

CALL TO ORDER

Session 24-04 a Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Commission was called to order by Chair Karin Marks at 6:00 p.m. on April 9, 2024 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska and via Zoom Webinar, and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONERS MARKS, AREVALO, BRENNAN, BROWN, HASCHE, KIM & PITZMAN

ABSENT: STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PEARSON

STAFF: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR ENGBRETSEN & DEPUTY CITY CLERK PETTIT

AGENDA APPROVAL

BROWN/BRENNAN 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

CONSENT AGENDA

A. Unapproved Minutes for the Regular Meeting on March 12, 2024

KIM/AREVALO MOVED TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 12, 2024.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

VISITORS/PRESENTATIONS

A. Derotha Ferarro, South Peninsula Hospital

Derotha Ferarro of South Peninsula Hospital delivered a presentation to the Commission regarding the funding and parameters for a childcare center for hospital employees. Topics covered included:

- Grant funding for the childcare center.
- Proposed location and layout of the childcare center.
- South Peninsula Hospital Employee Housing Project.
- South Peninsula Hospital major capital needs.

Ms. Ferarro then fielded questions from the Commissioner. Questions were asked on the following topics:

- Green space.
- Housing.

- Erosion issues.
- Acreage.
- Capacity/role for childcare center.
- Openness of the hospital to sharing the process.
- What extended hours with childcare looks like.

STAFF & COUNCIL REPORT/COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. EDC Staff Report

Community Development Director Engebretsen reported that the City and the Research Reserve are partnering to start working on the Kachemak Sponge Project.

B. Chamber Director Report

Ms. Engebretsen noted that the Chamber is going to upgrade their website. She added that the new website will be more functional in that it will have one website for tourists and another for locals. She also shared that the visitor guide is out and available online.

C. Homer Marine Trades Association Report

D. Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District Report

Chair Marks reported that the maritime industry development project is moving fast forward in the whole community. She noted that the project has a target ending of 2026, and that there are two projects that are currently being worked on: the Artic Energy Program and the Department of Transportation Program. She added that the state legislature provided money to set up programs to make it easier for the Department of Transportation to increase their consultation with local municipalities. Chair Marks shared some information regarding a Chamber Luncheon taking place on April 10th. Lastly, she reminded the Commission of the upcoming Industry Outlook Forum in Soldotna on April 25th.

E. Port Expansion

Ms. Engebretsen noted that there is funding in the President's budget for the Harbor Expansion Project. She added that she suspects there is lobbying taking place at the state legislature level for the state to provide their 30% of the project.

F. Guiding Homer's Growth Group

Commissioner Kim shared that there was a successful meeting with Agnew::Beck when they were in town at the end of March. He added that one of the takeaways from the meeting was to have more conversations in the future pertaining to energy, housing, storm water, and green spaces. Lastly, he shared the potential for a collaboration between Guiding Growth and MAPP (Mobilizing Action through Planning and Partnerships).

G. HERC Update

Ms. Engebretsen reported that the City is going to spend \$5,000 on some patching of the roof to keep nursing the building along in order to keep using it. She added that the City is hopeful to receive grant funding for the HERC repairs.

H. Planning Updates

Ms. Engebretsen stated that they've been working hard in the planning office to get the software for zoning permits up and running. She noted that this is the same software that would be used for short-term rentals and business licenses should they go into effect. She also reported that the transportation plan will be up for public hearing with the Planning Commission on May 1st. She briefed the Commissioners on the public hearing that the Planning Commission held on April 3rd in regards to another proposed childcare facility in Homer.

PUBLIC HEARING

PENDING BUSINESS

A. Business License

Memorandum from Community Development Director as backup

Chair Marks noted that the City Council passed a resolution directing the EDC to consider the creation of a City business license. She directed the Commissioners to the amended resolution in the packet and noted the changes that had been made. She turned the floor over to Community Development Director Engebretsen, who stated that she felt the Commission needed to decide how much time and effort they want to put into the idea of a City business license.

Chair Marks asserted that she didn't want the Commission to take on this concept if there aren't valid reasons for doing so in the community. She added that both Mayor Castner and Councilmember Venuti seem to think there is a need for a City business license.

Commissioner Brown provided a synopsis of comments made by Councilmembers at the City Council meeting the night prior to the EDC's meeting. According to Ms. Brown, there was an overall disapproval from Councilmembers regarding the creation of a City business license. She added that her opinion was she felt it would be a waste of the Commission's time, especially considering the fact that there isn't a lot of support from Council or the community.

Commissioner Arevalo suggested that the two champions for the idea of a business license provide a list of things that they would like to see come as a result of the implementation of a City business license.

Commissioner Kim voiced that he feels it is worth the Commission's time to investigate the creation of a City business license given that the Commission is here for the economic development of the City. He added that from a cost-benefits perspective, the benefits outweigh the costs, and therefore he is in favor of discussing the idea of a City business license more in-depth.

Commissioner Brown reiterated Commissioner Arevalo's previous comments about needing to know what this is going to accomplish for the City.

Commissioner Brennan stated that she didn't understand the purpose behind the City business license since realizing that there would be no means of enforcement. She added that she was on board with the idea of a business license at the previous meeting, but was a little disappointed to receive the direction from City Council without any foreseen benefits for businesses.

Commissioner Hasche provided that he had informally asked members of the community about the potential of a City business license after the last meeting, and stated that most people are surprised the City doesn't already require a business license. He added that the overall sentiment of the community seems to be "if it isn't broke, don't fix it."

Commissioners agreed that if they had a concise list of potential benefits to the City that the business license would create, they then would be more open to assessing the creation of such a license. Community Development Director Engebretsen suggested creating an outline with scheduled tasks for the Commission to work on at various future EDC meetings. There was general consensus from the Commission that more clarity was needed regarding why the City wants to implement a business license, and that further discussion was necessary regarding a business license.

B. Comprehensive Plan

Community Development Director Engebretsen noted that there was a great open house event two weeks ago. She added that Agnew::Beck will be launching a six-week survey within the coming weeks, and that the consultants will be making their second community visit during the second week of May. Visiting that week will enable the consultants to attend meetings with City Council, the EDC, the Planning Commission, and the Parks Art Recreation and Culture Advisory Commission, in addition to meeting with other user groups and City departments.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Alaska Small Business Development Center Small Business Advisory Funding

Community Development Director Engebretsen informed the Commission that she requested this in her budget request to the City Manager. She provided a brief background on the small business development center and how it is funded. She added that the request for this year is \$12,000, and that the City has funded anywhere from \$10,000-25,000 in the past.

HASCHE/KIM MOVED TO RECOMMEND THE CITY COUNCIL FUND THE ALASKA SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER HOMER BUSINESS ADVISORY IN THE AMOUNT OF \$12,000.

Commissioner Kim voiced his support for the funding, stating that every dollar the City invests pays tenfold. He inquired about the possibility of partnering with Robert Green at the Small Business Development Center to amplify his influence.

There was no further discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

- B. Land Allocation Plan
Memorandum from Community Development Director as backup

Community Development Director stated that the City reviews the land allocation plan annually to determine which properties should be out for lease. She added that there might be space at the airport this year, but with the runway construction taking place and other internal construction that the City is doing, she doesn't see space at the airport being feasible for leasing this year. She reviewed her staff report in conjunction with the land allocation plan for the Commission. There were in-depth discussions regarding the over slope areas on the land allocation plan.

BRENNAN/HASCHE MOVED TO REMOVE OVER SLOPE AREA 1 FROM THE LANDS AVAILABLE FOR LEASE PORTION OF THE LAND ALLOCATION PLAN.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

- A. City Manager's Report
- B. City of Homer Newsletter
- C. EDC Strategic Plan 2024-2025
- D. EDC Meeting Calendar

Chair Marks noted the informational materials and volunteered herself to deliver the report to City Council on April 22nd.

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

COMMENTS OF THE CITY STAFF

COMMENTS OF THE MAYOR/COUNCIL MEMBER (If Present)

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION

Commissioner Hasche said that this is his favorite time of year watching Homer wake up with all the action happening on the Spit.

Commissioner Brown thanked Community Development Director. She also thanked former Commissioner Pitzman for his analysis on the housing market at the previous EDC meeting.

Commissioner Arevalo mentioned that the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District has set up a meeting to offer the chance for public comment on the Fox River Flats RS 2477 right-of-way. She added that there will be flyers going around town on April 16th, and that the public comment period runs through April 26th. The meeting will take place at the Kachemak Bay Campus on Tuesday, April 16th.

Chair Marks thanked the Commission, stating that it's always a pleasure to have such a full and robust conversation about everything that comes before the Commission. She also noted the empty seat on the Commission, and that it could be filled by a City or non-City resident.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Chair Marks adjourned the meeting at 8:24 p.m. The next regular meeting is Tuesday, May 14, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. All meetings are scheduled to be held in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers and via Zoom Webinar.

ZACH PETTIT, DEPUTY CITY CLERK I

Approved: _____