

VALDEZ ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION COMMISSION

Minutes

Wednesday June 1, 2016

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REGULAR AGENDA - 7:00 PM

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

Commission *Chair Amanda Bauer*
Members *Chair Pro-Tempore David Dengel*
Present: *Commission Member Keith Thomas*
Commission Member Rhonda Wade
Commission Member Scott Hicks
Commission Member Mike Meadors
Commission Member Colleen Stephens (delayed)

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approval of the Regular Meeting Minutes of May 18, 2016

MOTION: Commission Member Mike Meadors moved, seconded by Commission Member Rhonda Wade, to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of May 18th, 2016.

VOTE ON THE MOTION: 6 yeas, 1 absent (Colleen Stephens-delayed). MOTION CARRIED.

IV. PUBLIC APPEARANCES

1. Dustin Huebner, Tailgate Alaska - Economic Impact of the Event

V. PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

VI. PUBLIC HEARINGS

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

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Mr. Cotten explained that Ms. Houston has been involved in this program, but the purpose of this is to incorporate topics that they have had several discussions about and what they are trying to do with the Commission. Lots of information and data collection has been very useful for things around town. Ms. Houston and he sat down and called the person who runs this business program with the state. It was brought to this Commission, not to endorse it but to bring the individual to Valdez, or get them on the phone to answer questions the Commissioners might have. He explained that before they do that he wanted to know if they thought the business community would benefit.

Mr. Cotten explained this is a fairly new program. It is a business assistance program. Ms. Houston explained that it is a partnership to provide training to the communities that are interested. Her center was engaged in the training originally, but she was unsure on what training options the State is offering now. Commissioner Dengel questioned who they were training. He asked, is it train the trainer. Ms. Houston explained that is basically the idea. She explained that the page Mr. Cotten attached was really the best sum up of what the program is trying to do. It is to build trust across the business community, connect them to resources to grow their business or prevent them from leaving the community; and training businesses that don't have succession plans and train them on how to do succession planning, and it is also about collecting data. Her center was responsible for working with any local organization that wanted to spearhead this initiative. It is a tool that is advantageous to the community as a whole.

Commissioner Meadors asked if Tailgate Alaska would be a good example of someone who this process might help. He stated that Dustin sat there and told them that they wanted to expand. If there is a track record on this template that they provide it would be good to find out more. If it has been successful and they would be willing to share on what has worked it would not hurt them. Ms. Houston explained that it is new in Alaska, but it is the bread and butter of economic development in the Lower 48. This is what economic development organizations are focusing on. Strengthening the business community by using this tool.

Commissioner Stephens arrived at the meeting.

Chair Bauer questioned Mr. Cotten if he wants the Commission to give direction to bring an individual to Valdez to give them information on the program. Mr. Cotten stated that it is to bring out the person or have them on the line to answer questions on that program or other programs.

Chair Bauer stated it seemed like the Commission would like more information. One way or another finding out more information.

2. Discussion Item: Collaboration Opportunities with ED Commission and Other Entities (PWSC, P&H Commission, Beautification Task Force)

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Mr. Cotten expressed they have now met with the three groups - Ports & Harbors, Prince William Sound College, and the Beautification Task Force. He explained that they feel that they were missing components in integrating with the organizations without doing their business. There are things that the commission could engage with them more. It's finding how to do that. The Ports & Harbors Commission hasn't identified a set plan yet and it is not clear how to work collaboratively with them yet.

Ms. Von Barga explained that it is important to engage as several items in the draft economic strategy relate to the work of the P&H Commission. It is important the priorities in the waterfront master plan and the economic diversification strategy are in concert with each other.

Ms. Houston expressed she had two questions. If the Harbor uplands is going to be discussed at the end of summer, do they need to put a date on it? Question two is how does this Commission stay updated in the interim?

Commissioner Dengel questioned if it was possible to be updated at each meeting? Commissioner Stephens explained that between Ms. Von Barga and herself they could accomplish it. Bringing in the City Manager to give that update would be the best option.

Ms. Von Barga explained that having a meeting with the Ports and Harbors Commission right now, even though the discussion on the uplands is starting to take off, would be an opportunity to look at it with fresh eyes. Questions of whether it is the best design or is the best option for the community scares people into thinking that it would stop the project while they want to continue moving forward since the process has taken many years to get to this point. It would be good to have the ED Commission come in to look at things from the economic perspective to help re-enforce that the project needs to provide the most economic return possible on the investment.

Ms. Houston questioned when they would like to meet with the Ports and Harbors Commission? Ms. Von Barga stated they should try for the second meeting in July.

Ms. Von Barga explained that the college issue with Mr. O'Conner has been brought up numerous times. A program hasn't been developed so it is hard to implement anything until that happens. Ms. Houston questioned if they should send a letter to Mr. O'Conner explaining in detail. Chair Bauer questioned if they should send a letter, or have another meeting with Mr. O'Conner? Commissioner Wade suggested that maybe it would be good to contact a person high up then Mr. O'Conner to explain things like Mining don't have much of a connection to Valdez, and it would be hard to attract people here for it. Trades are very needed. Commissioner Meadors suggested a letter because it would help the Commission clarify points they wanted to make. Ms. Von Barga stated she would take that to the City Manager because he is the one communicating with Mr. O'Conner on the exchange.

Ms. Houston stated that with the zoning and abatement needing to be a priority is there anything this Commission can do to back that or emphasize whether it is a

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staffing need or a directive need -something that the department can try and focus on it more. Ms. Von Bargaen suggested that it could come in the form of a memo from the Commission if they think it is a priority. This should be done by asking the City Manager and Council to consider it a priority as they go into the budget timeframe. Look at staff and financial allocation for abatement.

Commissioner Dengel stated that there was something in this year's budget. Ms. Von Bargaen stated that there is a position for a Senior Planner and a Housing Authority position that are funded. Part of that issue is space. Space needs have been scheduled with the City Council for a work session in mid July.

3. Discussion Item: ADA Accessibility as an Economic Development Opportunity

Mr. Cotten explained that Assistant City Manager Todd Wegner mentioned this subject at the last meeting. He explained that it brought up some interesting points on whether there are possibilities there to enhance Valdez for tourists or residents living here to make this community more accessible. Access is an important issue to a high percentage of the population.

Chair Bauer stated that the City buildings are not even accessible. If they talk about moving Community Development to the Airport, how would Ms. Von Bargaen get up to her office, there is not an elevator. It is a really big deal to watch tourists that are 90 years old try and go up the stairs at the Best Western and try and take their luggage with them. It includes a larger portion of the population than people realize. It is not just people in wheel chairs, it is broader than that. Right now the ramps taking people down to the boats are challenging. There has to be significant space on a ramp to be able to turn a wheel chair around. She asked if this is being considered with the new harbor design. It reflects poorly on a community that they do not have basic accessible needs.

Ms. Von Bargaen explained that even if something meets the letter of the law, stating that it is ADA accessible, does not make it functional. There is a store in town that the doors are so heavy that they cannot be opened by herself, an elderly person, or someone in a wheel chair. It was not an experience that makes anyone feel good, or make them feel like they are independent enough to do something. The door probably meets the ADA letter of the law but that does not mean anyone with a disability can functionally use it.

Ms. Von Bargaen stated that when they start talking about making a community more livable, and the quality of life, it is not just about when you can get around in the snow. It is about people being able to function as independently as they can on their own. Having minimum accessibility standards so that residents and visitors can have the maximum quality of life besides the restrictions of weather.

Ms. Von Bargaen explained that there had been some discussions that a program could be used as a tool. The City could cover the cost of an architect (either local or visiting) to go to the Commercial buildings owners on a voluntary basis and conduct an ADA

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evaluation of the property. That way when the business owners do renovations, the information would be available to them and they could take it into consideration. It would be an amazing tool that the City could provide. Another way to look at it is for the City to do matching grants for business owners. If they do make ADA changes, the City could match them up to a certain amount. They are incentives that the City could help to improve accessibility.

Commissioner Stephens explained that there are several groups that already exist that they could use to come in and do assessments. They have options of going into hotels and gave them plans on how to modify and they know what is achievable for a business and what is not. It might be a conversation to have with those groups to see what recommendations they have and how they have helped communities move forward.

Chair Bauer stated that this will take a lot of support from the Council. It is known that businesses have complained to Community Development on the costs of making their businesses ADA compliant. They also ask for permission to not comply.

The Commission discussed and agreed that they would like to follow up on this item. Ms. Houston questioned who would bring this item to City Council? Commissioner Hicks stated it should start in house.

IX. REPORTS

Mr. Cotten explained that the luncheon with the business community would be on June 8th. They had several RSVP's already.

Ms. Von Barga explained the RFQ she handed out has to do with the branding and marketing plan. It is on the City Council agenda for the Council to review and approve on June 7th. Comments need to be to her by Monday. Ms. Von Barga stated that the RFP for housing would likely be on their June 15th agenda.

X. COMMISSION BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

XI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business Chair Bauer adjourned the meeting at 9:17 P.M.