

Harmony EDA Minutes

September 5, 2019
7:30 AM

Council Room
Community Center

Present: Chris Skaalen, Steve Donney, Kerry Kingsley, and Steve Sagen

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

The regular meeting was called to order at 7:33 AM by Chris Skaalen

Minutes

The board reviewed the minutes of the August 1, 2019 and August 29, 2019 meetings. Motion by Donney, second by Kingsley to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Financial Reports & Claims

The board reviewed the loan portfolio and the new home rebate ledger. All loans were current and Giesen noted that the rebate for the new Hovey residence was paid out since the last meeting. There were no claims. Motion by Skaalen, second by Kingsley to approve the financial report. Motion carried unanimously.

Harmony Telephone Update

Jill Fishbaugher was present to give an update on projects Harmony Telephone was working on. She reported that crews are now working to install fiber in the southeast subdivision and that the rest of the town will be connected by the end of next year. She also mentioned that a broadband grant is being authored to create a fiber optic ring in rural Fillmore County. The board thanked Fishbaugher for the update and the exciting news about investments in the community.

Chamber of Commerce Report

Becky Hoff was present to give the chamber report. She said that the chamber board of directors had recently interviewed four candidates as potential replacements for her as director and that the process was ongoing. She said that the board of directors is very concerned about recent city council discussion regarding moving or selling the visitor's center. She said that the location of the visitor's center is very important given the visibility and access it provides in its prominent central location. She provided a letter from the chamber explaining the concern and outlined several statistics on the benefits tourism provides to a local economy. The board discussed; it was expressed that the visitor's center provides a lot of good support for the business community and amenities (such as the trail) in the community, and that some great community assets come at a cost. Motion by Kingsley, second by Skaalen to state that the Harmony Economic Development Authority supports continuing the visitor's center in its current location. Motion carried unanimously.

Dairyland Project Update

Giesen reported that Donney, Illg, and he met with a landowner to discuss possibly purchasing about 8 acres of his that is adjacent to the east of the industrial park for the

Dairyland project and possibly create another lot or two in a future Phase III of the industrial park. He said that the meeting went well, that the landowner was open to such a discussion, and that he would get back to Giesen in about a week. The board stated that they would be open to securing an option contract and would wait to hear what the selling price would be. The board said that they would call a special meeting later this month to approve a deal if necessary, to keep the Dairyland project moving forward on schedule.

Commercial Rehab Requests

Giesen reported back to the board on the prior month's discussion regarding the creation of a commercial rehabilitation program. Giesen explained that per the board's request he had communicated with some of the businesses who requested assistance and based on those comments and internal staff discussions he had created an outline of a possible program. He said that he would be comfortable if the board didn't want to take any action as the hope among the businesses were mainly for grant dollars, but since no grant dollars were available this potential program would utilize existing funds. The potential program would be a streamlined version of the existing loan fund program and make exceptions to the rules for specific rehab projects to help make the funds more accessible and useful. The program would generally follow the existing loan fund guidelines except that for specific uses borrowers could access up to \$5,000 as an unsecured loan without underwriting or fees. The board discussed at length. It was discussed that such a small amount might not be helpful and perhaps reducing the interest rate would encourage use. However consensus was that as a loan program it shouldn't compete with other lenders or simply give away EDA resources if there wasn't a clear need. It was suggested that if the program doesn't work, it could be cancelled. Giesen also said that this was being discussed simply because there had been a number of inquiries and that no action was required. Motion by Kingsley to not move forward with creating the commercial rehabilitation program. Motion died for a lack of a second. Motion by Donney, second by Skaalen to approve the commercial rehabilitation program as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Experience Harmony Projects/Goals

The board reviewed several options for recycling bins and discussed at length various options. Giesen said that he did discuss options with Harmony Enterprises and given the logistics requirements to use their machines and the cost, both he and Harmony Enterprises thought that their options would not be feasible today. It was mentioned that Harmony Enterprises was open to future discussions and working with the board to test run some of their equipment locally. The board agreed this was a good idea, possibly using some of their equipment for events like the 4th of July if possible. Consensus was that if possible it would be best to use Harmony Enterprises but that for the time being the standard bins were most feasible. Motion by Kingsley, second by Sagen to purchase four of the standard but decorative bins for Main Street, and see how well they are utilized before purchasing more in a year or so. It was discussed that staff should seek grants, possibly from the community foundation, to assist with the cost. Motion carried unanimously.

Prospects/Community Update

Giesen mentioned that he was working with several prospects in the preliminary stages of projects. He also gave the board the most recent CEDA grant bulletin as an update of available programs, and that any questions or ideas can be discussed with him.

Other Business

Sagen asked if the board had ever considered installing electric vehicle charging stations. He thought it might make sense to reopen that discussion and possibly install a station at the trailhead park. The board discussed. Consensus was that it was a good idea and that staff would research and bring back information for further discussion.

Hearing no objections, Skaalen adjourned the meeting at 9:19 AM.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for October 3, 2019 at 7:30 AM, at the Community Center.