

## **WASCO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**Thursday, March 2022**

**9:30 a.m.**

### **ZOOM TELECONFERENCE**

#### **ATTENDANCE**

COMMISSION MEMBERS: Megan Thompson (Chair) Tonya Brumley, Jennifer Toepke, Justin Brock, Lisa Farquharson, Mayor Rich Mays, Brian McCormick, Nan Wimmers (Vice Chair), Fritz Ellett,

EDC STAFF: Carrie Pipinich

GUESTS: Camille Grater (Workforce OR), Nate Stice (Regional Solutions), Natasha Blaircobb (MCEDD/RARE), Lisa Gambee (Wasco County), Alice Cannon (City of The Dalles)

#### **CALL TO ORDER & INTRODUCTIONS**

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

#### **DECEMBER 2021 MINUTES**

Lisa Farquharson moved to approve the December 2021 minutes; Nan Wimmers seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

#### **EDC STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE 2022 EDC WORKPLAN DRAFTS**

Carrie began by introducing the draft for the EDC strategic plan five-year update, reviewing the update process and describing the purpose of the EDC strategic plan. Carrie asked for any feedback on the content or recommended changes to finalize the update. Carrie specified that she would add page numbers to the final draft.

Nan shared she thought that Carrie created a robust and thorough draft, and she supports taking it to the County Commission.

Megan asked if there was anything in the draft Carrie thought the commission would have concerns with. Carrie noted that she thought it was in line with expectations but explained that there is a more detailed advocacy piece in this draft than in previous strategic plans.

Nan asked for clarification on what was included in the advocacy section. Carrie noted that the advocacy focused the EDC sharing information about community projects and needs with potential funders and legislators as well as identifying opportunities for our communities to further engage around funding resources. With these clarifications Nan and Jennifer shared their approval of the draft.

Nan Wimmers moved to approve the Strategic Plan 2022-2027 update; Tonya Brumley seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Before moving to the next section Carrie requested that individuals be prepared to participate in sub-committees going forward and if people are interested in working on a specific committee to contact her with their preferences.

### **EDC MEETING SCHEDULE, FORMAT**

Carrie noted that prior to the pandemic EDC meetings shifted to locations around the County and sometimes included facility and project tours. Carrie asked for input from the group on comfort with having in-person versus virtual meetings and reviewed some potential strategies for the EDC meetings moving forward.

There was group consensus to shift to a primarily in person format and incorporate tours for upcoming meetings. Carrie noted she would work to identify locations for the upcoming meetings and keep an eye on any changes in recommended COVID-19 precautions that may shift interest.

### **STAFF REPORT**

Carrie provided an overview of her staff report. A few highlights include:

- The Brownfield Coalition program has 9 public sites in the program currently.
- Several networking events are being planned including an innovation event and a pub talk event focused on pandemic resilience and access to capital.
- The BAT has continued to meet and is engaging around speed test mapping and survey work with an anticipated launch for the survey in May dependent upon the completion of the speed test site.
- The Community Enhancement Projects (CEP) list was acknowledged by the County Commission in January 2022
- She informed the group that a Grant writing training is being created with a target event date in May. The training will be made up of four 2-hour sessions throughout the month of May.

### **COMMISSIONER & PARTNER UPDATES**

Mayor Mays gave an update on the process for the Strategic Investment Program agreements around the next potential Google development. He explained that there are several sources of funds that will come to the community as a result of these agreements. One source requires agreement from a number of the taxing bodies on how it will be distributed between entities and this discussion is still ongoing. Mayor Mays noted that Mid-Columbia Community Action is proposing a navigation center on Seventh Street between sixth and seventh on a 2.6-acre piece of property that was donated to them. Mayor Mays also shared that the City of the Dalles is currently recruiting for a new City Manager and invited EDC members to participate in the community reception as part of the process. Lastly, the Mayor shared that the City is working toward developing a committee focused on climate change and is seeking a variety of partners to participate.

Alice Cannon noted that the city of the Dalles will also be hosting the Visioning event on March 9<sup>th</sup> and reminded the group that individuals wishing to attend the visioning project need to register for the event online.

Nan Wimmers gave an update on housing in the area. She explained that there has been a 20% increase in sales prices for homes since 2021 and are very few homes on the market. She expressed concern that residents are going to be priced out of The Dalles and the surrounding area.

Jennifer Toepke gave an update for the Port. She noted that businesses that are interested in locating or expanding in the port area are getting in touch but there is not enough land to work with. She also noted that the Port is seeing more people camping on their land outside of what is allowed currently. The Port is also focused on the Marina fire recovery, finding opportunities to partner with the city of Dufur, and working on trying to support businesses locating in other areas of The Dalles.

Megan reported that the Cherry Festival is coming up in April and encouraged getting in touch with Lisa if you are interested in getting involved. Megan also explained that Northern Wasco County School District 21 is starting a five-year strategic planning process and has requested community participation.

Tonya gave updates from the City of Dufur. Their sewer project will be out to bid shortly. At the Dufur school they have been working to establish the Ranger Tech program. The Ranger Tech program will help support students who wish to pursue employment right out of high school in skilled trades. She also highlighted several arts programming opportunities that the school has been able to leverage for their students recently.

Tonya also noted that NW Natural would like to participate on The Dalles Climate Action Committee. Mayor Mays agreed to work with her to make sure NW Natural is represented on the Climate Action Committee.

Justin noted that the PUD and Wasco Electric Co-op are partnering with Dufur's CTE program to share about career paths with the utilities. He then shared that the utilities have been working on updating infrastructure such as brittle copper wire that was damaged by storms and general weathering. Justin shared that the PUD is continuing to work with an engineering firm related feasibility for utility undergrounding in downtown. He shared that Wasco electric has submitted a grant application to Bonneville Environmental Foundation for installing a Level 2 EV charging station in Maupin. Having an EV charging station in Maupin would support tourism and recreation in the area. The PUD is getting ready to launch an EV car share program that will be a 2-year pilot that will be located at the veteran's office in Downtown the Dalles. The PUD has also submitted a grant application to Bonneville Environmental Foundation to add an additional vehicle and charging site at the Dufur School including the necessary infrastructure changes. The hope is that these will support community members in becoming more familiar with the technology. Lastly, Justin shared that the PUD board voted to approve a small facility charge increase to ensure that they can continue to make necessary investments in the system.

Fritz noted that there was significant legislation related to agriculture being discussed in the short session and reminded people to contact local legislators to weigh in.

Lisa Farquharson noted that the Chamber is looking for volunteers for the Cherry Festival. The Chamber Board is starting a new strategic planning process to discuss a three year direction for the Chamber. They are continuing to focus on small business support as we come out of the pandemic.

Alice shared updates on urban renewal in the Dalles. The city finished a financial analysis in February 2022 and reported it to their board. this analysis showed that the city has the ability to raise \$29.2 million worth of revenue for a renewal agency. Based on the projections of revenue we expect to stop collecting in 2026 or 2027 with their existing debt being retired in 2029. Their board has been undergoing strategic planning and will be finalized once The Dalles 2040 Visioning Project is complete. The city is currently trying to focus on return on investment and promote development with developers who are already property owners.

Nate shared updates on projects who received funding through the Legislature during the session. He also reiterated the importance of addressing housing in the region and the strain that it puts on the workforce and local businesses. Tonya shared that these housing concerns are echoed in Dufur as people are priced out of the Dalles and look to more rural housing opportunities. Megan added that another factor to the housing concerns in the area is an inability to get contractors to update properties and especially given the current limited access to supplies.

Lisa Gambie shared that communities in South Wasco County are also facing challenges around housing, infrastructure limitations, and workforce. Lisa has seen people who want to start new businesses in Maupin but can't find a house to live in.

Camille Grater from the Worksource Oregon office noted that the current challenge is helping employers find workers who are work ready. Local employers are all leveraging the same talent pool and attracting new talent to the area brings many challenges. It is very difficult to recruit people to the area due to the housing costs and limitations.

### **OTHER NEW BUSINESS**

No new business

### **ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:08 AM. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday June 2, 2022, and will be in-person at a TBD location.