

Harmony EDA Minutes

August 3, 2023
7:30 AM

Community Center
Council Room

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

Also Present: Amy Bishop, Aaron Bishop, Allan Dahl, Erica Thilges, Cindy Ofstedal, Allison Whalen, Lisa Miller, Janell Randa, Sam Grabau, 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 July 6, 2023 meeting. Motion by Himlie, second by Kingsley to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Financial Reports & Claims

The loan portfolio was reviewed. One loan payment was late, staff will follow up to get the missed payment current. There was one claim for payment in the amount of \$200 for a progress payment on the digital marketing assistance from Farm Charm/Becky Jones.

The board reviewed follow up information regarding the status of development agreement compliance. Giesen reviewed the status of the Bishop downtown grant noting that since the award was approved knowing the building was under construction, an anticipated timeline to complete the project was needed. He reviewed that timeline with the board, based on the information he confirmed with the recipients. He will include the written detail in the project file for future compliance check purposes.

The Twin City Trimmer project status was discussed. Sam Grabau updated the board on the status of the zoning permitting which had been resolved by the planning and zoning commission the evening before. Giesen noted that the property taxes were not paid yet but he had been in contact with the developer who assured they would be paid. It was noted that the development agreement requires taxes be no more than 90 days late, which would fall on August 15. Consensus of the board was remind the business of the approaching deadline and if the deadline passes without resolution of the issue, to proceed with the terms of collection detailed in the agreement.

Motion by Schieber, second by Himlie to approve the financial report as presented, including the payment of claims. Motion carried unanimously.

2024 EDA Budget

The board reviewed the proposed budget put forward by staff for 2024. Giesen reviewed a memo proposing possible projects given board initiatives and possible upcoming needs, in addition to the usual budget items. Three new initiatives were proposed for discussion: \$20,000 for renovations and repairs of the two "Welcome to Harmony" signs (including a possible 3rd sign on south 139 in 2025), \$20,000 to start a "major project" capital improvement budget to build funds towards needed infrastructure or other major business development project needs, and \$20,000 for a new city website. He noted that perhaps the website could be funded from other one-time sources but that it might be worthwhile

for the board to discuss and put forward a general recommendation. Because the website had other possible funding sources, he noted that the website request was not included in the budget detail worksheet. With the welcome sign repair and major project capital improvement fund, the total budget to be discussed totaled \$158,400 plus the usual prorated city staff expenses that are carried in the EDA budget (amounts to be determined at a later step in the city budget process). Consensus of the board that the budget request looked to be in order and that the new items should be forwarded to council for further discussion. The new website should be considered, but a source of funding was not identified.

The board heard a request from the chamber of commerce board president Erica Thilges and the other chamber board members in attendance. Thilges reported that because of financial sustainability issues with the cost of employing a full time chamber director, the chamber requested that the city create a full time tourism director position, as a city employee. The number of activities and events, as well as the attention and accolades given by visitors and residents for the chamber's great activities were discussed, too. The board discussed the concept and possible solutions and pitfalls, at length. Consensus of the board was that the chamber is a positive force for promoting the community and that the financial realities need to be solved. Three tracks for possible solutions were also discussed at length: continue forward as it has been in the past, create a hybrid city tourism/chamber position similar to what other cities have done, or create a city-only funded tourism director position. No decisions or recommendations were made but it was agreed that the situation should be discussed further by the board and city budget committee. Motion by Himlie, second by Schieber to discuss this matter further with the city budget committee and chamber board prior to the next EDA meeting for further consideration of the matter. Motion carried. Batstone volunteered to attend the meeting with the budget committee on behalf of the board.

Consideration of the proposed 2024 EDA budget was tabled pending further discussions of the chamber position question with the city budget committee.

Housing/Workforce Discussion

The board briefly continued the discussion about workforce and housing issues. Giesen noted that a few possible volunteers had been identified to discuss possible projects and solutions to create more housing in the community. The board agreed that this was a good discussion to pursue and continue.

Prospects/Community Update

Giesen gave a brief update on prospects. The board reviewed the monthly digital marketing report for the housing rebate program and Giesen reported that he was attempting to schedule a meeting with the DNR regarding bike trail project updates/next steps with the trail construction project.

There was no other business.

Hearing no objections, Kingsley adjourned the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 9:52 AM.

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