

## Harmony EDA Minutes

June 7, 2018  
7:30 AM

Council Room  
Community Center

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

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

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

### **Update from Harmony Telephone Company**

Jill Fishbaugher of Harmony Telephone Company was present to give the board a quick announcement about a project they were working on. She reported that the telephone company was studying the financial and engineering feasibility of deploying fiber optic service in Harmony. While it was too preliminary to go into more detail, she said that if the feasibility studies are positive this may lead to significant investments and upgrades to current internet service in the community. She also mentioned that the timeline would likely be slow given the steps and organizations the telephone company must work with as the put such a potential project together. She said she would keep the board up to date as the project progresses. The board was very pleased and excited to hear this news. Consensus was that the board would offer whatever help it could to help the telephone company move forward. The board thanked Fishbaugher for her work and the update.

### **Minutes**

Motion by Swenson, second by Kingsley to approve the minutes of the May 3, 2018 as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Financial Reports & Claims**

The status of the loan portfolio and past due loans were discussed. The new home rebate ledger was also reviewed. There were no claims for payment. Motion by Swenson, second by Kingsley to approve the financial report as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Chamber of Commerce Report**

Becky Hoff was present to give the chamber report. She said that everything was being finalized for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration and that those activities were consuming most of her time this past month. She also reported that 715 people were at the visitor's center in May, which was down a little over May 2017 but that web traffic was up 60% over the same time period. The chamber will also be engaging Austin Public Television sponsorship to promote the area and 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration.

### **Bike Trail Extension**

Illg and Giesen announced that the Governor had signed the bonding bill into law which contained \$1.5 million for construction and \$235,000 for acquisition of the bike trail extension to Niagara Cave and the Iowa border. The board was excited this project was finally moving forward. Staff will work with the trail committee and the DNR to continue moving forward. Illg discussed that it would be to the benefit of the city to

utilize the acquisition dollars to the fullest extent possible to maximize the project. The board agreed.

### **Experience Harmony II – Public Input Meeting Results**

The board reviewed all of the ideas and projects discussed at the final public input meeting of the Experience Harmony project. At the final meeting, Giesen reported that about 20 people discussed in three small groups the ten themes the board put forward from the community survey results. The board discussed at length the projects to work on moving forward which included:

1. Continue New Home Rebate program to encourage new housing.
2. Promote and encourage a variety of housing options.
3. Strengthen enforcement/city ordinance about dilapidated properties.
4. Create a program to encourage residential rehab.
5. Improve Highway 52 to a three lane with an alternate passing lane from Harmony to Rochester.
6. Pursue local transit options (e.g. EARL/SEMCAC/etc...).
7. Pursue commuter transit options (e.g. Rochester City Lines).
8. Educate public about current solar energy options.
9. Provide recycling options at all city buildings.
10. Provide recycling options in public spaces (e.g. visitor center, main street, parks, etc...). Could Harmony Enterprises' equipment be a part of this project?
11. Look into creation of a "Trash and Treasure" town cleanup day.
12. Work with phone company to improve broadband/cable services.
13. Improve/create amenities related to the bike trail (e.g. art, interpretive information, bike rentals, and the like).
14. Create documents/promotional pieces/comparison studies that can help promote the delivery of accurate community information (cost of living/taxes too high, garbage costs, etc...).
15. Improve the city campground.
16. Construct a new city campground/assist with the creation of a private campground close to town.
17. Increase options for overnight stays in Harmony (B&Bs, AirBNB, etc...).

The board asked staff to bring these ideas back to the next meeting for further discussion, possible edits and additions, and prioritization.

### **USDA Cooperative Development Grant Opportunity**

The board discussed a grant opportunity from USDA that was brought forward by Skaalen. Giesen encouraged any board member to bring forward opportunities like this for discussion as there might be a project that can benefit. The board discussed. Consensus was that there weren't any immediate project needs that would fit this grant.

### **Prospects/Community Update**

Giesen gave several community updates. He reported that he had been contacted by the Citizens League organization about a grant opportunity for Golden Happenings. He said that the Citizens League was a statewide nonprofit that supports various community enrichment activities and they were interested in applying for a grant that was essentially "invite only" on behalf of Golden Happenings to help them grow, to become more sustainable, and to potentially replicate Golden Happenings' unique structure across Minnesota. The grant was potentially for up to \$100,000 for three years. Giesen said

there was no match or significant requirements for the city and that with the tight deadline he wasn't able to bring it to the full board but he did run it past the board president. Both Skaalen and Giesen agreed it looked like a great opportunity. The board concurred.

Giesen said that there had been a meeting set for late June to discuss the proposed Fillmore County housing study project that was discussed at the last meeting. He said himself and Illg would likely attend.

Giesen also reported that Harmony has had excellent press coverage in the last month or so, they had been covered by multiple TV and newspaper reports in regards to the distillery project, Experience Harmony, bike trail project, and new home rebate program. All brought great positive attention to the community.

**Other Business**

Consensus of the board was to poll members as to their availability for the July 5 meeting to see if it should be pushed to July 12 instead.

Hearing no objection, Skaalen adjourned the meeting at 9:29 AM.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for July 5, 2018 at 7:30 AM, at the Community Center.