

WASCO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Thursday, March 2, 2023

9:30 a.m.

Meeting In Person at Idiot's Grace Winery
Mosier, OR

ATTENDANCE

COMMISSION MEMBERS: Megan Thompson -*Chair*, Jennifer Toepke, Nan Wimmers, Fritz Ellett (Green Ridge Tree Farm), Rich May, Lisa Farquharson-*Vice Chair*, Brian McCormick, Bob Krein

EDC STAFF: Carrie Pipinich, Jill Brandt (MCEDD Administrative Assistant)

GUESTS: Phil Brady (Wasco County Commission), Michael Held (Business Oregon), Juliana Foster (Main Street Mosier), Greg Dearholt (Main Street Mosier), Witt Anderson (City of Mosier), Jayme Bennet (City of Mosier)

CALL TO ORDER & INTRODUCTIONS

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

DECEMBER 2022 MINUTES APPROVAL

Megan asked for any comments or corrections on the December 2022 minutes. *Rich Mays noted that the Google revenues to The Dalles were misreported in the minutes at \$15 million, to be corrected to \$5 million per year.*

Bob Krein moved to approve the December 2022 minutes with the correction noted. Lisa Farquharson seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

MOSIER COMMUNITY UPDATES

Megan welcomed the Mosier representatives to the meeting.

Mayor Witt Anderson proceeded to give an overview of current capital projects and initiatives.

- 1) The Mosier Center project will be half fire station and half community room with office space for both the city and fire district and include a food pantry space and commercial kitchen. The project's design is finished and ready to go to bid. Right now the City is working to get the permits, and will be starting the NEPA work that is required to utilize the federal funding that was awarded. At this stage of design, the project is projected to cost out at \$8.8 million. Mosier now has \$6.6 million committed for this project from a variety of sources but still need roughly \$2 million to complete the project. They have requested funds through the State Legislature to close the gap.
- 2) Their water system upgrade to add a back up water source is continuing to make progress but the well is not completed, and this portion of the project has run into cost escalation problems. Since the USDA grant was awarded for this project, the projected cost has increased by approximately half a million. City representatives will be asking for Christmas tree funding for this project also.

- 3) Plaza and Bicycle Hub project has funding from a Parks and Rec grant and will require a city match. TThe Plaza will provide an open space for the farmers market and other outdoor events. A community restroom is planned to be located on the south side where the bicycle hub is located to replace the port-a-potties currently being used. Price escalations also present a challenge to the completion of this project.
- 4) An EV Charging grant from PacifiCorp will fund the addition of a station adjacent to the Mosier Center. Bids for this project came in high and the City is seeking additional funds.
- 5) Mosier's Wastewater treatment plant upgrade has a grant from the state. The project would replace the wastewater output pipe feeding directly into the Columbia River with a tertiary treatment wetland. This project is about halfway through the design phase and will hopefully be completed within the current grant funding.
- 6) The City is also in the process of updating its comprehensive plan and natural hazard mitigation plan.

Mayor Anderson thanked Michael Held for the support from Business Oregon, noting that the partnership with the fire district has allowed the state money to flow to the Community Center project.

Jayne Bennett spoke of the City's goal to reestablish and reconnect relationships after the Covid years.

Megan asked for more detail on Mosier's Fire Department. Mayor Anderson, who is also a volunteer at the fire department, gave a detailed overview. The City of Mosier's borders encompass approximately 400 acres, and the Fire District is about 22 square miles. Mosier's Fire Department has one paid position, the Fire Chief, and everyone else is a volunteer. Mosier is not equipped to transport or provide EMT services, relying instead on the mutual aid partnerships with Hood River Fire and Mid-Columbia Fire. He emphasized that these partnerships are crucial.

The question was asked: will the charging station for EVs be able to service electric bikes? Mayor Anderson affirmed that this is included in the planning of the bicycle hub with up to 6 outlets. The number of e-bikes in and around Mosier is significant.

Juliana Foster, Executive Director of Main Street Mosier, gave an overview of the agency. This is a community and business enrichment-focused nonprofit group. Main Street Mosier's structure has recently adopted the Main Street America organization model of Four Pillars. They have also taken over the Mosier Valley newsletter with some 1000 subscribers. There has been significant growth since the restructure.

Main Street Mosier puts on three events per year. The Springfest is held at Totem Plaza with vendors. This year the Springfest will be held on Earthday, April 22nd. The summer festival event is scheduled for June 24th, with free music on the school lawn from noon to 8pm. There will be music, a beer garden, and local vendors. The final annual event is Winterfest. Last year's event had good turnout and provided free food and beverages, visits with Santa for the kids, and mariachi band music.

Membership in Main Street Mosier is up, and its board is growing. A subcommittee for the skate park project has formed, with the City's donation of land adjacent to the EV Charging station to

begin raising seed funds for the project. Main Street Mosier has also been collaborating with the middle school to create the handmade wayfinding signs around town.

Greg Dearholt (MSM) spoke next. He joined Main Street Mosier about two and a half years ago after living in Mosier for 20 years but working outside the area. At time he joined the agency, it was just beginning its operating restructure. This reorganization has really revitalized Main Street Mosier. Connections between Main Street Mosier and the city and the school are creating partnerships that are strengthening the community. Main Street Mosier's Economic Vitality Committee held its first introductory business event in the fall as both an introduction and forum to learn about the business community's challenges. The next event is scheduled on May 10th and will focus on issues identified-finding and retaining staff and funding resources.

Mayor Anderson added that the Friends of the Gorge are scheduled to visit today to collaborate on the Towns to Trails. Mosier is noted for its wildflower hiking trail from the plateau that might some day connect all the way to the Discovery Center in The Dalles. The group discussed opportunities and challenges with the proposed connection.

Lisa asked if Main Street Mosier's business members pay dues. Greg replied yes and noted personal membership dues are \$25, and business memberships are \$100. Fritz asked if this was the same as in The Dalles? Lisa explained that Main Street The Dalles has a different structure that uses sponsorship, not membership dues. Michael Held chimed in to note that most Main Streets use sponsorship similar to The Dalles. He added that the difference in how the membership supports the organization is dependent on whether it is organized as a 501 or a 503.

Brian spoke next as a business owner in Mosier and described the history of the property and business. Now a winery, the property was planted entirely with cherry and pear trees when it was purchased. The winery was established in 2018, and is still classified as a micro-winery, producing less than 2000 cases per year. The winery uses grapes grown on the property itself, with grapes grown in partnership with a winery in HR, and from grapes on a family owned property in Lyle. The cherries remaining on the property are very old trees, and are used in cidermaking, along with apple and pear. Quince is also grown on the property that is sold both in the Mosier farmer's market in the The Dalles farmer's market. The Winery Tasting room is open five days per week all year. Mosier now has three wineries and a cidery.

WORKPLAN PROGRESS + UPDATES

Carrie provided an overview of the workplan development process and noted the request today is for feedback on the pieces identified to tackle this year.

Nan commented that she thought the trainings and the proposed Mock One Stop Event to bring Wasco County's communities together to discuss their water /wastewater project was valuable. Michael Held cited Pine Grove as an example of a community that now has a project as a result of the MCEDD-sponsored events previously. These events are crucial to help the small rural communities to get in front of major infrastructure issues. Nan stated her willingness to continue to help with this event as a volunteer.

Lisa noted the last Innovator's Drinks event was really successful with 25 attendees. She added that the networking piece at these events is invaluable.

Michael asked if the EDC was planning to provide comment to Business Oregon before the next legislative meeting on the Rural Capacity Fund. This pilot program funded staff capacity for grant writing work, some \$40,000 that was earmarked specifically to aid small communities. The award amount was matched by foundations whose requirements were not so specific, which allowed staff to extend their grant writing assistance to larger communities and nonprofits as well. Business Oregon's request to continue this funding was not met in the first round of consideration before the new governor, so this request will help in the effort to get this funding re-introduced.

Lisa F. moved that staff move forward with writing a support letter that will represent the EDC both as a coordinated group and as individual members. Fritz seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Nan W. motioned to approve the workplan as presented. Fritz seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

INTEREST FORM: POSTION 10

Megan thanked Nan for her service, adding that she will always be welcome to participate in these meetings! Nan thanked the group. The candidate's interest form was in the packet materials as the basis of discussion. Carrie explained that the role of the EDC is to recommend a candidate to the County Commission, who will make the appointment.

Nan appreciated that the candidate was a commercial loan officer. She felt it was important to keep someone who works in this part of the economy represented on the Council. Megan agreed, noting that Ed knows ag lending and now works at First Interstate Bank in both Hood River and The Dalles, so he is well connected.

Nan Wimmers motioned to recommend that the county appoint Ed Thomas to position 10. Rich Mays seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

STAFF REPORT

Carrie provided highlights from the Staff report including:

- **Brownfield Coalition Grant** has 17 projects now on the list, the an additional site recently approved in Dufur. MCEDD has applied for a new regional Brownfields grant to continue this effort and should hear if it was awarded in May.
- **Innovation Initiative.** Innovators Drinks events have been successful. The South Wasco Alliance has funding to look at small business ecosystem and has contracted this work out. There will be more business interviews focused in South County as part of this process that will be incorporated into the larger County efforts.
- **Infrastructure.** Staff has focused in on significant support for Pine Grove Water District, Tooley Water District, and Wamic Water & Sanitary.

- **Community Visioning processes in Dufur.** The second meeting occurred late in January, and goals and strategies were discussed. Staff is working with the input provided to develop a draft community vision plan. Staff is also participating in Maupin's efforts to update its vision.
- **CEP list.** Submitted to the County Commission in January and was approved. Next steps will be to add into MCEEDD's regional project priority list and updating the EDC's Strategic Action Plan.
- **Flood plain map update with FEMA.** Maps are now out for review and the public outreach process is beginning.

ROUNDTABLE UPDATES

Nan had no update except to thank everyone for the opportunity to work with this group.

Jennifer reported that there are businesses that are continuing to look at Port property. There is discussion around the Boat Basin rebuild. The Port is also looking for funding to put in a new launch ramp, parking lots with restrooms. Lisa asked if a better fueling system on the boat moorage was under discussion also as she hears about it often as a regular request. Jennifer replied that the Port has not put this in because of the responsibility and staffing to maintain and dispense the fuel. Andrea did investigate which ports, if any, were managing their own fuel station. She found that everyone is outsourcing due to similar concerns/issues.

Fritz reported that he has been tracking the Legislature now that it is in session. He added that there are many active bills with impacts on small business and farming. He emphasized the importance of engagement. He also noted many have expressed concerns with top down approach on homelessness and the transition of Oregon Motor Motel to transitional housing. He noted there could have been more transparency in the process.

Lisa reported that Daniel Bonham will be in The Dalles tomorrow to meet locals and gather information on this topic to take back to Salem. In general, citizens and business owners have been expressing more concerns over the houseless population not accessing resources through partners like MCAC. She noted that projects such as the Motor Lodge have rules that focus on safety and that MCAC has done a good job at communicating that information out through several forums and answering questions from the business community.

Lisa noted that there is legislation considering increasing the Corporate Activity Taxation level from 1 million to 5 million which will help some of our small businesses with high revenues and low margins.

Rich Mays reported that the District 21 bond committee recommended a November bond vote. Rich noted the importance of clearly communicating financial impact to home owners and answering questions of the District about the plan for the current high school and surplus property the District owns. He also noted that Main Street The Dalles is undergoing reformation. Rich shared that the Dog River pipeline construction will resume shortly with a projected completion date projected at the end of 2023. He also noted that MCAC's recent purchase of the motel for housing has generated more community discussion than ever. Their Executive Director had made a

presentation to the City Council on Feb 13th. The last council meeting had a large attendance with people concerned about the effect on downtown and the community. Rich emphasized that this a significant community issue and that we have to work together to address it.

Phil Brady that the County is exploring options to improve their facilities, consolidate employees and support robust services for citizens.

Megan noted that there is a bill with potential funding to upgrade current the housing for migrant seasonal workers to ensure it compiles with H2A requirements which is a barrier currently to more farms accessing the program.

OTHER NEW BUSINESS

Carrie asked for input on June meeting location. The meeting will be held on June 1st. Suggestions were for a solar tour outside of Maupin, a tour of Antelope's Young Life Facility, a tour of the Port of The Dalles.

ADJOURN

Megan adjourned the meeting at 11:37 am.

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, June 1, 2023, location TBD.

Respectfully submitted by Jill Brandt, Administrative Assistant