

WASCO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Thursday, September 7, 2023

9:30 a.m.

WE3 Coffee in Dufur, OR

ATTENDANCE

COMMISSION MEMBERS: Megan Thompson (*Chair*), Jennifer Toepke (Port of The Dalles), Ed Thomas (First Interstate Bank), Fritz Ellett (representing Ag), Lisa Farquharson (*Vice Chair* / TDAC), Justin Brock (NWPUD), Tonya Brumley (NW Natural)

EDC STAFF: Jacque Schei (subbing for Carrie Pipinich)

GUESTS: Scott Hege (Wasco Co. Commissioner), Jill Brandt (MCEDD Administrative Assistant), Dan Spatz (City of The Dalles)

CALL TO ORDER & INTRODUCTIONS

Megan Thompson called the meeting to order at 9:35 am. A round of introductions took place. It was noted that Dan Spatz was present to represent the City of The Dalles but was not able to vote at this meeting because his appointment will not be officially approved until the Board of County Commissioners meeting on September 20th.

JUNE 2023 MINUTES APPROVAL

Megan asked for any comments or corrections on the June 2023 minutes. Fritz called out an error on page 2, fourth paragraph down:

*The 2021 fire wrap-up and replacement of the Port's damaged docks is underway. This project is **estimated to cost \$500-\$800 million** to complete. Dock access is vital for the traditional Pikeminnow fishing, as well as the new-last-year Bass fishing tournament, which has caused a wave of interest among other fishing associations to hold their tournaments at The Dalles.*

The corrected dollar amount for dock repair was estimated from \$500,000 - \$800,000.

Fritz Ellett moved to approve the June 2023 minutes with the correction noted. Tanya Brumley seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

OFFICER ELECTIONS

Jacque reviewed the responsibilities associated with the officer positions. The term of Officers' positions began on July 1st and there was discussion about the timing of the terms not fitting well with the Commission's meeting schedule. At the group's request, Jacque made a note to discuss adding the election of officers to the June meeting agenda with Carrie when she returns. Current Chair Megan Thompson and current Vice Chair Lisa Farquharson were both willing to continue in their positions, and both were also willing to relinquish their seats to anyone willing to take on the

leadership roles. Lisa offered to take on the Chair position, and after some discussion Lisa Farquharson was nominated to be Chair and Megan Thompson was nominated to be Vice Chair by Bob Krein. Fritz Ellett seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed. Officers will serve through June 30, 2024.

EDC OPEN POSITIONS

Lisa brought up the open positions as the next order of business. Jacque summarized the three positions with terms that will end in December 2023.

- Position 2 represents Central County. Tonya Brumley holds the current position and has indicated she would like to serve another term.
- Position 9 is an at-large position currently held by Fritz Ellett - he is interested in serving another term.
- Position 11 is an at-large position which represents utilities. The position is currently held by Justin Brock and he is interested in serving another term.

Position 5 represents the City of The Dalles, and the current rep, Mayor Rich Mays, will be replaced on the Commission with Dan Spatz, the City's new Economic Development officer.

Bob Krein motioned to reappoint the incumbents to positions 2, 9, and 11, and to formally approve Dan Spatz for position 5 representing the City of The Dalles. Ed Thomas seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

There was discussion and agreement to advertise Position 3 representing South County. The current rep, Amy McNamee, has been absent for enough meetings to qualify for replacement under the ordinance forming the EDC, which states that "if any member misses two (2) consecutive meeting with unexcused absences, the Court [Board of County Commissioners] may replace that member with another from that area." The term for this position ends December 31, 2024.

Staff will advertise through the media and personal outreach. Interest forms will be due in advance of the December meeting so that the EDC can consider the applications received for these appointments. The EDC's recommendations will then be presented to the Board of County Commissioners for their final appointment.

2023/24 COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT PROCESS

Jacque explained how this annual process to determine Wasco County's ranking/prioritization of county-wide projects fits into MCEDD's update to the CEDS. The first step is to set up meetings in each community, plus one combined meeting for all of the unincorporated areas of the county. These meetings provide an opportunity to find out about projects, learn details, look for opportunities for collaboration between projects, identify where tech assistance and funding is needed.

Jacque said that she planned to schedule these meetings through the month of October and into mid-November if needed. She added that she was taking recommendations for contacts and locations to set up the meetings, and asked the group to send any info that will help. With the community meetings wrapped up by mid-November, a draft project list will be developed, and Jacque will work with the EDC Chair to do an initial prioritization prior to the December EDC meeting. The list and

priorities will be discussed by EDC and they will make a final recommendation to the County for approval in January.

Ranking criteria for projects were outlined on page two of the memo in the meeting packet. It was noted that a report on the progress of the past year's projects will be included.

STAFF REPORT

Jacque reported that the Brownfield Coalition grant that The Dalles received in 2020 is ending. There is an open community meeting scheduled on Sept. 12th in the City of The Dalles to talk about the projects that have been completed, followed by a tour of buildings. Dan Spatz gave out details of the meeting and tour. Jacque invited all to attend and explained that MCEDD has received a new \$1 million grant that will cover all five counties in the region, and this funding will allow follow up with more projects in Wasco County.

Jacque reported that the Wasco Innovation Initiative's Pitch Fest event was very successful with a large attendance and great participation from the competitors. Woodsy Craft Co. received the grand prize. MCEDD and partners plan to reapply for another ROI grant. Jessica Metta has also been working with Wasco County partners to continue with the Regional Innovation Hub meetings next year if MCEDD is successful with the funding applications.

There is a lot of activity with infrastructure work in the county: the City of Maupin water and wastewater projects, the Tooley water district and Pine Grove water project. Jacque has been moving forward with funding searches for these projects.

Lisa asked if there were any further questions. *There were none.*

COMMISSIONER UPDATES

Ed Thomas reported that banking was slow due to the high Interest rate. Most activity is continuing to work on projects that were already in the pipeline two years ago, or necessary items only. New projects are cost prohibitive. Contractors are working less on residential building projects, but commercial building is still strong. Most residential projects getting attention these days are repairs/replacements done by landlords in order to retain their tenants.

Justin Brock reported that utilities are focused on right of way clearance as part of wildfire mitigation efforts. PUD line rebuilds are happening in sections, replacing crossarms. This is typical maintenance over time that reinforces the whole system. Part of the utility's staff is working to support the big build happening at the smelter site. There will be an outage next week for the Rowena feeder to reinforce it. Customers have been notified. Cleanup for the existing distribution system is ongoing. EV charging spaces have been added in The Dalles at the Rite Aid parking lot back corner. Wasco Electric is hiring for a new General Manager.

Tanya noted that school has started in Dufur, with the eight-man classic (small town football) successfully winning their first game. Litigation has stopped Dufur's wastewater project. A sidewalk (with bike routes) improvement project from We3 down main street is planned to start with money received through a state grant. Dufur currently has a public works employee position open. Recent events - the annual Threshing Bee had problems because the barley was wet and plugged up the harvesters, so the demo did not happen. The Fair saw lots of changes this year, with

parking for the event returning to the old school. Tanya noted that there is room for improvement and the fair planning committee is looking for feedback. Arena safety and improvements projects are needed.

Scott Hege asked for clarification on the issue with the sewage treatment project in Dufur. Does the town need to purchase land to resolve the issue? Tanya affirmed yes, and that the dispute had not been resolved as of this morning. Scott noted there was confusion arising out of hearing from different points of view on this project. Tanya clarified that there was ongoing litigation over the land, and Jennifer confirmed that the Port had this same info.

Dan Spatz introduced himself as new in the brand-new position of Economic Development Officer for The Dalles. Josh Chandler oversees his position, and Dan will be involved with any and all economic development activity going on in The Dalles: point person for Urban renewal projects, Brownfields projects, Enterprise Zone, vertical housing projects, liaison to Main Street, and also as the City's liaison to the airport. The childcare center project has transitioned from the college's project to become an ESD project, with current plans to locate the center in the old vacant Chenoweth High School. Dan's involvement with this project will maintain continuity and momentum for the project's funding. The project will be competing for funding out of the \$50 million allocated for childcare in the state legislature.

Megan asked about the status of using Chenoweth School for the childcare center. Dan explained that the building is required to maintain an educational use, which the childcare center qualifies for. The building is right on the Scenic Area boundary line, and was grandfathered in as an educational facility when the Scenic Area was created, so a Scenic Area permit is not required if the building retains an educational focus. The ESD (Educational Service District) will manage and operate the center.

Fritz Ellett reported that the EPA was in the process of reaching a settlement with an Environmental group in California that will impact Oregon and Washington, regarding the use of hundreds of thousands of acres that are the historic range for the checkered spotted butterfly. The new settlement will affect the processes for registering pesticides- everything will be required to be planned and permitted. Some of the most productive farmlands will be affected. He went on to speak about how the issue of insurance companies dropping regions and individual policies affects farmers in our area who have experienced wildfires and natural disasters. People are not making claims, rather they are paying out to self-insure up to \$10,000 in their efforts to not give the insurance company a reason to drop their policy. The insurance companies are looking for reasons to drop policies in "at risk" zones.

Scott Hege reported that the County is in the process of buying the Old Columbia River Bank Building to consolidate most county operations into one spot. The building sale is set to close on the 15th. The first step will start with space planning to provide services in the most efficient ways possible. The project is long-term, with months of work to do to make the building work and has an occupancy goal of mid-year 2024. The Courthouse will house all justice system functions. The Road department will remain where it is. The project is an effort to improve efficiency and will include some sale of property.

Tanya asked if the non-county tenants currently in the bottom part of the building will remain? Scott replied that all current tenants will stay through their current leases. The big focus for planning is to centralize as many services as possible for better customer convenience. Options being considered are bringing Public Health back under the county, relocating 911 (possibly up at the college), and long-term redevelopment of the whole annex.

Megan Thompson reported that the Cherry harvest was highly challenging this year due to the weather and market factors. The final results won't be known until the end of October/ early November. There were acres of cherries left unpicked because harvest costs are such a huge expense for farmers that many decided it was not worth the cost of picking. Pears and apples are being picked now, and the overall size this year was small. This year growers cut back hours and laid off many full-timers because operating the lines was too expensive. Megan added that there has been outreach working with the governor's office to determine if declaring a disaster may give farmers some relief funding.

Scott Hege added that the Governor's office has asked for directions from the USDA regarding the disaster declaration. Megan said that letters have been kicked back to the ODA for revisions. Scott asked to confer with Megan after the meeting to coordinate messages to the USDA, he is going back to DC and an update will help. Megan explained that they are gathering data from all of the growing areas in the state, focused on agricultural housing and employment. Wasco County is in a drought declaration. Hood River, as an adjacent county, can tailgate onto it.

Lisa Farquharson began her report with the upcoming celebration at Viento State Park from 10am – 1pm. Two more miles of the Historic Highway trail have been completed! ODOT is looking for missing gap money to continue with the project next year. Their next round of funds will not be available until the fall of 2025. Also high on the Chamber's priority for action is the homeless issue. A nuisance has been filed against St. Vincent's and will be addressed at the next city council meeting on Monday night.

Megan referenced Portland's new ban on open drug use, and she wanted to know if there is a similar ban in The Dalles? Lisa explained that by law a small amount of drugs are allowed to be carried. The problem is that people are loitering on the sidewalk at the museum, and in the immediately surrounding blocks (including the Chamber). This is a nuisance for tourists and the businesses located there. Lisa urged everyone who is affected to call in- this helps the police department to know where the activity is and provides the documentation needed to take to St. Vincent's board. Today is the deadline for St. Vincent's to come with a plan of action to remedy this.

Bob Krein reported that the Bakeoven CIS was approved for \$1.1 million. This will involve mapping out resource concerns such as wells and firebreak suppression areas. CIS is an Impact Statement that will cover the County from Tygh Valley to Antelope. Wells will be drilled, which will bring money for local contractors doing the work. The district has a cost share program for people doing projects such as rainwater catches, wells and spring developments.

Rafting was down across the board this year and the season is now over. This year, the water didn't get too hot. He noted that weather is important to rafting, and this year's season didn't start until July 15th. The weather has been causing the season to be shorter and the last day this year was August 20th. He added that eventually rafters may need help from the BLM related to group sizes on the river. He added that enforcement will have some consequences.

Bob noted that the RFPAs, fire breaks, airplanes, and all the tremendous support with firefighting this year was noticed and appreciated by all South County residents. He was enthusiastic about the help, and the absence of the "us versus them" mentality of the past.

Scott explained that there were now more agreements for collaboration with fire when the state can and will step in; conflagration, when a fire gets to certain size or gets to areas where structures burn. Wasco County can request resources from the state by declaring there is a conflagration. He added that yesterday's commission meeting voted to dissolve the Columbia Rural Fire District that has existed for the past 56 years. The district voted to dissolve in order to become a Rural Fire Protection Association, which will have more access to protections.

Bob added that it would be helpful if the RFPA could communicate with the county better. Scott replied that this new form allows radios to be given to the association.

Bob continued his report with an update on the solar installation, which is now beginning to get some solar panels in. Maupin itself is struggling business-wise. At the last Chamber meeting, it was noted that restaurants are the #1 attraction in town, and they are struggling. There are now two new coffee shops, which is a good sign.

Tanya asked if rafting was saturated, and Bob said yes, a couple have gone out of business. Outfitters are meeting groups at City Park but they aren't local, and the City of Maupin could do a better job monitoring. Steelhead fishing has been poor, and Maupin's overall economy is struggling. All employers are shorthanded. Housing is a big issue. Maupin is teetering economically; town leaders do not want to become a ghost town like Shaniko.

Jennifer reported that the Port of The Dalles is finishing up its strategic plan for the next five years. The discussion to determine how the Port's goals can be met in the future. One of the Port's goals is job creation. The Port's Board is trying to figure out if more jobs need to be created because there are lots of jobs, but no people to work the jobs. Housing is under consideration, and creative thinking is needed to come up with ways to partner with the City on the redevelopment of 2nd street. There is some industrial/commercial land there that the Port could possibly help with building out, which could then be leased out as housing. Ongoing discussions with businesses are on hold because of high interest rates. Funding is under consideration now for building a new launch ramp at the Marina.

The strategic plan will also include some discussion with the County on how to utilize the Port for emergency use (example in the Cascadia situation). The Dalles is best situated for supporting Portland with both river and airport facilities. Emergency response will all depend on the locks on the dams continuing to function.

Jennifer also noted the impacts of the homeless situation at the Port. She concluded her report with a reminder of the Port's celebration and tour that will coming up soon.

Dan expressed interest in having an attainable housing conversation with the Port.

OTHER NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

ADJOURN

Lisa Farquharson adjourned the meeting at 11:15 am.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 7, 2023, location TBD.

Respectfully submitted by Jill Brandt, Administrative Assistant