

Harmony EDA Minutes

February 2, 2023
7:30 AM

Community Center
Council Room

Present: Kerry Kingsley, Steve Donney, Andy Batstone, Greg Schieber, and Michael Himlie

Also Present: Allan Dahl, Erica Thilges, Jill Huffman, Jacqui VanMinsel, Becky Jones, Allison Whalen, Samantha Grabau, Ron Zeigler, and Chris Giesen

The regular meeting was called to order at 7:31 AM by Kerry Kingsley.

Minutes

The board reviewed the minutes of the January 5, 2023 meeting. Motion by Schieber, second by Himlie to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Batstone entered the meeting at 7:32 AM.

Financial Reports & Claims

The board reviewed the loan portfolio. All loans were current. There were no payment claims. Motion by Schieber, second by Donney to approve the financial report. Motion carried unanimously.

Guests

The chair recognized two different guests that wished to address the board. Ron Zeigler, President/CEO of CEDA was present to thank the city for its continued support and discussed several updates, new, and ongoing programs provided by CEDA.

Jill Huffman and Jacqui VanMinsel of Harmony Telephone/Spring Grove Communications/MiBroadband/Mabel Telephone were present to give a brief update on the growth of their companies. They mentioned that they now have 22 employees across 3 locations. The fiber to the home project in Harmony is making progress; the system will be ready to turn on in the southeast quadrant of Harmony soon with the southwest and north sides of town following. The entire project should be done in 2023. Huffman noted that local Harmony Telephone employees will help install equipment in Harmony resident's homes.

Harmony Real Estate Update

No report was given due to a last minute scheduling conflict.

New Home Rebate Marketing

Giesen reported that he and Kingsley had issued a press release the prior week and that all of the local TV stations and Rochester Post Bulletin had picked it up, covering the new home rebate program updates.

The board reviewed a quote for new signage to promote the program, similar to what was done with the original program. A quote from Kelly Printing and Signs totaled \$600 for 50 full color double sided signs with posts. The board reviewed the quote and draft artwork. Motion by Himlie, second by Batstone to purchase the signage as quoted using the draft artwork. Motion carried unanimously.

Bike Trail Project

The board discussed the status of the bike trail extension project. Giesen reported that local legislators would soon introduce bills to provide the needed funding to finish the entire bike trail construction. Currently the state has about \$1.4 million from the 2018 bonding bill and because of inflation, another \$4 million is needed to complete the project to the Iowa border and to Niagara Cave. Giesen said he would keep the board posted on the status of the project and legislation.

The board discussed submitting an application to LCCMR for construction funding. Consensus was to have staff submit an application by the March 31, 2023 deadline. It was noted that costs should be included in the grant to provide for project management/oversight.

The poor condition of the current trail from Harmony to Preston was also discussed.

Industrial Park Maintenance

The board discussed maintenance of the industrial park property. Consensus was to get quotes on removing the fence and planting prairie/wildflowers, particularly in the approximately 8 acre portion that is currently farmed with a crop. Giesen will follow up.

Possible Collaborative Project

Giesen discussed a possible collaborative project between multiple existing organizations in the community. After the brief discussion at the last meeting in regards to the historical society's elevator project, Giesen reported that he and others had several conversations about how to help move that project along with other possible projects forward. That, perhaps there would be an opportunity for the board to help coordinate efforts to leverage larger possibilities for the elevator/visitors center/village green area as a whole. Given the area's interesting characteristics, visibility, location, proximity to amenities/downtown, need for renovation in some cases, and that the area is already under public ownership – could an advisory committee made up of interested stakeholders be formed to create a collaborative plan for the area? An example given was, if work is needed at the elevator, visitors center, and with the village green properties, would it be better to coordinate those efforts in conjunction with the other amenities like the trail head, parking, downtown, splash pad, etc... which would result in a better cohesive plan/use of the property and be more attractive for outside sources of funding like grants. Giesen noted that this was merely a preliminary discussion at this point to gauge interest before spending any time on it. He wanted to gauge the board and the city council's interest. Both the historical society and chamber of commerce, along with individual community leaders, have already indicated an interest. He also noted that if anything were to move forward it would likely be a multi year project. The board discussed. Schieber mentioned he would be willing to volunteer for such an advisory committee should it form. Motion by Himlie, second by Schieber to recommend that the

city council consider authorizing an exploratory committee to preliminarily start talking about the opportunity of a refresh to the village green area, in conjunction with existing stakeholders. Motion carried unanimously.

Development Agreement Status Check

The status of the compliance with two development agreements were discussed. It was reported that since the last meeting, the Hammel House agreement payment for 2022 had been received but that the On the Crunchy Side taxes were still unpaid. Donney volunteered to talk with the owners and report back to the board.

Chamber of Commerce Report

Allison Whalen gave the chamber report. Whalen expressed her excitement about a possible project to refresh the village green area. She reported that the recent chamber annual meeting went well and that her board continues to work on an update to their organization's mission, vision, and values statements. She reported that the taste of the trail event lead by Root River Trail towns will be ending its current format but that another event will take its place. She continues to coordinate with CEDA for a March 1st educational event to be held at Harmony Spirits. Chamber board member Erica Thilges reported that the downtown wayfinding signage project is now fully funded and that the signs have been ordered, she was still hoping for installation before April.

Prospects/Community Update

Giesen gave an update on prospects.

Himlie asked the board about crosswalk painting and upgrades to the alley on the east side of Main Ave. Donney recommended he bring those items directly to city council or to a council committee for further discussion.

There was no other business.

Hearing no objections, Kingsley adjourned the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 9:30 AM.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for March 2, 2023 at 7:30 AM at the Community Center.