

WASCO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
THURSDAY, September 2, 2021
9:30 a.m.
ZOOM TELECONFERENCE

ATTENDANCE

COMMISSION MEMBERS: Nan Wimmers (Vice Chair), Megan Thompson (Chair) Tonya Brumley, Fritz Ellett, Bob Krein, Amy McNamee, Jenn Toepke, Justin Brock

EDC STAFF: Carrie Pipinich, Jill Brandt

GUESTS: Commissioner Steve Kramer (Wasco Co Commissioner), Kathy Schwartz (Wasco Co Commissioner), Alice Cannon (City of The Dalles),

CALL TO ORDER INTRODUCTIONS

Megan Thompson called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m. A round of introductions took place.

JUNE 2021 MINUTES

Amy McNamee moved to approve the minutes; Fritz Ellett seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

EDC STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Carrie noted this is the second session of the update process. The last session focused on a SWOT Analysis as well as demographic and economic shifts. Today's session will focus on revisiting the EDC's mission, vision, and goals. Carrie reviewed the background information provided in the packet and asked for discussion of any updates.

The group agreed that flexibility to adapt and address current conditions is important. Jennifer added that the business response to the pandemic is a great example of the need for flexibility. She noted that the most successful businesses have been able to pivot by responding actively to the changes.

Tonya Brumley asked Carrie to further describe the term "key services" in the strong and sustainable EDC section of the document. Carrie responded that one key service that the EDC provides is technical assistance for communities and economic development partners. Alice Cannon added that financial and siting services could be key services. Carrie noted that these services are part of the EDC's work, but that it encompasses more and adds different types of capacity in different communities around the County depending on need. Alice then proposed adding industry sector advice to siting and financial services, as well as access to funding opportunities.

Steve Kramer suggested several edits to the vision statement that were incorporated. Alice commented that she read the vision statement as a mantra that defined the values to be aspired to. There were also several minor edits and clarifications to the goal areas proposed. Carrie invited the group send any additional ideas via email them to her in the next few weeks to be incorporated into the drafts for the next meeting where strategies will be developed.

Carrie then asked if anyone had anything to add to the SWOT analysis in the packet. Megan asked what the term “Dry Side” referred to under the natural resource heading. Steve answered that this term came from the forest collaborative work where the Barlow District has been referred to as the dry side.

2021 COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT PROCESS

Carrie reviewed the annual project process and noted that staff proposed using the same model for this year but asked if there was input on any additional considerations for criteria in particular. The EDC consensus was to keep them the same. She noted that they would explore in person meetings for those that were interested and of an appropriate size.

Megan asked if any of last year’s big projects were completed. Carrie answered that the Dog River Pipeline project funding is now in place. The full project is expected to begin next year. Megan asked Carrie to share last year’s project list and Carrie gave a quick summary on each of last year’s projects that were listed on the screen.

Carrie shared that County staff have asked to explore the role the CEP process may take in identifying potential investments for community service fees associated with the most recent long term enterprise zone agreement with Design LLC. Carrie noted that if this moves forward it may impact how the EDC develops this process in future.

STAFF REPORT

Carrie’s reported on her work with the Port and the Community College on the digital economy ecosystem planning with Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) since the spring meeting. Google has provided support with CORI and is looking for ways to incorporate additional tech and digital economy pieces into our community. Carrie requested the EDC’s input on this work after review of a brief presentation (attached).

Kathy Schwartz asked how broadband access fits into this development. Carrie responded that Broadband access is critical! She noted that there is separate work being done with QLife staff and CORI to identify costs to close broadband gaps in the county. Kathy also asked for examples of what type of jobs we are talking about with this initiative. Carrie then gave some examples: software coding, IT workers, digital marketing, etc. Carrie noted she would share a link to the CORI webpage where there are some tangible examples of this type of work and added that the closest geographic example is Independence where they have been able to leverage an EDA grant to do more detailed work on ag tech.

Carrie then reminded that group that MCEDD was awarded a Rural Opportunity Initiative Grant to support businesses on the use of digital tools. The grant was completed at the end of June and was used to develop videos that are now posted on our website, and business profiles that highlight how local business owners have used resilience strategies and tools to support their business through the pandemic.

Carrie then reported on her work with Maupin around community visioning, Dufur around their pool improvements, and the south Wasco County fiber expansion project. Carrie also noted that several applications have been submitted to leverage the Brownfield coalition assessment grants. Alice added that there has been more active marketing in the urban renewal area of The Dalles for

Brownfield's funding, and that she will step up outreach efforts to let folks know of this opportunity. Carrie noted that thanks are to Andrea from Port as well as Michael Held and Nate Stice for their support in this effort.

Carrie also noted that she has been participating with Comm College's childcare center feasibility study. They have gotten 80 responses to survey but are extending the deadline. She asked the EDC to share with their networks.

EDC MEMBER AND PARTNER UPDATES

Alice Cannon stated that she was pleased to be on core group with the Brownfield coalition and noted that it dovetails well with incentive programs in the urban renewal area. She also reported on interest in promoting more housing downtown.. Alice gave an update on the Tony's building, noting that they had received approval from the Historic Landmarks commission for demolish because it is a non-contributing resource. The urban renewal agency board met and gave staff permission to move forward with applying for a Brownfield assessment to look at hazardous materials and an underground storage tank. Alice also reported that the First Street project is underway, with the preliminaries happening now: design work, purchasing right of way, construction permits.

Fritz Ellet reported that statewide redistricting to set Congressional boundaries is happening now.

Bob Krein reported a good rafting season in Maupin this summer. He added that the fishing season on the Deschutes has been closed due to drought. The Bakeoven Solar construction project is moving forward, with workers scheduled to come in over the next month.

Jennifer reported that the Port is focused on fire cleanup at The Dalles Marina. She appreciated the input on CORI and Brownfields that were mentioned in this meeting. She added that the Port continues to rethink Economic Development with the small amount of land available, noting that businesses want much more than the one to two acre pieces that the Port has available.

Megan reported that the cherry harvest is now complete. The wheat crop yields were low due to lack of water but harvest is also complete for them. All of the local agriculture folks were thankful that there were no fire incidents that affected this year's crops. Megan ended her report with the reminder to everyone that The Dalles bridge will be closed Thursday evening through Monday morning.

Kathy pointed out that on the first slide of the Rural Innovation presentation on the far left, is a list of broader community infrastructure basic needs (ex public health, education, etc). She added that these items are the foundation building blocks that every community needs to move forward.

OTHER NEW BUSINESS

None noted.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 11am AM. The next meeting is scheduled for December 2nd.