

**WASCO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**Thursday, December 7, 2023**

**9:30 a.m.**

**Mid-Columbia Economic Development District**

**802 Chenowith Loop Road, The Dalles**

**with Virtual Attendance Option**

**ATTENDANCE**

**COMMISSION MEMBERS:** Lisa Farquharson (*Chair*), Jennifer Toepke, Ed Thomas, Dan Spatz , Brian McCormick, Bob Krein, Megan Thompson

**EDC STAFF:** Jessica Metta (MCEDD), Jill Brandt (MCEDD)

**GUESTS:** Phil Brady (Wasco County Commission), Brandie McNamee (City of Antelope), Valerie Egon (Business Oregon), Kate Willis (South Wasco Alliance)

**CALL TO ORDER & INTRODUCTIONS**

Lisa Farquharson called the meeting to order at 9:41 am. A round of introductions took place.

**SEPTEMBER 2023 MINUTES APPROVAL**

Lisa asked for any comments or corrections on the September 7, 2023 minutes.

*Dan Spatz noted the error on page 4, first paragraph down. Chenowith High school be corrected to Chenowith Middle School.*

**Brian McCormick moved to approve** the September 2023 minutes with the correction noted. Jennifer Toepke seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

**EDC OPEN POSITIONS**

Amy McNamee has moved away from Wasco County and Kate Willis from the South Wasco Alliance has applied for the Open Position #3. Jessica Metta noted Kate and SWA's strong engagement in South County. Dan Spatz and Phil Brady also commended Kate's work.

**Dan Spatz motioned to recommend** Kate Willis to the Board of County Commission to fill out Amy McNamee's current term through December 31, 2024. Ed Thomas seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion carried.

**2024 COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS**

Jessica introduced this topic with a reminder that the main factor to consider when prioritizing was the project's readiness to proceed. The process began with community level meetings that were held across the County in November. Staff have provided a draft ranking for the top 10 projects countywide for review, revision and approval at today's meeting, to create the final draft prioritized list of projects that will be submitted to the Board of Commissioners in January for their consideration and then submitted to MCEDD for the Regional CEDS update.

*Discussion: There was discussion on the ranking of Dufur's Health Center on the top 10 list. Dan suggested that Dufur's project #4 was a more critical need. Jennifer explained that this was discussed at the Dufur community meeting, and the town is not yet ready to fund this project. Jessica noted that the health center has only a small gap in funding that the town may secure before Wasco County adopts this list. Once funded, this project will be off the list. The group concurred that if #5 comes off, it should be replaced with another Dufur project.*

*Brandie McNamee requested that Antelope School Community Center project be moved to the top 10. The town is actively going for a big push for funding in 2024. The building turns 100 in 2025 and the project has already secured two grants. Jessica suggested replacing the Affordable Housing project in The Dalles (#10) with Antelope Community Center. Phil Brady agreed with the suggestions, adding that the housing project is already in progress. There was general agreement to help support Antelope to secure more grants with this endorsement in the top 10 list.*

Lisa asked for any further questions on the list. *There were none.*

Jessica noted that The Dalles Irrigation District is looking to get onto next year's list with a maintenance project to correct surge tank issues affecting residential areas in The Dalles.

**Megan Thompson motioned to recommend** the amended list of top 10 priority projects to the Board of County Commissioners. Dan Spatz seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

### **STAFF REPORT**

Jessica touched on highlights from her written report.

- MCEDD is getting organized to start receiving applications for the projects falling under the Brownfields Coalition grant. For the projects review and approval team, Carrie Pipinich will represent Wasco County and Lindsay McClure will be the MCEDD staff person leading the project. Nomination forms are planned to be open within a month.
- MCEDD is applying to Business Oregon for a second Rural Opportunities Initiative grant with a continued focus in Wasco County. The first round of this grant funding supported the Wasco Innovators Drinks networking events, the Gorge Pitch Fest, and the Wasco County Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Assessment. This round of funding will continue with the Innovators events and Pitch fest, as well as support exploring adding Youth Entrepreneur programming around the County in partnership with the SBDC and local school districts.
- MCEDD is currently supporting Pine Grove Water District in an application to Business Oregon for funding for their new well project, and working with Tooley Water District's project.
- Broadband Funding continues with Jason Hartmann assisting QLife and Maupin towards securing funding to build out system. Jason will continue with this work under Carrie when she returns.
- MCEDD is currently recruiting for an OIB vacancy for Wasco County. Jessica asked the group to forward any recommendations.
- For MCEDD's staffing, Carrie returns on Monday. Jacque Schei has resigned and moved on to Bonneville Power, so MCEDD is also recruiting for her position that includes grant writing, project development and grant administration for infrastructure projects.

### **COMMISSIONER AND GUEST UPDATES**

Phil Brady gave an update on Kramer field. The property is owned by Wasco County and leased by Parks and Rec, who operate the field. The last lease expired in August, and negotiations to restart the agreement have been unsuccessful. Commissioner Hege wants to reestablish the lease, but to do this the County needs to do some work to make the field usable. Commissioner Brady wants to move ahead with the new plans related to a sports complex as well.

Dan Spatz shared updates for The Dalles. Main Street has new leadership coming on. The current Urban Renewal district began in 2009 with bonding that will be paid off in 2029. Of the 16 Urban Renewal projects that have been identified over the years, 14 have been completed. The Agency is exploring its future. The Early Learning Center project is moving ahead with preconstruction planning. The school district has submitted a brownfield funding request to remove asbestos and prep the old Chenoweth Middle School site for this project. The Dalles Brownfield funding received approval for a one-year extension. The City plans to submit a funding request for the Westside Plan for Transportation Growth Management funding this spring.

Ed Thomas reported that this is a slow banking year with high interest rates slowing business growth considerably. Business conditions for existing companies are all over the map.

Jennifer Toepke had no news to report for the Port of The Dalles.

Brian McCormick also had no updates to report.

Megan Thompson reported that there were OSHA rules that will impact orchards under consideration at the Legislature.

Bob Krein shared that wells are drying up and water is becoming a huge issue. He also reported that the solar panels project in South County is moving very slowly these days.

Kate Willis spoke about South Wasco Alliance's (SWA) work. She noted that the SBDC collaborated with Maupin Works and the Chamber to bring a business starter series workshop to Maupin as part of an effort to make entrepreneurship less intimidating for locals who may only have a GED. SWA is seeking funding from the Gorge Health Council to secure a community health worker to focus on South County. Recreational tourism opportunities continue to be a focus with support from Travel Oregon. A kids maker program is being developed as a combination of STEM and Ag programs that will utilize the South Wasco Farmers Market as a lab to test and retail what is made over the year.

Brandie McNamee gave updates for Antelope. Both bicycle and motorcycle touring are happening. Cycle Oregon donated money for improvements and getting the Antelope Community Center up and running is the top priority. There are many abandoned properties in the community, and Antelope has been working with the State Fire Marshal to clear out the deadwood fire hazards. Streetscape design is in progress, at the preplanning stage with ODOT now. Antelope has received a Travel Oregon Grant to increase accessibility and has started working on its Dark Sky designation. Brandie noted that Antelope could be the first designated Dark Sky community in Oregon.

Lisa Farquharson reported that the Chamber has been increasing its support and training for Latino businesses. Last night's initial meeting had 75 participants with lots of questions and discussion. Retail

and restaurant owners reported that sales were down below Covid levels this past year because inflation and interest levels have suppressed business. The Chamber is actively creating events to support local small businesses through the winter. The recently completed Non-profit Board training conducted by Alison A Hart will have two follow-up sessions in the coming months.

Valerie Egon listed the water infrastructure projects in Wasco County that Business Oregon is currently involved with. Pine Grove is applying for a grant/loan for a drinking water project. The Tooley Water District project needs additional technical assistance work to clarify the water rights and what is needed for the project to proceed within the National Scenic Area. The City of Maupin is working through the process for significant improvements for both their water and wastewater system improvements. Valerie also noted two new grants programs that are rolling out from Business Oregon that will benefit Wasco County. A Grant for SBDCs with awards of \$300,000 that is open now through January, and the \$50 million statewide program that will help build childcare infrastructure and facilities will come online in 2024.

Phil Brady agreed that the business economy is lower than it was before and even during the pandemic, when business was artificially buoyed with economic stimulus payments. Ed noted this is due to many different factors. He cited wind sports, which have had a 30% downturn across the world. One of the major factors behind this is that there is less wind in the summers now. Another factor is that many businesses who received disaster loans are not seeing the business to support these huge debts. When a business is just barely making it, they don't have funds to service debt. Lisa agreed that sales are down and the cost of goods and labor is up. While there are still jobs, retail and restaurant businesses are really hurting.

#### **OTHER NEW BUSINESS**

*There was none.*

#### **ADJOURN**

Lisa Farquharson adjourned the meeting at 10:51 am.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 7, 2024, location TBD.

*Respectfully submitted by Jill Brandt, Administrative Assistant*