

Session 13-02 a Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Commission was called to order by Chair Sarno at 6:00 p.m. on February 12, 2013 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONER ROSS, SARNO, SCHMITT, WAGNER

ABSENT: FAULKNER (excused), KRISINTU

COUNCILMEMBER: ZAK (absent)

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

AGENDA APPROVAL

Chair Sarno said she would like to discuss some economic development class information that she received under new business. The agenda was approved as amended by consensus of the Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

None

RECONSIDERATION

There was no reconsideration scheduled.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. November 13, 2012 Regular Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved as presented by consensus of the Commission.

VISITORS

A. Kyra Wagner, Local Food

Kyra Wagner updated the Commission on some work being done on local food production opportunities in conjunction with a 3 year VISTA project. She quoted from a letter by Chamber Director Monte Davis who said that there are people in Homer who will put down any kind of resource development and almost every kind of economic development that is isn't farming. She quoted the CEDS, that farmer's market spokespeople have noted that local agriculture could benefit significantly through efforts to identify markets and connect producers with those markets. She said the Homer Farmer's Market and Sustainable Homer were successful in recruiting a Volunteer in Service to America, a VISTA, to assist in meeting this goal. Mrs. Wagner explained that the VISTA is coordinating a three year project launched in November of 2010, and she is the supervisor. She reviewed the progress explaining that the first year's plan was to identify markets and connect producers to those markets. The first year Vista ran a pilot for the program for the State that allows Quest users to spend their food stamps at the farmer's market on local food. He also surveyed local food infrastructure and found that Coal Point is a DEC approved

kitchen and processing facility capable of taking on large amounts of vegetables here in town. He surveyed restaurants asking them about purchasing locally grown food, and an overarching theme developed that restaurants need a regular supply of larger quantities. Schools are a great market, but it is difficult getting into their USDA system. The hospital, senior center, and mental health center might be easier to work with. The second year VISTA started looking at ways to improve production. She spent a lot of time working with People's Garden grants and working with students and youth to learn how to grow food. She hosted community meetings with high tunnel owners. There are over 250 new high tunnels in the Southern Kenai Peninsula and more coming on line this month. It was discovered that most were happy growing food for themselves. The VISTA put together local food directory, but the growers usually sell out very quickly. In an ongoing survey, restaurant owners are being asked what kind of vegetables they use and in what quantities, in an effort to let growers know of the economic potential. This year's VISTA is excited about the project, and the goal is to get a better grasp on what is holding back production. Questions arise to the possibility of making a living farming in Alaska, policy changes to help encourage farm production, is there missing infrastructure, communication, or land prices. Any kind of work to resolve the problems will likely need more than the year of the VISTA project, so they are trying to integrate this into the community so locals can continue to move the idea forward. This year she will be working on a community food security assessment that the USDA provides and develop an oversight committee. It overlaps with MAPP goals of community health improvement and will be integrated into their software, resulting in more connection with community organizations and community awareness. Mrs. Wagner said her goal with this information is for the EDC to see this as a resource for their work in the economic development in the agricultural field. House Bill 40 that would allow municipalities to change tax codes on structures used for agricultural production is currently in the legislature. If the bill passes, it will enable the City to have ability to lighten the load on our producers, this would include high tunnels, storage facilities, and so forth.. The City Planner is currently considering how to zone high tunnels in the City. She encourages the EDC consider the agriculture section in the CEDS and brainstorm ways to advise the City about supporting agricultural production.

There was brief discussion about information Al Poindexter shared at a previous meeting, and also about processing opportunities at Coal Point.

STAFF AND COUNCIL REPORT/COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOROUGH REPORTS

PUBLIC HEARING

PENDING BUSINESS

NEW BUSINESS

A. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Chair Sarno was nominated for another term as Chair. Chair Sarno accepted the nomination, noting that other Commissioners should take a turn at attending City Council meetings. There were no other nominations for Chair.

Commissioner Wagner was nominated for Vice Chair. He accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations for Vice Chair.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 12, 2013

- B. Recommendation to City Council Adoption of a Resolution of the City Council of Homer, Alaska approving seasonal day use parking at the Homer Education and Recreation Center parking lot and authorizing the City Manager to work with the State for signage as needed.

WAGNER/ROSS MOVED TO RECOMMEND THE RESOLUTION TO THE CITY COUNCIL FOR ADOPTION.

Commissioner Ross commented that Chamber Director Monte Davis is on board working to help move this forward. Mr. Davis is also drafting a letter to Council that they will take the lead after the City gets it off the ground, and try to get local businesses to carry this through.

Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester added that she has taken the idea to the City Manager and will work with him on the budget.

Commissioner Ross agreed to make a brief presentation to the Council.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

- C. Follow up on January 10, 2013 EDC Worksession on Marketing Homer to High Tech Entrepreneurs

Commissioner Wagner explained that during the worksession the group recognized that Homer doesn't really have the band width for bigger industries and it would be costly for them to come here. The consensus was that we have a lot of entrepreneurs here who don't need a huge amount of band width. They considered ways for entrepreneurs to find out about Homer. One option is the Chamber. Mr. Davis was there and they discussed doing a survey to develop some statistic that could be included on the chamber's website.

Chair Sarno commented regarding Bisbee, Arizona's movement to advertise everywhere for artists after their copper mine industry shut down. It has developed into a thriving art colony that has economic vitality. She noted that entrepreneurs can be a young person starting at ground level up to a high volume type business, so it includes everyone.

The group discussed ideas to incorporate into a survey for local entrepreneurs, including number of employees, net or gross income, location, years in business, type of business, who and where are they marketing toward, what they think might be needed to help promote or develop, and if they would offer testimonial.

Mrs. Koester said she would work on a draft to bring back to the Commission.

- D. Community Development Class Information

Chair Sarno said that she received some books and information from Mary Parks about a course she completed in Economic Development. She offered that the information is available to share to deepen what they might be able to do for the community. Mrs. Koester commented that the information could be made available for Commissioners or Councilmembers to check out.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

A. Entrepreneur Meetings – Commissioner Wagner

Commissioner Wagner commented about an incubator group he and Michael Haines are working with. It meets monthly and he envisions three groups of people who would attend, including the lone eagles who are established, the newer startups who are looking for some coaching, and the wannabe's who want to get started. He commented about an 18 year old, who he calls the rock star, who has an internet business and is very excited about it, as well as others who talked about their businesses. He sees it as a really good networking environment.

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

Larry Slone, city resident, commented about marketing Homer to high tech businesses. He attended their worksession and said it is evident that we can't compete directly with Anchorage for a bigger business given all Anchorage has to offer. On the other hand Homer has everything Anchorage has to offer, just in a more limited quantity. He encouraged the group to define the benefits of being in a small town and suggested the theme "Homer is Alaska's small town alternative." It is up to the group to define what is significant about Homer that sets it off from others.

Bumpo Bremmicker, city resident, commented that on a recent tour of the country by train he stopped at a lot of places. In doing that you think about whether there is some where you would rather be than Homer. They visited some really nice places and were often asked what Homer is like. He told people the area encompasses about 10,000 people, enough people to make it interesting and small enough that you know a good percentage of the people. We have people from all over the world with different ideas, and it is the people who make this place. He likes Larry's idea to promote what we have. Everywhere you go there are people having interesting conversations, a lot of young people coming in and are excited about what is going on. One thing he noticed in his travels is that the towns that seem to be doing well are those with a healthy and vibrant downtown core.

COMMENTS OF CITY STAFF

Community and Economic Development Coordinator Koester commented that the industry forum was a successful event and it showcased Homer to a lot of people. She looks forward to working with the group on their next project.

COMMENTS OF THE COUNCILMEMBER

COMMENTS OF THE CHAIR

Chair Sarno commented that she is happy to have this group together and encouraged them to keep looking for slogans.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION

Commissioner Ross said there were some good ideas tonight. He agrees with the notion of keeping downtown attractive. Soldotna is doing a revitalization project and that might be something worth looking in to and discussing.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 12, 2013

Commissioner Wagner commented that this is what he does in his private life so it's fun, and when it's fun, it's good.

Commissioner Schmitt commented that being someone who wasn't raised here he would say that Homer definitely is a beautiful place and the people here make it well worth staying. He has been here for almost 10 years and hasn't regretted a bit of it.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Commission the meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 12, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

MELISSA JACOBSEN, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK

Approved: _____