

Harmony EDA Minutes

November 1, 2018
7:30 AM

Council Room
Community Center

Present: Chris Skaalen, Steve Donney, Deb Swenson, Andy Batstone, and Kerry Kingsley

Also Present: Marsha LaFraniere, Jill Fishbaugher, Becky Hoff, Jerome Illg, and Chris Giesen

The regular meeting was called to order at 7:34 AM by Chris Skaalen

Minutes

Motion by Swenson, second by Kingsley to approve the minutes of the October 4, 2018 meeting as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Financial Reports & Claims

The status of the loan portfolio and new home rebate program were reviewed. All loans were current.

There was a request from the trail committee to join the Minnesota Parks and Trails Council at an annual rate of \$35. Giesen reported that this organization was very helpful in the promotion of the trail extension project at the Capitol and had twice included our project on their list of supported projects, even though we weren't members. Illg mentioned that legislators asked whether our project was on Parks and Trails' list was a big factor in securing funding. Staff recommended membership. Motion by Swenson, second by Batstone to join Minnesota Parks and Trails Council at the annual membership rate of \$35. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Kingsley, second by Swenson to approve the financial report as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Update from Harmony Telephone Company

Jill Fishbaugher was present to give an update on Harmony Telephone's fiber optic project. She reported that the fiber cable is in the ground and connections will be made to customers soon in the project area. She also reported that MiBroadband and their partnership with MiEnergy is now officially completed as of yesterday. They plan to add staff, which includes new staff in their Harmony office. Harmony Telephone is also laying conduit in Harmony's new residential subdivision in conjunction with the city's electric infrastructure project so that they can install fiber cable next year. They are also looking at additional fiber installs next year.

Revolving Loan Request

Giesen introduced Marsha LaFreniere, who he had been working with for several months to assist her with opening a yarn and knitting arts supply store on Main Street. Giesen reported that she had negotiated the purchase of the building occupied by Harmony ReStore and was requesting a revolving loan in the amount of \$7,700. The requested terms were 5.25% APR fixed, for 10 years, to assist with acquisition. Security on the loan would be a 2nd mortgage on the real estate financed and personal guarantees of the borrower and her husband. Giesen said that the loan committee had reviewed her

application, business plan, and financials and recommended approval. The board discussed the proposed store with the applicant and thanked her for her interest in opening in Harmony. Motion by Batstone, second by Swenson to approve the loan application as requested. Motion carried 3-0-2; Skaalen and Batstone abstained.

Fiber Internet Signage for Industrial Park

The board reviewed draft language of the addition to the Industrial Park signage. Consensus was to have the sign read “HIGH SPEED FIBER-OPTIC READY”.

Chamber of Commerce Report

Becky Hoff was present to give the chamber report. She discussed upcoming events such as Holidayfest, the tree lighting festival, small business Saturday, and breakfast with Santa. She said that half of the Harmonyopoly games have been sold, that they are working on the 2019 guidebook, and that she would be attending the southern Minnesota tourism conference.

Hoff also reviewed the latest web traffic statistics and reported that visitor center numbers were down slightly in 2018 from 2017; 6,884 compared to 7,551 last year. The board suggested that weather was likely a contribution to the shift this year as seasonal weather was not as usual this year.

Experience Harmony Projects/Goals

Giesen reminded the board that they had requested to keep Experience Harmony Goals on the monthly meeting agenda. He said he would also include the list of goals as a reminder and way to keep the ideas fresh in everyone’s minds. This month he suggested they look at the Telling Our Story goal. He and Hoff suggested a new promotional video that could focus on attracting people to live and work in Harmony. The chamber is creating a tourism promotional video and there is an opportunity to co-op some of the work; a quote for a 90 second video was received from Flying Buttress Media for \$2,025. The video could be used on the city and business websites, pushed out with digital marketing, and social media. Donney said that he would like to see a marketing plan created before committing to funding the creation of a video. The board concurred. Giesen mentioned that if the board spends dollars to bring people to the city website, they may want to consider refreshing the look so that it is attractive and current. The board discussed at length. It was agreed that the board would like additional information on creating a promotional video and requested that staff set up a meeting with Flying Buttress Media to discuss the process and expectations.

Skaalen brought up an additional goal to discuss. He suggested that the board look into a “Trash and Treasure” program to allow residents get rid of large junk items. The board discussed at length. Skaalen wanted to know who would fund the program and at what point should a budget be created. It was agreed that it was probably not an EDA expense. Motion by Kingsley, second by Skaalen to recommend to the city council that a “Trash and Treasure” event be created. Motion carried unanimously.

Strategic Planning Assistance

Giesen asked the board if it would be acceptable to offer strategic planning assistance to the group Golden Happenings. He said that he had observed a meeting of theirs and that he felt there would be many potential opportunities if the group had formal organization. That a business plan of sorts would help organize their members, finances, and create a sustainable club for residents to utilize. Especially given the average age of the community is higher than most in the region; having activities and organizations for

seniors was an important community development issue. The board agreed. Giesen said he would approach Golden Happenings and offer his assistance.

2019 CEDA Contract

Giesen presented the proposed 2019 contract from Community and Economic Development Associates (CEDA) to provide professional economic development staffing services. The contract amount totaled \$30,293, which is a 3% increase from the 2018 rate, payable quarterly and provided 1 day per week plus an extra day per month services as similar to prior years. Motion by Batstone, second by Swenson to approve the contract as proposed. Motion carried unanimously.

Swenson and Batstone left the meeting at 8:54 AM.

Prospects/Community Update

Giesen discussed several prospects and updates. He reported that he and Illg had met with Vicky Tribon and Sandy Strozyk in regards to placement of a third welcome monument on highway 139. He said that they had agreed to locate the sign south of the cemetery somewhere where it was highly visible and open, most likely south of the wooded area immediately to the south of the cemetery. They had found plans already created for this sign and needed to approach local builders to help assist with construction. Approval from MnDOT was also needed still but was not anticipated to be an issue.

It was reported that a meeting with the DNR trail planners had be set for 10 AM on November 13th, 2018 at the Visitors Center to discuss updates on the trail project.

Giesen reported that he had received a count from the property listings for the Industrial Park. They are listed with a group called Co Star for free and received 45 hits in October, they had been viewed several thousand times since being listed in approximately 2008.

Giesen reported an update on Opportunity Zones. He said that local entities are discussing creating a local fund to direct local dollars to local projects and that several inquiries had been received already. Skaalen and Donney asked to stay posted on any developments.

Giesen also reported that staff and Skaalen met with Dairyland Power Cooperative they indicated that they would like to build in the Industrial Park. The building would likely be larger than originally planned. They would come back to the board and request an option to purchase several lots in the near future and would like to design the project in 2019 with construction in 2020. However, it was noted that their board had not yet approved the project, but their staff was optimistic.

Giesen said that he had also met with several prospects, is assisting with succession planning with a business, and recently completed a USDA grant to purchase equipment for the public works department.

Hearing no objections, Skaalen adjourned the meeting at 9:40 AM.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for December 6, 2018 at 7:30 AM, at the Community Center.