

Session 12-05, a Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Commission was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Sarno on June 12, 2012 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONER KRISINTU, SARNO, SCHMITT, WAGNER

ABSENT: COMMISSIONER FAULKNER

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. May 8, 2012 Regular Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved by consensus of the Commission

VISITORS

A. Aaron Larson, SpitwSpots - Market Homer for High Tech Business

Aaron Larson and Beau Bridges, officers with SpitwSpots provided some information about the company. Mr. Larson and Mr. Burgess explained that SpitwSpots and other wireless internet service providers, or wisps, have been able to build an infrastructure and network through the airwaves and bring service to hundreds and almost thousands of people now, which would not have service otherwise. It is important to consider alternatives when thinking about the kinds of businesses and economic stimulation with hard line services, it is also important to note that there are interesting things being done to benefit more remote and low density communities like theirs. Regarding the market in Homer for high tech businesses, the wisps make up a vibrant and fairly competitive environment on the cutting edge and trying to provide intense speeds. This technology can allow people who want the lifestyle of living in a cabin in the woods and the ability to telecommute to their high powered job. That opportunity exists because wisps can get to areas where hard line infrastructure would be too costly to develop.

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Question was raised regarding whether the city should invest in extending the hard line that could be available through a line accessible near Bishop's Beach, or if the wisps are doing an adequate job. Mr. Larson & Mr. Burgess commented the cable exists and it's used by the other large companies, but doesn't have bearing in the feasibility of fiber to home. To benefit specific business and consideration would have to be given to their specific business needs. Currently multi hundred megabit links are out of the reach of wisps, the capability to start deploying 700 megabits and up point to point links is about 6 to 8 months out. If there is a business that requires large amounts of data, they're in all likelihood a business that can afford to extend the hard line for their needs. There are very few businesses that wouldn't be satisfied with a wisp that has the current technology available. When thinking about whether the city should play an active role in funding it, the information utility line doesn't equate to some thing like water lines as it is useful to a large number of citizens without terminating at their home, and there are local businesses making money providing that last mile service. Mr. Larson noted that their prices are very comparable to rural communities around the country. If people want to live in Homer, they will be able to find the internet resources they need to work from home.

STAFF AND COUNCIL REPORT

- A. Review of Resolution 12-041
- B. Staff Report: Resolution 12-041: Market for Homer for High Tech Business; Suggest Topics for Next Meeting

Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester reviewed her staff report. The Commission discussed the information in the resolution and options for scheduling worksessions to have informal discussions on the topics and invite community members who can provide feedback as industry representatives. It would be an opportunity to talk about how to market, what our current capacity is and what the future could be for a particular niche. They addressed the importance of having some time for doing research on worksession topics in an effort to be prepared to ask questions and have informed discussion with industry representatives.

The Commission agreed to have a worksession at 5 p.m. before their next meeting on July 10 and watch the TedEx video about transition towns and have discussion. They also talked about Mrs. Koester's recommendations for July agenda topics.

PUBLIC HEARING

None

PENDING BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Appoint member to Lease Committee

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The Commission had brief discussion regarding the appointment to the Lease Committee. Commissioner Schmitt volunteered to participate and there was no objection from the Commission.

INFO ITEMS

- A. City Manager's Report 6/11/12
- B. Families First correspondence
- C. 2008 Renewable Energy Fund grant application for tidal feasibility study
- D. Certificate of Appointment for Nantia Krisintu

Chair Sarno commented regarding the City Manger's report information on the dredge spoils. She noted that some of the dredge material could be used for the Kachemak Drive bike path.

In response to questions, Mrs. Koester commented about the status of the Renewable Energy grant fund information.

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

Bumppo Bremicker, city resident, commented that internet businesses can benefit many different people. Homer is full of artists who probably already benefit from having their art sold on line, and recently he finds that he runs into many more film makers in the area and he is curious how they benefit from the internet. He thinks there are many groups in the area who could share their information on internet business and to organize a forum where they could share their experience would be beneficial to the community. There is a ton of stuff going on here.

Beauregard Burgess, city resident, commented as a councilmember regarding the CIP list. He doesn't represent the Council tonight, but personally he thinks the more the Commission brings to the process sooner, the time it will give the Council to consider it. It would be helpful to brainstorm fundability for the CIP priorities that are recommended. He also encouraged them to look at broad economic benefit and things that dovetail like a Pike's Place Market environment to replace a Farmer's Market as it is beneficial for agriculture and also for other businesses. Regarding the internet utility issue, Mr. Burgess noted it is important when making decisions like these, not to confuse the medium and the message. It is great there is a broad economic spectrum of things we can do by having it here, but the market has thrived because he City has stayed out of it. He thinks avoiding micromanaging while focusing on what is already here is appropriate. He urged them to use local recourses, namely the Chamber of Commerce for marketing Homer. With regard to renewable energy, he thinks if the Commission feels strongly about it, it would be worth revisiting the City Code regarding renewable energy installation. As a renewable energy installer in one of his businesses they do wind turbine and solar installations and it would be worth making that more accessible. Right now it is difficult for city residents to put up a wind tower for a variety of reasons.

There was brief discussion regarding the Alternative Energy Tour, the capability of wind towers, and if they are viable in the city based on the amount of wind. Mr. Burgess noted that if they consider looking at that portion of code it is important to understand the new technology that is available for smaller lots and denser neighborhoods.

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The Commission talked about the CEDS document, when it was adopted, and the process for updating it.

Aaron Larson commented about plugging holes in the economy and attracting people to come here. He said when he was at the Farmer's Market the other day there weren't any vegetables yet, but there were other things there that people had to sell. It made him realize a public market would be a great thing, and in relation to fundability, the City could easily encourage a public market by not charging people to have one. It is something not every town has and is very Homer-esque. The economy isn't really getting any better so the more trade we can do internally, the better, and the more that people can find something to do.

It was noted that the public market idea is a good one. The group talked about the current farmer's market and some things to consider for a public market.

COMMENTS OF CITY STAFF

Deputy City Clerk Jacobsen noted that wind energy systems are outlined in title 21, the City's zoning code. This Commission is certainly able to discuss and make recommendations, but she encouraged them to keep in mind that code amendments to title 21 are considered by the Planning Commission as well as the City Council.

COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL MEMBER

None.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION MEMBERS

Commission Schmitt said he appreciated the different aspects of discussion about the agenda items tonight.

Commissioner Wagner commented that he learns a lot at these meetings and it gives him other ideas. He thanked everyone.

Commissioner Krisintu said she is excited to be here and hopes we can work together to get some things done. She thanked the visitors for their comments tonight.

Chair Sarno commented that the group is making good progress on figuring out how to bite into this. She thanked staff for their input.

ADJOURN

There being no more business to come before the Commission the meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for July 10, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers.

MELISSA JACOBSEN, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK

Approved: _____