

Session 18-03 a Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Commission was called to order by Chair Karin Marks at 6:05 p.m. on April 10, 2018 at the Cowles Council Chambers, City Hall located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONERS GUSTAFSON, MARKS, BROWN, AREVALO  
COUNCILMEMBER SMITH  
STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE GROVES

ABSENT: COMMISSIONERS RICHARDSON, SANSOM & EVANS (EXCUSED)

STAFF: SPECIAL PROJECTS AND COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR CARROLL  
DEPUTY CITY PLANNER ENGBRETSSEN  
DEPUTY CITY CLERK KRAUSE

#### AGENDA APPROVAL

MARKS/GUSTAFSON MOVED TO AMEND THE AGENDA TO ADD CLARIFYING CITY REGULATORY BARRIERS UNDER PENDING BUSINESS ITEM A.

Commissioner Marks and Ms. Carroll explained that this was requested to be on the agenda at the March meeting and was inadvertently omitted. It is part of the Action Items that the commission was addressing from the results of the BR&E Survey.

VOTE. NON-OBJECTION. UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

Chair Marks requested a motion to approve the agenda as amended.

GUSTAFSON/BROWN - SO MOVED.

There was no discussion.

VOTE. NON OBJECTION. UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

#### PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Dr. Marley, city resident, commented on the value to the community of a community/conference center and placement of such a facility at the entrance to Homer. He provided comparison of Sitka and their facility that provides a venue for a wide variety of events within the community and it would be beneficial for Homer to have something similar.

Chair Marks recommended Dr. Marley keep abreast of the discussion that will be upcoming on the HERC facility and advised him of the potential Task Force that will be created by Council. She was sure that the Task Force would find his suggestions informative.

There was a brief discussion on a community/conference center being on the city Capital Improvement Plan for a number of years.

Chair Marks thanked Dr. Marley for coming and speaking to the commission.

Council member Smith departed the meeting at 6:20 p.m.

#### RECONSIDERATION

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Special Meeting Minutes for March 22, 2018

Chair Marks wanted to amend the minutes to define that the Corps of Engineers did a feasibility study **on the Port and Harbor and correct the spelling of the word “core” to “Corps”.**

The Commission agreed by consensus to the amendment to the minutes.

Chair Marks requested a motion to approve the minutes as amended.

GUSTAFSON/BROWN – SO MOVED.

There was no discussion.

VOTE. NON OBJECTION. UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

#### VISITORS

#### REPORTS

- A. Marine Trades Association Report
- B. Chamber Director Report

Commissioner Gustafson attended the Chamber of Commerce meeting and reported that results from the Winter King Derby were discussed. He reported the following:

- 33% of the participants have never been in the tournament
- a total of 1200 participated
- 75% of the participants were from other areas and 25% of those participants registered were from Homer.
- Most of the participants spent two –three nights in town.
- The payout total in cash and prizes was over \$170,000.

- He noted that it was “slow” fishing as only 100 or so fish that were caught compared to previous years where as many as 500 were caught.

C. Pioneer Avenue Task Force Report

Chair Marks reported on behalf of the Pioneer Avenue Task Force and provided a letter from the Task Force as a comment and recommendation of support for the creation of a master plan for a more vibrant, connected central commercial district and encouraged the Commission to implement Wayfinding Signage, benches, trash receptacles, continued development of new gardens, murals and possible gathering points.

Chair Marks further stated that the Task Force is in agreement that developing a plan will provide the framework necessary to **address “connectedness” of Homer as well as a Streetscape, which are defined** as public places where people engage in various activities including shopping, dining, working, strolling and living. Streetscape includes natural as well as built aspects often of small components that create a visual impact. Having the City invest in such an armature would allow reaching out for possible grants and involvement to accomplish an integrated Homer that brings the city together but still provides for the individuality of spaces and sections of the city that makes Homer so unique.

The Pioneer Avenue Task Force supports the Economic Development Advisory Commission submitting a recommendation to the City Council for funding the development of a streetscape plan.

D. Staff Report

Jenny Carroll, Special Projects and Communication Coordinator noted that there was no additional items to report for this meeting.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

PENDING BUSINESS

- A. Moving Forward with BR&E Action Items
  - Public-Private partnership to create a master plan for a more vibrant, connected central commercial district.
  - i. Wayfinding - Streetscape Project Proposal

Chair Marks reviewed the proposed idea of developing a wayfinding and streetscape plan for Homer and the historical process to get to this point. She used as an example with the improvements over the last several years on the Homer Spit and in Old Town with installation of the boardwalk, banners, etc.

Commissioner Gustafson commented on the differences of Homer developing compared to other communities in Alaska.

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen stated that Homer is auto-centric, while Seward was developed over 100 years ago so was established in a more compact design. She mentioned Sitka, Palmer, and Soldotna using cohesive signage for vehicles and pedestrians so everyone knows where they are and **can get from point A to point B and that is some of Homer’s problem being so spread out as it is. Stating** that in urban planning you normally do not see a main route over a mile. In most communities they

have signage that states “You are Here,” and identifies the important points, Ms. Engebretsen providing the example of someone at Ulmer’s wanting to go to the Museum. That is a bit of a hike especially if you have someone in your party that may have a disability of some kind.

Student Commissioner Groves provided his experiences when moving to Homer explaining how inconvenient it is getting around town when you are a new resident or just visiting. Signage would have been nice to show how to get around town. The map that is distributed in the spring **in the paper doesn’t** provide the distances between things. It is very misleading.

Chair Marks stated that this is just an example and requested input from the commission and commented on the need of replacement of the current banners the city has and planting the flowers and actually grew the annuals that were planted each year until recently. It was her understanding that would probably be changing and hence including a plant list in the plan.

Chair Marks noted the items that the Pioneer Avenue Task Force recommended be included in the plan.

Ms. Engebretsen clarified what the Wayfinding and Streetscape plan would cover such as little rest stops, colors to use and where a Trolley Stop may be; she also noted that Homer has never had Welcome to Homer signage; she commented on the signage that Soldotna had such as neighborhood designation signage or street signage; and explained pedestrian signage versus vehicle signage.

Chair Marks commented that she is more interested in signage focused on pedestrian connection.

Commissioner Gustafson requested clarification on parking/signage for recreational vehicles.

Ms. Carroll responded regarding the regulatory signage and parking locations for the recreational vehicles during the season. It was noted that this signage is still valid and standing.

Commissioner Brown brought focus on the statement included in the staff memorandum providing background information on the Homer Wayfinding and Streetscape Project. She objected to the sentence in the memorandum that the most mentioned idea was to improve the business climate and quality of life by having a pedestrian accessible town with trail connected business districts.

A lengthy discussion ensued covering a variety of points including but not solely focused on the following:

- The cost to develop a plan \$25,000 - \$40,000
- Negative complaints
- Non-profit versus for-profit businesses
- What are they going to get with this plan
- The information was pulled from the survey results on quality of life and improve business
- Cost of plans range for example
  - o Soldotna 2 yrs ago \$45,000 – Downtown Improvement Plan
  - o Palmer \$35,000
  - o Juneau \$75,000
- Project includes more than banners, signage, benches, etc.
- Continue to work on items piece by piece
- Streetscaping and Wayfinding is a basic structure that most tourism based communities have

- Funding possibilities to develop and enact the plan recommendations
- Requires the expertise that is not available locally
- Cost is based on a few variables such as what will the plan address, number of public meetings, consultant trips to Homer
- There is no State involvement or requirements
- It is the commission's decision on if a plan would assist in economic development for the city, determine what the commission wants to include in the project
- Use the local creativity for the design – contests will require advertising, judging, etc.
- The memorandum is directed to the Commission from Staff
- The City of Homer has no standards regarding benches, trash cans, banners – there are requirements such as legibility, ADA compliance, the expertise is not available locally or in house, i.e. employees.
- Availability of grants or outside funding

Chair Marks and Commissioner Arevalo will review and draft specifics of the plan for the commission to review at the May meeting with Deputy City Planner Engebretsen. Commissioner Brown requested information regarding funding options such as grants.

Chair Marks requested commissioners to review the draft plan included in the packet and submit recommendations or questions by or for the next meeting in May. She expected the same questions from City Council.

Ms. Carroll requested the commissioners to come back with three specific aspects of a streetscape wayfinding plan that they feel brings about economic development. She further noted that the intent of the plan is not to get grants but to assist in that endeavor. The plan is for economic development via wayfinding, beautifying, and creating a more vibrant economic district for Homer and hopefully connecting it to the other economic districts in Homer. That is the purpose of the plan. She requested the commissioners to each bring something back for staff to work on.

Commissioner Gustafson commented on having the Town Center Plan and what is the scope of this plan and how do they limit a plan like this as he believed that the city needed to tie the different districts together while still dealing with the issues with the actual streets. He further noted that he would be curious how they would do this since Homer does not have that and in fact some areas are requiring more help than others. Having the plan from Soldotna really helps but having some mockups or examples of what Homer may have would be great.

Commissioner Brown believed it was the “scope” and she is not clear on that issue on what do they need. She noted that there is a signage welcoming people to Homer referring to the Baycrest sign and the sign at Pioneer Avenue.

Chair Marks reiterated what Ms. Carroll requested and what she has added to the discussion previously. She stated that is what the commissioners individually want or would like to see in the plan.

Commissioner Gustafson agreed with Chair Marks.

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen reiterated the connectedness desired for pedestrian traffic and that they do not have a way to let someone know that if they are here on one trail how would they get to another part of town. If the Commission wants to include vehicles then that is another aspect and a whole lot more money.

Commissioner Gustafson wanted to have the information on for example does the state remove their signage or do they add additional signs.

Discussion ensued on the attempt to bring more traffic to Pioneer Avenue and it has not worked. A question to ask is, "What type or signage does the City of Homer require?" Ms. Engebretsen provided the example using cruise ship visitors and the Trolley, while a private business, in other cities in the Lower 48 they have a map and schedule and a "You are here."

Further points made would be to look at vehicle signage since many visitors to Homer include visitors from other parts of Alaska. While gearing towards pedestrians, there should be some signage for vehicles.

There was no further discussion.

#### B. Clarifying the Regulatory Barriers to Business

Chair Marks inquired if anyone listened to the Council meeting and noted that Councilmembers Smith and Erickson were working on revamping the Lease Policy. At the last meeting Commissioner Brown had an interest to look into this issue.

Commissioner Brown reported that she visited informally business owners in town and on the Spit the anti-business feeling and a lot of the comments mirrored what was shown in the survey but none of those business owners filled out the survey.

Commissioner Brown spoke to between 10-12 businesses. She advocated for the commission to visit businesses and that they would get an earful.

Further discussion included the following points:

- Approaching business owners to get input as a commissioner
- Varied perspectives leads to a disconnect and discontent
- Ombudsman
- Cannot fix it all or pick up all the pieces especially if there is no participation or providing vague answers
- Perception on some requirements and anger or discontent is leveled at the easy target this being the city
- Not unique to Homer
- Non-profit versus for profit
  - o Competition
  - o Funding or revenue streams
  - o Provide services that private industry does not provide
  - o Bring lots of economic activity
- Government role
- Developing outreach to create understanding throughout the community

Developing actions items to address these concerns is a daunting task but it is hoped to see some patterns that will bring about some tangible processes that could be developed to remedy some of these issues or ideologies. It is great to reach out but they did receive some great input from the BR & E and need to continue with that.

#### NEW BUSINESS

#### INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

- A. **City Manager's Report March 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting**
- B. Commissioner Attendance at City Council Meetings

Chair Marks noted that she attended the April 9<sup>th</sup> meeting and did not believe there was anything to report to Council for the April 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting from this meeting and that they will be meeting before the May 14<sup>th</sup> Council meeting and someone could volunteer at that time.

#### COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

#### COMMENTS OF CITY STAFF

Ms. Carroll had no further comments.

Deputy City Clerk Krause commented that it was an interesting meeting and very informative as she is a business owner, a public employee for 11 years and on the board of a non-profit so it was very interesting to hear the information provided on non-profit versus for profit businesses.

#### COMMENTS OF THE COUNCILMEMBER

#### COMMENTS OF THE CHAIR

Chair Marks had not further comments.

#### COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION

Student Representative Groves confirmed that his last meeting will be May 8, 2018 but had no further comments.

Commissioner Gustafson and Brown had no additional comments.

Commissioner Arevalo commented this meeting has given her a lot to think on, she has written down her homework and hopefully she can bring a lot more bright ideas to the next meeting.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Commission the meeting adjourned at 8:22 p.m. The NEXT REGULAR MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR TUESDAY, MAY 8, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

---

RENEE KRAUSE, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK

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