs, lack of diversity in industry, limited retail, lack of affordable housing, and reduced revenue services as issues in our community. Additional economic trends that support some positive solutions as a public market are the Kenai Peninsula unemployment rate is 9.9% compared to the statewide rate of 7.9%. More than 18% of Alaskans are food insecure compared to 14.6 % nationwide, also access to affordable and fresh produce is very limited in Alaska, and there is increased vulnerability for food delivery with our single road system. Key solutions to address these issues would be to create an incubator group to grow the economy year round. Supporting efforts that broaden the economic base, proactively developing town center, increasing local food production in actively developing organic farming, and creating a permanent public market structure in the town center would support all of these solution and have a multitude of community health benefits. She noted the grants that have been received in the Homer area for high tunnels and that the existing farmers market is only open 3 months of the year, on land with limited use, set a few miles from the business district of Homer. More space and infrastructure are needed to accommodate additional market vendors; it is an issue that will be exacerbated by the recent increase in high tunnel growers. The City of Homer has proven their commitment to this project through its inclusion in multiple guiding documents including the Comprehensive Plan, Town Center Plan, Climate Action Plan, and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

### **RECONSIDERATION**

There were no items for reconsideration.

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. July 17, 2012 Regular Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved by consensus as amended of the Commission

#### **VISITORS**

A. Al Poindexter, Anchor Point Greenhouse - "Promote Homer as an Agricultural Center"

Al Poindexter, owner of Anchor Point Greenhouse, commented regarding agriculture in the Homer area. He gave a brief overview of his background with agriculture explaining he grew up on an egg farm in Seward that grew into Totem Eggs, and they worked with farms in Palmer and Anchorage supplying eggs statewide. Throughout the years he has worked in other areas of agriculture including cattle farming, oyster farming, and teaching agricultural votech and natural resources at Homer High School. Upon the passing of his mother he took over ownership of the Anchor Point Greenhouse. Mr. Poindexter offered four ideas of promoting Homer as an agricultural center.

- Education- Pressure the school system to get involve, high school in particular, where students are starting to develop directions for careers. A better job can be done of educating, promoting, and facilitating courses and experiences for high school students that may interest them in some field of agriculture or natural resources. Our state runs on natural resources from oil, to forest, to timber, yet our school does a poor job or educating in those areas and as a result we have people from California, New York, and other places coming here to manage our natural resources. Returning use of the City greenhouse to the high school would benefit students. Supporting an FFA program is another key component to education, as it develops leadership for a broad range of careers. Community Recreation and the Community College are also instrumental groups that should be involved in promoting agriculture.
- Promotion- Agricultural activities should have reduced taxation due to such a small profit margin that any major taxation basically kills it, especially in initial startup. Working to provide incentive to promote agriculture and help advertise and bringing Alaska Grown programs in to the community from the Department of Agriculture.
- Facilities- Provide some facility to help promote and support agriculture. Something similar to the pavilion in Palmer that is large enough for a public market in the summer and other venues in the winter. It would provide a roof and protection, parking, a multi use floor, and a hand washing station would be needed as well. Other facilities include a USDA inspected slaughter facility to increase meat production including beef, swine, and other meats, dairy processing, and a facility for canning, pickling, and freezing vegetables. It is the lack of middle infrastructure that holds production at bay.
- Facilitation- Removing obstacles for construction and start up of facilities and agricultural buildings. Assisting with permitting, land development, and sales of products.

Commissioner Wagner commented regarding the potential for the fish processing facilities to assist with freezing and canning food when the tourist season slows down. He also said that in doing some research he has seen where a lot of cities are leasing land for farming.

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Mr. Poindexter continually reiterated the value and importance of a good, high standard FFA program in the schools. He explained that students who have completed all four years of the program and met all the criteria could get a land scholarship if land was available. They could get a 5 to 10 acre piece of land for free to go and farm for a specific amount of time, then it would revert to another graduate of the program. It is another way to help encourage growing farmers. In response to comments about the high tunnels Mr. Poindexter noted that a quality FFA program will have a land lab with a small green house, garden space, stock yards, and small processing plants. That is what we need in our schools. Kids have the time to learn those practical skills so they know how to do it when they get out of school. Adults who are investing in high tunnels don't have that kind of time because they still have to make a living.

Commissioner Krisintu questioned what lessons could be taken away from the statewide agricultural development incentives that were offered during Governor Hammond's tenure. Mr. Poindexter responded that they tried to do the big Midwest agriculture projects and wanted results in three years. Agriculture is different in Alaska and studies throughout the United States show it takes a full generation before a farm becomes productive. It is better in Alaska to grow small farms, 5 to 20 acres then the ones that become successful will absorb the other farms that fail. It works that way for our northern hemisphere neighbors.

The notion of garden camps was mentioned and Mr. Poindexter once again emphasized the significance of formal natural resource agriculture education in school.

Chair Sarno asked about Mr. Poindexter's current production of Fishy Peat currently using dehydrated fish waste and meal from Kodiak. He explained how they process the fish waste on a large scale and a key component is finding a location where the odor, flies, and bears wouldn't interfere with people's livelihood.

## **STAFF AND COUNCIL REPORT**

### **PUBLIC HEARING**

None

### **PENDING BUSINESS**

#### **A. Capital Improvement Plan - Prioritize EDC Recommendations**

Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester reviewed what the Commission had accomplished at their last meeting and tabulated their individual recommendations for the CIP as follows:

1. Town Center Infrastructure
2. Harbor Improvement Revenue Bond Projects
3. Marine Ways Large Vessel Haul Out Facility
4. Land Acquisition for New Roads
5. Firefighting Enhancement-Aerial Truck

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The Commission discussed the public market concept and that it would be beneficial to promote it with the town center infrastructure. From an economic position the two projects should coincide with each other.

FAULKNER/WAGNER MOVED THAT THEY ACCEPT THE TOP FIVE LIST AND AMEND THAT THE TOWN CENTER/PUBLIC MARKET DESIGN BE INCLUDED AS NUMBER 1.

There was no further discussion.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT

Motion carried.

**NEW BUSINESS**

None

**INFO ITEMS**

None

**COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE**

None

**COMMENTS OF CITY STAFF**

Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester encouraged the group to consider future meeting topics and continue to build on what the group has already considered.

**COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL MEMBER**

None

**COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION MEMBERS**

Commissioner Schmitt commented that he appreciated hearing from Mr. Poindexter tonight; it was good to have him here. He was glad that most of his CIP top five made it on the Commission's list.

Commissioner Wagner thanked everyone.

Commissioner Krisintu thanked Katie for inviting Mr. Poindexter.

Commissioner Faulkner said he would miss the next meeting. It was good to hear from Mr. Poindexter tonight and commented that the book *Go North Young Man* by Stoddard is about one of Homer's first agriculture projects ever. It's a great piece of history and can probably be found at the library.

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Chair Sarno commented that she loves working with this group and the progress they are making. She would like to move forward on a lot of things Al recommended and encouraged each of them to go and visit Katie as they all have their own areas of expertise. She noted that the Kachemak Drive bike path information in the CIP is inaccurate and asked if it could be corrected by the Path Committee and the Parks and Recreation Commission and then updated in the CIP.

**ADJOURN**

There being no more business to come before the Commission the meeting was adjourned at 7:14 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for September 11, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers.

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MELISSA JACOBSEN, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_