

WASCO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
THURSDAY, JUNE 3, 2021
9:30 a.m.
ZOOM TELECONFERENCE

ATTENDANCE

COMMISSION MEMBERS: Nan Wimmers, Tonya Brumley, Fritz Ellet, Bob Krein, Brian McCormick, Rich Mays

EDC STAFF: Carrie Pipinich, Jane Allen

GUESTS: Commissioner Steve Kramer, Kelly Howsley-Glover, Alice Cannon, Nate Stice, Michael Held, Rodger Nichols

CALL TO ORDER

Nan Wimmers called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. A round of introductions took place.

MARCH 2021 MINUTES

Rich Mays moved to approve the minutes; Fritz Ellet seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

WASCO COUNTY MAJOR EMPLOYERS LIST

Carrie shared that staff worked with the Open for Business Committee to complete an update of the Major Employers list for Wasco County. Staff will work to obtain additional information from businesses who did not respond and will make the list available as a resource on the EDC website when it is complete. Nan asked if staff knows how many seasonal agricultural employees are in Wasco County. Carrie said she can ask the state economists if there is any data on that but that they are not generally included in the covered employment reported. Bob noted that the solar farm will have 250-350 employees in Maupin in late fall and added that there are concerns on housing these workers. Nan suggested that EDC members could reach out to businesses to get a clearer picture of employees.

EDC PRIORITY ISSUES APPROACH

Carrie noted that staff met with Nan and Megan to discuss an approach on the issues of housing and childcare that were noted as priority issues in December but not part of the EDC's work in the past. The group discussed strategies to understand what is happening on these issues in the community and to not duplicate work that is already occurring. Carrie discussed the potential actions outlined in the memo and asked for feedback.

Nan shared that the housing situation is very dire with prices in outlying communities increasing as well. She added that costs for building are also very high. Alice added that the City of The Dalles is working on housing code amendments to be compliant with HB 2001, which allows for duplexes on all lots that are zoned for single-family homes. Alice stressed the City is trying to hear the community's concerns and sent notices out to every property owner in the residential zone, with a Spanish language translation as well. Rich Mays added that Hood River is going through a similar process, and they are receiving a lot of feedback from the local community. Carrie highlighted that the City of Maupin is wrapping up a housing needs analysis and that staff has been actively engaged in the discussion.

Carrie provided a summary of a survey that the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub completed last fall to understand childcare needs from families and how it impacts employment. Staff will work with Christa Rude to provide support for conversations with employers around childcare needs as requested. Carrie

shared that CGCC was awarded a grant through The Ford Family Foundation to support a childcare center feasibility study and that staff will continue to engage with this effort moving forward. Lastly, Carrie noted that encouraging local childcare businesses to engage with the SBDC may be a helpful strategy.

EDC STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE: DATA, ASSETS, SWOT

Staff noted that this was the first session in the update process for the EDC's strategic plan. Jane Allen shared a presentation that highlighted current relevant economic and demographic trends. Carrie shared that it was interesting to see job growth over the five-year period and how the pandemic impacted that in one year, and that she will be interested to see what job growth looks like into the next year as the economy begins to open. Nan added that she was worried about the number of businesses that will survive coming into the next year. Nate shared that he has heard that many high-wage employers are having a difficult time hiring. Carrie noted that state economists claim that the data does not support the notion that unemployment benefits are to blame for high unemployment rates. Carrie said that staff will keep the EDC up to date on the workforce participation numbers.

Jane Allen shared the second half of her presentation which went over the asset mapping and SWOT analysis processes. The group participated in an asset mapping and SWOT analysis activity using Google Jamboard.

Michael Held noted that he has had many business development conversations around new startups and business expansion in the past month and has been encouraged by that.

STAFF REPORT

Carrie gave a staff report update. Staff has been working to support another round of grants for businesses in Wasco County that were affected by the move to extreme risk. Staff has also been sharing information to businesses regarding federal resources through the American Rescue Plan, including the Restaurant Revitalization fund, Shuttered Venue Operators fund, as well as the operational costs assistance grants from Business Oregon. Michael shared that there is a list of who is eligible on the Business Oregon website. Carrie noted that the state program was more flexible than the County program.

Carrie shared that the needs assessment report by MCEDD staff has been completed and that it provides a good overview of needs around the region and offers strategies to recover moving forward.

Staff has supported the housing needs analysis in Maupin as well as helped to develop a Travel Oregon grant so that Maupin could make improvements to Kaiser Park.

Carrie thanked Fritz Ellet and Justin Brock for participating in the QLife Strategic Planning Process. Staff has been working with QLife to identify grant opportunities. Carrie noted that the next steps would likely be to coordinate a broadband action team to identify service gaps.

Staff has been working with the SBDC on a business resilience training series over the past year that includes broadband tools, business preparedness planning, and accessing capital. Staff has partnered with Immense Imagery to produce video resources based on those trainings.

Staff has been working with The City of The Dalles and Port of The Dalles to support planning for The Dalles Brownfield project. \$600,000 will be provided to owners to complete environmental assessments for their properties. Funding will be available to both public and private entities.

Staff has been working with the Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) assessment and strategies for digital economy opportunities for Wasco County. Carrie stated that this will be an interesting opportunity to

explore diversification in our industries and collaborations with the tech sector. Carrie noted that CORI plans to continue with engagement in the future.

Roger Nichols asked regarding the brownfields project, whether property owners have been notified about potential contamination issues on their property. Carrie noted that the next steps will be outreach to property owners identified for potential contamination based on historic uses or existing DEQ information and as well as education on what qualifies as a brownfield. Carrie requested thoughts from the group on how to best spread the word about the availability of the funds and the benefits to property owners. Nan agreed that the messaging to property owners will be important moving forward.

EDC MEMBER AND PARTNER UPDATES

Tonya Brumley shared that SWCD and watershed councils recently secured grants to manage underground storage in the Fifteen Mile watershed. Tonya expressed concern about the extreme drought in the Wasco County area.

Bob shared that Maupin had a busy Memorial Day weekend despite the impacts of supply chain shortages, particularly for local rafting businesses. There are also a few new rafting companies in Maupin. Restaurants and service businesses continue to have issues with staffing. Bob commented that he is concerned about upcoming construction projects, particularly where the construction workers will find housing. He also shared that the solar project beginning this summer will be at full construction capacity by the fall.

Brian McCormick reported that Mosier has been really busy recently and that the influx of tourists is putting stress on local transportation routes.

Rodger Nichols shared the CRGC added a climate action plan as well as a section on diversity, equity, and inclusion in their management plan update. The Gorge Commission's next meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 8th.

Fritz Ellett reminded the group that the legislature is still in session and that there is still time to elevate your concerns and priorities. He shared that he was impressed with the QLife board and the work they have been doing. Fritz also noted that the EDC should monitor how businesses that have accumulated debt will fare once the economy opens up. Finally, he reminded the group that this will be a bad fire season and to be careful as the weather warms.

Alice reported that the City of The Dalles has been busy with housing code amendments in order to make housing development more efficient and streamlined. At the recent budget committee meeting, interest was expressed by City Council to support economic development in The Dalles, with emphasis on supporting both small businesses and the Mainstreet program.

Tonya inquired about landlord assistance programs. Fritz responded to the question with the information that there will be sunsets on renter protection programs. Carrie added that there is still money available for residential landlords. Business Oregon also reported that they had a commercial rent relief program that required landlords and businesses to apply for jointly.

OTHER NEW BUSINESS

There was no other new business.

ADJOURN

Meeting was adjourned at 11:40AM