

WASCO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
THURSDAY, March 19, 2015
Maupin City Park
206 Bakeoven Rd, Maupin, OR

ATTENDANCE

COMMISSION MEMBERS: Joan Silver, Kathy Ursprung, Fred Justesen, Dan Durow, Gary Grossman, Mary Kramer, Frank Kay and Greg Johnson

EDC STAFF: Amanda Hoey and Carrie Pipinich

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Joan Silver called the meeting to order at 9:02 am. There was a quorum present.

MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 19, 2015

Frank Kay moved to approve the minutes of the February 19, 2015 meeting with the correction of forest “collaborative” on the last page. Greg Johnson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

MAUPIN MAYOR WELCOME

Frank noted that things were going well in Maupin. They are working on the new City Hall, Library and Civic Center project as well as development of the park in downtown.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION ROLE UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION

Amanda noted that the shift in role presented a lot of opportunity and flexibility, but that staff wanted to work with the Commission to further define the EDC’s progress forward. She noted that direct input from the EDC could support developing an effective structure and create the foundation for progress.

Carrie reviewed the memorandums provided to the group related to implementing the role change through structural changes and committee formation.

Joan asked the group for their input and understanding of the overarching role. Fred noted he had some questions about what it meant. Carrie reviewed the three items laid out in the Order adopted. They include: remaining an information source for the BOCC on economic development related activities; providing leadership on county wide economic development issues, and collaborating with and providing technical assistance to local communities to accomplish economic development projects. Joan noted that the EDC is the only entity working in all of Wasco County that has a purely economic development focus.

Discussion:

Dan Durow noted that the proposed shift would move some of the workload to the Commissioners from staff. Amanda noted that this would be based on each individual Commissioner’s ability to engage, but that better utilizing the expertise and knowledge around the table could be very beneficial. Dan agreed that if the Commissioners were able, it would be a benefit but that there was still significant work to be accomplished around the county. Dan indicated that he liked the committee structure as the hands-on aspect was a good approach.

Greg noted that working together to increase investment and move projects forward would demonstrate the EDC's ability to impact the community. Gary noted that providing technical assistance and formulating committees, if they were successful, would generate a significant amount of additional work for staff. Kathy noted that there was no reason the EDC committees could not partner with other entities and community members to accomplish the work at hand.

Dan Durow asked about the budget from the county and if MCEDD wanted to continue the contract. Amanda stated that the changing role is important and therefore MCEDD plans to continue to engage to shepherd the EDC into this more active phase. She shared the budget request to the County. Frank offered to write statements on the value the EDC has provided and its critical past and future support.

Frank asked what the committees would look like. Carrie noted that an example of how the committees could work is the Broadband Committee. Staff work with an EDC Commissioner (Frank Kay), and volunteers from the SWA Internet Capacity Committee to address broadband access challenges. This effort was also able to leverage additional funding to provide more staff time. Frank suggested consideration of subject versus project oriented committees. Joan also suggested geographic focus areas as a potential approach as well. She noted that some items, like industrial lands and broadband could have a broader focus but that working on, for example, Dufur's water study, could be a more focused geographic project.

Mary asked if staff would attend all committee meetings. Amanda noted that it would depend on the projects or topics taken on. She noted that with some topics the technical assistance provided through professional staff was needed, but for others it could be relied upon less.

Dan noted he liked the idea of moving projects forward. He noted that the Community Enhancement Process is an opportunity for each community to annually highlight their projects and express concerns. He stated that a primary value of the EDC is providing a forum and voice for our rural communities to communicate with County leadership. The EDC focusing on taking action on those projects could provide a huge value to the process as well.

Dan also noted that the number of proposed committees would be overwhelming to staff and should be focused down given the resources available. Dan proposed that the Industrial Lands and Community Enhancement Projects committees could be combined as they are really both about moving projects forward. Joan concurred.

Mary noted that a lot of people are working on "Open for Business" and business promotion activities so the EDC should not duplicate efforts. She noted focusing on community enhancement projects was her priority. Kathy noted that perhaps the "open for business" and marketing aspects should be incorporated to help sell projects more effectively.

Greg noted that infrastructure is key, and that communities and business cannot function without them. He noted that the EDC had a lot of technical expertise around the table. He felt he brought leadership and ability to move projects forward to his position. He noted that working with communities to accomplish projects would have the biggest impact. He suggested having commissioners designated to call individual projects in our top ranking to provide assistance and obtain regular updates.

Joan asked if perhaps a 3rd committee could focus in on specific projects, be a sort of “roving committee” that identified a project and moved it forward. Greg noted he liked the idea of working on projects to see them through.

Fred encouraged the group to have a focus on both community enhancement and bringing in business. That they were two different funding streams, and both necessary for economic development in the County. He noted that collaboration with other entities on this could be beneficial.

There was conversation about further developing project proposals to better reflect where the projects stand, and community buy in. Amanda noted that this was part of the technical assistance that could be provided.

Mary noted that to her, projects that stood out as key to supporting communities included the Dufur and Wamic water projects. She shared that Dufur has some momentum going and a strong interest in focusing in on key projects. Kathy agreed that these two projects were a good place to focus.

Fred noted that supporting bringing in jobs could help to provide the tax base needed to make these investments in infrastructure. Greg agreed but also noted that it was hard to site businesses without the infrastructure already in place. Gary noted that the Port is a good example of how this works. As soon as they had all of the pieces in place for their industrial park, they started marketing the land so that they would have opportunities lined up as they complete it. Dan noted that water is key to not only business development and investment but also to community survival.

Dan proposed focusing on committees defined by specific projects. Frank noted that we should consider keeping the broader overarching committees related to broadband and industrial lands in addition to having specific committees.

Frank also noted that the EDC’s support working with Maupin to develop their economic development plan had a strong impact. They were able to identify focus areas and local partners to take on each of those areas and move projects forward after that assistance.

Joan noted that there seemed to be general agreement on the broad direction of moving to quarterly full EDC meetings and more regular working group meetings.

Amanda noted that another item on the agenda was to discuss the Community Enhancement Project process, and let the group make any adjustments as the process had been relatively rushed to meet deadlines for submission to the regional process.

Gary noted that the ranking was flawed if the EDC was focused on providing technical assistance. He noted that it was too focused on readiness to proceed rather than willingness from the community to proceed. Fred concurred that local buy in was significant to moving projects forward in rural communities. Dan noted that he didn't think that the ranking process needed to be changed as it provided high rankings to projects that were seeking funding currently, but that in future it would be helpful to ask each Commissioner to inform staff of the projects they think would have the most impact. Greg noted that he would have liked to have more time to talk with the communities and ask questions. He noted that perhaps a longer meeting would be beneficial, or more focus on this information throughout the year. The group agreed that there was no need to revisit the ranking for this year, but to include the question related to where the most impact could be had for the Commissioners as an additional portion of the process. This would lead to two ranks next year 1) the economic impact ranking and 2) areas where the EDC can provide assistance ranking.

Joan noted that consensus seemed to have formed around project focused committees. She asked for proposals for projects to move forward. There was consensus that discussing projects was more effective than doing an additional ranking exercise related to picking projects to work with. Mary noted that Dufur and Wamic Water System Needs Assessments and one of the Mosier projects seemed like good fits for the EDC. The group concurred.

Mary Kramer moved to focus on committees for Dufur, Wamic, and Mosier along with the existing broadband committee. Gary Grossman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with discussion on an option to further review options for the "open for business" committee.

Amanda asked about hosting the quarterly meetings throughout the County if the group saw value in this. She noted that hosting the meetings in the three areas identified for support this year could fit well. The group concurred.

Carrie reviewed the memo related to adding an additional Commissioner. She requested input from the group on what focus they would like to see.

Discussion:

Gary noted that some sort of utilities representative would be beneficial as the projects the group wanted to focus on were mostly utility and infrastructure related. Greg concurred that some sort of engineering or water system expertise would be helpful. Joan asked about public utility focus. Dan noted it should be someone with interests outside of The Dalles. Frank noted that outreach should be done to the SWA related to potential candidates that could fill this role. There was consensus in the group that there should be outreach to specific individuals thought to be best suited to filling the role after it was published. Staff noted they would work to get information out and hope to have applications for consideration at the next EDC meeting.

BROADBAND COMMITTEE REPORT

Staff provided an overview of the broadband survey results. Of note was the significant concern about speed and reliability in service and the number of respondents saying that they either had home based businesses or teleworked. Next steps with the survey include inventorying assets available to support access and working with the ISPs to determine if a business case can be found or if gaps in funding need to be addressed. Staff also hosted a Gorge Broadband Consortium regional meeting focused on exploring collaboration and leverage opportunities to support increasing broadband access in the region. Outcomes included exploring “dig once” best practices, working to support increased utilization of federal broadband programs in the region, and continuation of regional meetings.

Meeting Adjourn at 12:05PM

The next meeting will be April 16th at 10 am in The Dalles at MCEDD’s office with a call in option set up as well.

Submitted by Carrie Pipinich, EDC Staff