

Harmony EDA Minutes

May 4, 2023
7:30 AM

Community Center
Council Room

Present: Kerry Kingsley, Greg Schieber, and Michael Himlie

Also Present: Amy Bishop, Cindy Ofstedal, Becky Jones, Kent Whitcomb, Allison Whalen, and Chris Giesen

The regular meeting was called to order at 7:32 AM by Kerry Kingsley.

Minutes

The board reviewed the minutes of the April 6, 2023 meeting. Motion by Himlie, second by Kingsley to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Financial Reports & Claims

The loan portfolio and new home rebate report were reviewed. All loans were current and two new home rebates had been awarded. The board reviewed the payment claim for \$4,200 from Randy Barnes for removal of the tree line, brush, and fence that runs through a section of the industrial park. Giesen reported that the work was completed. Motion by Schieber, second by Himlie to approve the financial report and payment claim as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

MiEnergy Report

Kent Whitcomb from MiEnergy was present to give an update on projects from MiEnergy Cooperative. He noted that he was available to be a resource for not only electric needs but also on economic development projects. He also gave an update on several solar grant projects the cooperative is working on. The board thanked him for his work.

Experience Harmony 3

The board discussed continuing a third iteration of the Experience Harmony place making planning effort. Schieber noted that the city's comprehensive plan was still being worked on and wondered if starting Experience Harmony 3 now might duplicate efforts. Himlie agreed, noting that more information may be learned at an upcoming city-led meeting for the comprehensive plan. Schieber agreed to ask questions and bring back information about the comprehensive plan that might be helpful for EDA project planning efforts. It was agreed that waiting for the comprehensive plan to be finished prior to initiating the board's own project planning efforts may be worthwhile. Kingsley thought it would be good to discuss this item again at the next meeting, once Schieber can investigate further and report back, as well as allow absent board members a chance to give their thoughts. Consensus was to wait until more information could be gathered.

Digital Marketing: Home Rebate Program

Giesen presented a proposal to market the new home rebate program in a more strategic way than had been done in the past. It was suggested that a dedicated social media

presence targeting likely applicants could produce better results and build a base to prove Harmony's market potential to new residential developers. In working with Becky Jones for ideas and best practices for digital marketing, she brought several other ideas forward that would target the strongest audience. Creating a dedicated and active Facebook/Instagram page that is updated multiple times per week to keep information at the top of the feed/interact with prospects, and create content/buy advertisements on digital platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Zillow.com and Realtor.com were several of such ideas. Because of the ongoing maintenance and attention this type of marketing would require, Giesen suggested that having a third party assist would be beneficial. The board discussed, Jones explained additional thoughts for action items and measuring results. Jones offered her services at a rate of \$100 per month through the end of 2023 to create, maintain, buy ads, report metrics, and otherwise run such a program. Giesen recommended engaging with Jones through the end of 2023 to provide such services (\$800) and providing \$1,650 for a digital ad buy budget, all from the EDA marketing budget (\$2,450 total). The board discussed. Motion by Himlie, second by Schieber to approve the digital marketing project as proposed. Motion carried unanimously.

Industrial Park Maintenance

The board reviewed a quote from Mayer Seed and Solutions for approximately \$1,000 – 1,200 to seed eastern portion of the industrial park (~4 acres) that was recently planted with crops. This quote would make the area look similar to the rest of the undeveloped park with a regular grass mix. A quote for prairie grass was still forthcoming. The board noted that they preferred the prairie grass option if it was affordable. Himlie suggested recent prices he saw would be economical, especially for saving on maintenance. Amy Bishop was present and gave Giesen additional information and contacts. Giesen will investigate and advise the board chair. Consensus was that at least for now, only the bare ~4 acres on the eastern side would be replanted, and if successful the board may consider replanting the northern area at a later date. Motion by Himlie, second by Schieber to approve up to \$1,200 for planting the ~4 acre eastern portion with prairie grass, under the board chair's discretion. Motion carried unanimously.

Chamber of Commerce Report

Allison Whalen was present to give the chamber report. She said that they are getting ready for this year's 4th of July event and looking at new activities for teens for the festival. June 5th will be the ribbon cutting for the new splash pad. Whalen has been attending various regional training events, too. The chamber is finishing the production of a new tourism map and their rebranding effort. In addition, they are updating their website, and the new member management software is working well. Whalen thanked volunteer Ralph Beaström for all of his work in renovating the tourism/historical society exhibits at the Visitor Center. She also noted that twin cities TV station KSTP will be hosting a live segment from Gabby Lou's restaurant for their morning show on May 8th.

Bike Trail Update

Giesen reported that there were no new updates on the legislative funding for the bike trail.

Small Cities Block Grant Update

Giesen noted that the small city block grant is now actively being rolled out. Representatives from CEDA have started contacting businesses owners and representatives from SEMCAC are contacting single family homeowners. There was not enough interest from eligible residential rental unit owners to be awarded funds for rehab of residential rental units unfortunately. Business owners and residents will be contacted in the order in which they returned their survey, and program representatives will check for eligibility and provide additional information.

Prospects/Community Update

Giesen gave an update on additional prospects. He reported that the industrial park prospect mentioned a few months ago is still looking at options to see what is the best fit for their business but has not committed to a purchase agreement yet.

Giesen reported that he had submitted a grant application totaling \$2,004,000 to secure a federal earmark for funding of the UV wastewater improvement project through Senators Klobuchar and Smith. This grant would fund up to 80% of the project. He said that both senators requested that this project receive federal funding and forwarded the application to the appropriations committee. The committee will determine which projects receive funding through the federal legislative process and must pass both the Senate and House, as well as be signed into law by the President. Funding may be awarded as soon as July 2023.

Giesen noted that he has had ongoing conversations with the chamber about cleaning and rehabbing the “Welcome to Harmony” community entrance signs, which are starting to show their age. In addition this conversation renewed the interest in placing a 3rd sign on Highway 139 south of the city.

There was no other business.

Hearing no objections, Kingsley adjourned the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 8:57 AM.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for June 1, 2023 at 7:30 AM at the Community Center.