

Session 21-01 a Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Commission was called to order by Chair Karin Marks at 6:00 p.m. on January 12, 2021 at the Cowles Council Chambers, City Hall located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska via Zoom webinar, and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONERS MARKS, BROWN, RICHARDSON, AREVALO, JOHNSON, CHEROK

ABSENT: COMMISSIONER SPEAKMAN

STAFF: DEPUTY CITY PLANNER ENGBRETSSEN
DEPUTY CITY CLERK TUSSEY
PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR KEISER

AGENDA APPROVAL

Chair Marks called for a motion to approve the agenda.

AREVALO/BROWN MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS UPON MATTERS ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

RECONSIDERATION

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. December 8, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes

Chair Marks called for a motion to approve the last meeting minutes.

JOHNSON/BROWN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MEETING MINUTES.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

VISITORS/PRESENTATIONS

A. Jan Kaiser, Public Works Director – Main Street Sidewalk Project

Chair Marks introduced Jan Keiser, Public Works Director.

Ms. Keiser provided an update on the Main Street Sidewalk Project. The project was approved for design last year by City Council and are gathering feedback on the designs to make it as “shovel-ready” as possible with the intent that as soon as they get a funding opportunity that they can act on it, hopefully this year. She referred to the map and design materials in the packet to describe what staff has proposed to the Planning Commission, City Council, and now to the EDC. She asked the commission to share their thoughts on the designs at this meeting.

At the request of Commissioner Richardson, it was clarified which part of Main Street is being proposed for improvements, which is the west side of the upper-hill portion. No land acquisition was required for construction; it is all being done within the easement.

In response to Chair Mark’s questions, Ms. Keiser clarified that asphalt will be used to top the sidewalk and what additional details still need to be worked out for the Pioneer Avenue intersection. She also confirmed the peony bed adjacent to the Homer Theatre will be protected during construction.

Commissioner Cherok inquired on what the thickness of asphalt will be. Ms. Keiser responded that the Sprucewood Trail was installed 10+ years ago and is still holding up with Public Work’s regular maintenance. It was also clarified that there will be a curb and gutter, which will mitigate vehicles driving and parking on the sidewalk/Right-of-Way.

STAFF & COUNCIL REPORT/COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. EDC Staff Report

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen spoke to her written report, noting the following topics:

- Attendance at Chamber of Commerce board meetings
- Plan to include notes in staff memos as to how the respective topic ties into their EDC goals
- Working on COVID vaccine POD (point of dispensing) planning for a South Peninsula Hospital event happening this week

Chair Marks thanked Ms. Engebretsen for her work and tying the BR&E (Business Retention and Economic Study) into their meetings.

B. Chamber Director Report

Chamber Director Brad Anderson commented that he is happy to see the vaccine progress in our community. He reported on Chamber updates, which include:

- Working with Simple View to do a huge revamp of their website and other advertising grids.
- Bringing back the fishing tournaments; was hard to cancel those last year due to COVID but are planning to have tournaments at later dates to give more time for the vaccine to get through the community and make things as safe as possible for more participation.

- Winter King Salmon Tournament – April 17th
- Halibut Tournament – June 4th and 5th
- New event: Peony Celebration – July 9 thru 24th
- Looking to hold some type of food truck event either in June or September
- Working on digital signage at the Homer Airport
- Legislative committee is going to be taking a much more aggressive approach with economic development projects and looking to find ways to promote

C. Homer Marine Trades Association Report

Chair Marks requested that commissioners and staff reach out to HMTA representatives to ensure they're aware they have a seat at the EDC.

D. Pioneer Avenue Task Force Report

Chair Marks noted there is nothing to report until February 2021.

E. Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District Report

Chair Marks commented that KPEDD updates would be discussed under Pending Business, Item B.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

PENDING BUSINESS

A. COVID Business Survey

Chair Marks introduced the item by reading the title. She provided a briefing of last meeting's discussion on their plan to reach out to various businesses regarding the impact of COVID-19, and then deferred to the commissioners to give their individual reports.

Commissioner Richardson spoke to four to five businesses including a barber, an attorney, a bank, and a restaurant. All had been affected but none had to close or was severely suffering due to COVID. Feedback included getting their City communications from various resources; positive support for continued clear communication; problems with having employees out due to kids being home from school; not having enough substitute teachers to cover gaps due to in-person/remote learning or staffing issues; getting more mask use in the community and business owners wishing for more action from Council as they feel they can't enforce mask policies on their own.

Commissioner Cherok spoke to four businesses including an excavation company, a charter, a restaurant, and sales/service business. One was closed for a few months but more as a precaution, while for another it was operational due to it being slow; others said business was still really good and in fact one of their busiest years. Feedback received included two used PPP loans; staffing remained relatively the same with the exception of the excavation business that increased employees; one

business interested in funding assistance while the others preferred the City to not implement any restrictions and to just allow them to operate as usual.

Commissioner Arevalo spoke to two non-profits and two restaurants. Feedback from the non-profits included significant funding loss due to not being able to hold their usual fundraising events or programs, which is about 50% of their budgets; communication channels were impacted as many businesses that show their flyers were closed or not open to public traffic; staffing remained about the same but volunteer efforts were down; did receive some PPP funds; were already in-tuned to City channels for information but recommend keeping many different channels; appreciated the grant funding but would also like to see covered shelters. Feedback received from one restaurant was they were hard-hit financially and felt there was nothing the City or EDC could do. The other restaurant, while also impacted greatly, was already better known for take-out services and even after they initially had to lessen their hours and staffing they were still able to make up their losses after a 6-month period; they appreciated the City grants and community efforts to keep them afloat; suggested that the EDC could forward their feedback to Council or provide feedback from Council to the businesses.

Commissioner Johnson spoke to one non-profit as his other contact did not get back to him. Most of what he's heard from other commissioners is similar to what he heard; COVID has had an impact on their business and personal lives; staffing was significantly cut back; City could help with ensuring strong federal resources remain available.

Commissioner Brown spoke to three long-standing charter businesses. Feedback received included that travel bans and restrictions had a huge negative impact; overall out-of-state business was completely wiped out but in-state travel was up; PPP and grant money was very helpful and kept payments to captains and crewmembers about what they would be during a normal year; one company was able to roll over customers to 2021; one business had been purchased January 2020 so was severely hurt by COVID; PPP requirements made them keep employee levels the same; online and radio channels were great and there was a large amount of positive feedback for local and regional assistance; many requested action to do everything possible to encourage visitors and not restrict businesses.

Chair Marks spoke with five businesses: a brick and mortar retail, a virtual retail, a service provider, a recreational business on the Spit, and a restaurant. Feedback collected included that many received financial assistance (both State and local), with one doing so well financially that they didn't qualify for funding; one business noted that they noticed an uptick in sales as a reflection of customers choosing to spend their money where they normally would have spent elsewhere; issues of having to shorten employee hours and take on more as the owner; used many different communication channels to get information, although there was two that hadn't even thought to use the City's website; differences with grant funding regulations and issues with new businesses not qualifying for assistance; no reports of any businesses that were completely down-and-out or had to close.

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen commented that it was helpful to hear all the verbal reports and written feedback the commissioners sent to her. She recommends the EDC's report to Council should reflect businesses' overall positive response to the City's support. Many of the issues they highlighted were also a struggle for City staff as they had to deal with many problems on a case-by-case basis. She

reiterated the two primary messages identified were 1) problems if you were a new business owner, and 2) local and State assistance programs worked so by-and-large many businesses did ok and didn't fail. She was not sure what additional assistance will be forthcoming.

There was discussion on next steps the commission would like to take. There was unanimous agreement that a formal survey was not necessary, and to have Ms. Engebretsen compile all of their collected information for the February meeting for them to make final recommendations to City Council.

Mr. Richardson voiced his concern that the substitute teacher shortage is a time-sensitive issue and if there was a way the City could help. There was discussion on what the EDC could do, such as including the issue in their Council report or reaching out to Community Coordinator Mike Illg.

B. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update

Chair Marks introduced the item by reading the title. She commented on how pleasing it was to see the large number of local businesses, commissioners, and City staff that participated in the KPEDD's (Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District) annual public business forum held via Zoom with the University of Alaska.

Ms. Marks further explained the two areas that were discussed at the forum. Goals listed were 1) technology and telecommunication, 2) workforce and human capital, 3) infrastructure and land use, 4) business climate and entrepreneurship, and 5) regional partnerships. The other area of discussion was regarding SWOTS: "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats" for the borough. The SWOT is to be posted to KPEDD's website for review, and is to help everyone see themselves in the CEDS, but might not all agree on them. What the EDC may end up doing is taking the SWOT and see what is applicable to our community and what isn't. Tim Dillon will be presenting at the February meeting on this matter.

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen shared her positive experience with the forum and looks forward to learning more about KPEDD's outreach plans and how EDC fits into that. She highlighted how, compared to other regions, the Kenai Peninsula Borough has the strength of having multiple industries; no one or two industries are dominant. She noted that not much was discussed about geographic discrepancies, such as higher costs of living in Homer compared to worker wages, but they can look to the SWOT for better info.

Commissioner Arevalo commented on how the forum did not fully address Homer's housing situation in reference to increasing numbers of retirees. She opined that those who live here know that's a big deal, and should be incorporated into their Homer info.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Wayfinding & Streetscape Plan Request for Proposals
 - i. DRAFT Development of Homer Wayfinding-Streetscape Plan RFP

Chair Marks introduced the item by reading the title and deferred to Deputy City Planner Engebretsen. Ms. Engebretsen requested feedback from the commission regarding the Wayfinding and Streetscape Plan RFP (Request for Proposals) and whether this project includes signage for vehicles, such as gateways to the community.

Commissioner Arevalo responded, noting that for cars it's more for directional assistance along the Homer Bypass. There was discussion on which specific locations to make sure are included in the RFP.

Chair Marks inquired on the number of public meetings and how many staff thinks may be needed. Ms. Engebretsen explained that about three meetings is reasonable with additional outreach. Ms. Marks noted a few areas in the RFP that may need to be revised, including the reference to Pioneers on Pioneer Workgroup instead of Pioneer Avenue Task Force/Peony Celebration, and the unfamiliar term "parkways landscape improvements".

Commissioner Johnson inquired on how much would the document have to change to include the vehicle signage information. Ms. Engebretsen responded that there would only be about a couple sentences to include, and not add too much more to the scope of work.

JOHNSON/AREVALO MOVED TO MAKE THE DISCUSSED AMENDMENTS TO THE RFP DRAFT AND SUPPORT THE WAYFINDING AND STREETSCAPE PLAN REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS AND RECOMMEND CITY COUNCIL APPROVE THE RFP FOR ADVERTISING.

There was no further discussion.

VOTE: YES: MARKS, CHEROK, AREVALO, BROWN, JOHNSON, RICHARDSON

Motion carried.

- B. Main Street Sidewalk Project
 - i. Homer Main Street Sidewalk Improvements Design

Chair Marks introduced the item by reading the title and deferred to Deputy City Planner Engebretsen. Ms. Engebretsen commented that this is the commission's opportunity to make additional comments on the subject, and to make a motion if the EDC is in support of the Main Street Sidewalk Improvement project moving forward.

MARKS/RICHARDSON MOVED THE EDC GO ON RECORD TO SUPPORT THE HOMER MAIN STREET SIDEWALK IMPROVEMENTS DESIGN.

Chair Marks commented that the EDC supports having the sidewalk go up Main Street on the West and East side¹ to give what is required to make it safe and that they look forward to having that completed.

¹ At the February 9, 2021 Regular Meeting, Commissioner Arevalo noted that the Public Work's improvement proposal was intended only for the west side of Main Street, not the east side, and to ensure that Chair Mark's comments reflect support for what was proposed.

VOTE: YES: CHEROK, RICHARDSON, BROWN, JOHNSON, AREVALO, MARKS

Motion carried.

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

- A. City Manager's Report for December 14, 2020
- B. City Manager's Report for January 11, 2021
- C. CARES Act Economic Relief Grant Programs Update dated January 5, 2021
- D. EDC 2021 Meeting Calendar
- E. Commissioner Attendance at 2021 City Council Meetings

Chair Marks agreed to attend the City Council's January meeting and encouraged the other commissioners to volunteer to provide the Council report.

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

COMMENTS OF CITY STAFF

Deputy City Clerk Tussey thanked the commission for a good meeting.

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen voiced her appreciation for the commission's discussion on the Main Street and Wayfinding/Streetscape projects and to see progress being made. She thanked the commissioners for visiting businesses to conduct the COVID survey and how now more than ever it's important to facilitate relations with businesses and community members.

COMMENTS OF THE COUNCILMEMBER

COMMENTS OF THE CHAIR

Chair Marks thanked everyone for their participation and aiding in projects moving forward. She reminded the commission that terms will be expiring April 1st for Commissioners Johnson and Arevalo and hope they plan to reapply. At the Chair's request, Deputy City Clerk Tussey explained the reappointment process and what communications they can expect from the Clerk's Office.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION

Commissioner Johnson commented that he will be absent for the EDC's February meeting.

Commissioner Arevalo thanked Deputy City Planner Engebretsen for all her work with keeping the EDC on track with accomplishing their goals. She thanked Commissioner Richardson for coming up with the idea to reach out to businesses and his work in developing the COVID Survey questions. She briefed the commission on her last report to City Council and how those efforts garnered interest from councilmembers and the mayor; she opined that Council may follow up with the EDC on that survey as

it provides valuable information. Ms. Arevalo also thanked the City at large for the Christmas light program.

Commissioners Brown, Cherok, and Richardson had no additional comments.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Chair Marks adjourned the meeting at 7:44 p.m. The next Regular Meeting is Tuesday, February 9, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. All meetings scheduled to be held via Zoom webinar in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.



RACHEL TUSSEY, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK I

Approved: February 9, 2021