

WASCO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Wednesday, September 28, 2022

9:30 a.m.

**Meeting In Person at MCEDD Conference Room
And ZOOM TELECONFERENCE Remote Option**

ATTENDANCE

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

EDC STAFF: Carrie Pipinich

GUESTS: Jill Brandt (MCEDD Administrative Assistant)

CALL TO ORDER & INTRODUCTIONS

Megan Thompson called the meeting to order at 9:35 am. A round of introductions took place.

MARCH 2022 MINUTES APPROVAL

Megan asked for any comments or corrections on the March 2022 minutes.

Nan Wimmers moved to approve the March 2022 minutes; Fritz Ellett seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

OFFICER ELECTIONS

The Commission's current Chair is Megan Thompson and the Vice-Chair is Nan Wimmers. Megan stated that she could continue to serve as chair. Nan will be stepping down as vice-chair. Jennifer Toepke nominated Lisa Farquharson as vice chair. Tonya Brumley seconded the nomination.

Nan Wimmers motioned to approve Meghan Thompson and Lisa Farquharson as the EDC officers to serve through July 1, 2023. Fritz Ellett seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

EDC OPEN POSITIONS

Carrie noted that three terms would be ending in December along with one additional vacancy. Carrie reviewed the details for Positions 4, 7, and 8 and noted that all of the current members were willing to remain on. She noted that Nan is moving toward stepping back from the EDC and would like to find a replacement to fulfill the remainder of the term for Position #10 through December 2024. The group confirmed an interest in encouraging a focus on real estate and development for this position and discussed outreach approaches. Carrie noted that the position would be posted shortly with a deadline for first consideration before Thanksgiving so that the EDC could make a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners at the December 1st meeting.

2022/23 COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT PROCESS

Carrie gave an overview of the proposed process as outlined in the memo to include community level meetings in Maupin, Mosier, Dufur, Tygh Valley and The Dalles. Before the December meeting, a draft list will be developed based on input from these meetings that the Commission will prioritize at the December meeting.

The group discussed the value of the process and did not request changes. Staff noted that the meeting dates would be shared with the EDC members and encouraged engagement as they are able in at least one community level meeting.

STAFF REPORT

Carrie gave her staff report. Highlights included:

- The Brownfields Coalition grant money has been allocated with projects that are mostly located in The Dalles, with one project in Mosier. City staff in urban renewal and public works did a tremendous job in outreach, getting projects. Carrie explained that the City is not eligible to apply for the next round of funding this fall, and MCEDD will apply for funding for the whole region. While this new grant application will cover all five counties, Wasco County will be well positioned to continue to receive investment due to the existing outreach efforts.
- Wasco Innovation Initiative hosted another Innovators Drinks event and is planning for the next in the series in October.
- The Main Street Mosier Business Alliance Meeting had about 35 people attending and staff presented information on the EDC and MCEDD's loan programs to the group. There was good engagement and energy at the meeting and there is interest in creating a Business Development Guide for Mosier
- The Wasco County BAT participated in the regional broadband meeting was convened in September. Broadband surveys are still open due to requests from local partners. There were 118 surveys received back from Wasco County, and 144 speedtests. Carrie asked the Commission to continue to ask for community participation on the speedtest and the survey, which is planned to close in mid-October.
- EDC Staff and Port staff are working with the City on an update process for the Dufur Community Vision Plan from 2016.

COMMISSIONER & PARTNER UPDATES

Mayor Rich Mays reported that since the last Commission meeting, the community service fee allocation had been finalized for the SIP agreement with Google. He noted that Matthew Klebes had accepted the position of City Manager and has been on board for the past six months. Matt has plans to add an Economic Development Officer in the Community Development Department in the coming months. Mayor spoke about the Buildable Lands Inventory the City completed in the last couple of years and the challenge with appropriately accounting for the land Google will start to develop soon. The City decided to wait for development to begin to update the inventory before adopting it. The group discussed implications for the City regarding urban growth boundary/urban area boundary expansion needs for employment land. Mayor Mays ended his report with the recent Northwest Mural Fest event. While this was not a city project, the Chamber was a great supporter and the event went off beautifully. The City has 23 new murals in place!

Rich left the meeting at 10:41.

Tonya Brumley reported that the Dufur School Jerri Walker DePriest fundraiser raised \$51,000 this year. Both the School District and City have job openings currently. The School District's Career

Technical Education program is being coordinated by Leona Egglund. They had a very successful course with Baker Technical Institute on equipment operator training, flagging, and other similar programs. The City is completing the first phase of a wastewater project that will remove sludge from their ponds and is working toward going out to bid for the remainder of their waste water treatment plant project soon. Dufur is installing new radio read water meters with its ARPA funding.

Jennifer Toepke reported that the Port is working on its strategic business plan update to be finished by June 2023. There are two businesses that are looking to expand into the Port area that will hopefully buy two of the few remaining parcels of available Port land. The Marina fires were discussed.

Lisa Farquharson reported on upcoming Chamber events, including a candidate forum, Power Breakfast with BOLI, and the Historic Highway Centennial Celebration. Lisa noted that she will attend Travel Oregon's Tourism commission meeting in Hood River next week. The Chamber is beginning a three-year strategic plan update with their new, expanded Board of Directors. There is a good representation of community at the table with different industries and sectors with the board expansion. The Chamber also has a new CRM website platform for members that will provide a mini website to them within the Chamber's website. The business can develop a marketplace of goods that can be sold online there with revenue passing through to the member. The Chamber also hired Alex Hughes as the Chamber's new Business Development Director. Alex's major focus will be on building relationships and supporting members.

Fritz Ellett gave an update for Agriculture in the county. Regulation has continued to create extra costs and burdens that affect small farm businesses, eating into time and the ability to make a living. These challenges are supporting the trend to consolidation of farms to larger operations.

Nan Wimmers reported on the real estate market changes due to the interest rate fluctuations. Buyers have less buying power with the increased interest rates impacting their payments. Sellers are not yet willing to adjust their prices down because of interest rates which is causing listings to stay on the market longer. The market has changed too recently for historic comparisons yet, but most don't anticipate a crash locally. The current trend is correcting the swing of rapid appreciation of the past few years.

Megan Thompson reported that this year's cherry harvest was late and short. Her family orchard experienced early season rain damage to about two thirds of the crop. Pears are being picked now; Hood River has had a better crop than The Dalles, but was still light. FSA fire and drought relief in south county have affected crops. Meghan agreed with Fritz that regulations are driving small growers out and causing consolidations to bigger farms.

Carrie Pipinich shared that the annual Gorge Economic Symposium will be in person at the Civic on November 4th with updates from the regional economists, a panel on renewable energy, and the HUD Regional Director giving the keynote on housing. Both NW Natural and the Chamber are sponsors for this event.

Jennnifer Toepke asked if there was tribal representation on the EDC or an opportunity with the open seat. Carrie stated that this would be possible for an at-large position but that there was not one specifically designated at this point. She reviewed the geographic, entity associated, and broader at large interests with designated seats currently. The group discussed potential engagement with local tribal entities.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 AM.

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday December 1, 2022, and will be in-person at a TBD location.

Respectfully submitted by Jill Brandt, Administrative Assistant