

## Harmony EDA Minutes

June 4, 2020  
7:30 AM

Held electronically due to the  
COVID-19 pandemic in accordance  
with Minn. Stat. § 13D.02.

Present: Chris Skaalen, Andy Batstone, Kerry Kingsley, and Steve Sagen

Also Present: Melissa Vander Plas, Devin Swanberg, Paley Gordon, 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 May 7, 2020 meeting. Motion by Batstone, second by Kingsley to approve the minutes as presented. The question was taken on the motion and the roll was called. There were 4 yeas and 0 nays as follows:

Those voting in the affirmative were:

Skaalen  
Batstone  
Kingsley  
Sagen

### **Financial Reports & Claims**

The board reviewed the loan portfolio and new home rebate program ledger. All loans were current. There was one claim for payment from CWS for digital marketing purchases in the amount of \$1,312.37. Motion by Sagen, second by Batstone to approve the financial report and payment claim as presented. The question was taken on the motion and the roll was called. There were 4 yeas and 0 nays as follows:

Those voting in the affirmative were:

Skaalen  
Batstone  
Kingsley  
Sagen

### **Trail Extension Update**

Giesen gave an update on the trail extension project. He said that the city recently received a clean review from the DNR grant department in regards to the LCCMR grant.

The board reviewed the response the DNR planning department gave to questions from the trail committee regarding the proposed trail plan amendment. Giesen said that the DNR is waiting to schedule a public input meeting on the proposed trail plan amendment until the pandemic subsides, as they are not able to hold such meetings at this time. He added that the draft trail plan amendment has not been made public yet but that the trail committee was allowed to review it prior to being published for public comment. From this, Giesen reported that the DNR planners are anticipating only building the trail segment to Iowa once there is a trail coming up from Iowa. The board discussed their

concern with this and agreed that all efforts should be made to push for full construction now.

Giesen said that the DNR grant department recommended that the city purchase “funding provided by” signage for the trail through the DNR web store to indicate that the funding was provided by LCCMR. The board concurred. It was discussed that the larger 12” x 12” sign might be most appropriate. Giesen recommended that 5 signs be purchased, one for each entrance to the trail route and one to be placed at the junction, and an extra in case there is another location identified. Each sign is \$20. The board agreed that it was important to give credit and acknowledgement to LCCMR for the funding of this project. Motion by Sagen, second by Kingsley to purchase 5, 12”x 12” “funding provided by” signs for the trail as recommended, including any necessary mounting hardware and posts. The question was taken on the motion and the roll was called. There were 4 yeas and 0 nays as follows:

Those voting in the affirmative were:

Skaalen  
Batstone  
Kingsley  
Sagen

Skaalen suggested that the board host a small reception to thank volunteers, state officials, and mark the donation of the land for the trail, to the state. The board concurred. It was agreed that such an event might make sense to hold later in the summer.

### **Joint Board Meeting: Attempt to Reschedule?**

The board again discussed hosting a joint board meeting between the city council, EDA, and Fillmore Central school district. Given the issues related to the pandemic, it was decided to take no action today and keep this item on the agenda to discuss at the next meeting.

### **Experience Harmony Projects/Goals**

Giesen gave an update on the Experience Harmony projects and goals. He stated that two of the three months of video advertising

### **Chamber of Commerce Report**

Vander Plas was present to give the chamber report. She submitted the following report in writing:

## **Harmony Area Chamber of Commerce Director’s Report ~ June 2020**

### **March through June**

~ Due to COVID-19, the visitor center building was locked from the end of March through May 31. I worked during this time and was able to be in the office to answer calls and emails. We delayed bringing back additional staff until June 1 and will not hire the second assistant as we usually do for the summer as we anticipate the number of visitors to be lower.

~ The building is now open with public restrooms and hallway brochure racks accessible to visitors. Currently the Chamber and visitor center office is closed to walk-in traffic, but it is staffed and people can call our number for help as they browse brochures. We are not yet utilizing volunteers, but may do so as

the summer progresses. The board has yet to decide when or if the office will open for walk-in traffic. If it does, we will only allow limited access and rope off our karst display and other areas to discourage people from lingering or congregating.

### **Summer events cancelled, some businesses open, others still closed**

~ The number of requests for guidebooks and other information was beginning to increase this spring as the pandemic hit, but, unfortunately, has since seen a drastic decline.

~ Our 2020 guidebook was delayed with our printer and graphic designer being on furlough during the stay-at-home orders. During this time we have been using 2019 books to fill requests. Now, the board has opted to cancel the 2020 printing for the time being as many visitor centers remain closed, Mall of America will no longer distribute our book this year and our online requests have declined significantly. We have just less than 1,000 books from 2019 that we will use until they are gone. As the summer progresses, we may consider doing a fall guide that could take us into 2021.

~ Many Harmony businesses have reopened and restaurants and bars are opening with outdoor and patio seating as of June 1. While the bike trail has remained open and has seen great use through the spring and early summer, Niagara Cave and Amish Tours of Harmony are not opening quite yet.

~ As you probably know, the board voted to cancel our Chamber-sponsored Fourth of July events. It was not an easy decision and board members were split. We had looked at several alternatives to try and make the celebration work safely, but in the end, most felt cancelling was the safest thing to do.

~ Our Explore Minnesota grant was rescinded last month, so I am working on paperwork for reimbursement for funds that had already been spent, which included the spring edition of Inspired Magazine and the billboard on Highway 52, just north of Decorah. We anticipate that the remainder of the funds that were “recalled” will be reallocated for more localized promotions – focused on day-trips and regional travel rather than out-of-state travel. This will actually work well with the “United in Harmony” promotions we are developing.

~ Through it all, I have continued the weekly newsletters to update people on the business hours and any events we’ve had.

### **Goals going forward**

~ Our new focus is working with members in any way we can to help them through the summer. We are working on a “United in Harmony” campaign for social media, our website, local publications and our newsletters. I will be doing posts similar to the “Harmony Eats” takeout guide I did in April with different categories of our businesses. We will be keeping our website updated and I am working with Michelle Quanrud (our webmaster) to design a landing page for that information. We will create a “go to” spot for our businesses’ current hours and any other community news related to Covid-19 developments/cancellations.

~ We will be creating a video of Harmony residents (volunteers and civic leaders) that can be played for visitors, with personal recommendations and insights into our community. It will contain more of a “now that you are here, you should see this” rather than “why you should visit” focus.

~ We are also trying to come up with Fourth of July celebration ideas for small, neighborhood parties that may utilize our Harmony businesses. We will also work with entities that may still be hosting events that weekend – Conservation Club, Golf Club and Fire Department?

### **Contact me**

As always, feel free to contact me in the office on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, as well as additional hours on some Wednesdays and Fridays. My office number is 507-886-2469 and my cell is 507-450-5971.

The board discussed the report at length. Batstone commented that the chamber board had been meeting weekly to touch base and discuss the items in Vander Plas’ report, in particular to discuss event status and general chamber/visitor center operations. He

added that none of the decisions were made lightly. The chamber board did not want to create any potential issues by having a robust 4<sup>th</sup> of July event that would attract large outside crowds, and they also did not want to spend dollars on activities like purchasing guidebooks (or other marketing) unnecessarily if there wasn't the prospect of a return on that investment. The board concurred that the chamber was taking a prudent approach. It was discussed that perhaps additional local marketing or notice could be given (perhaps a flier or social media outreach) to clarify what 4<sup>th</sup> of July activities are being held, however it was noted that even the few events that have not been officially cancelled yet had a high likelihood that they would be cancelled. The situation was still very fluid, several members noted. It was agreed that that the chamber is handling the situation well.

### **Prospects/Community Update**

Giesen gave an update on prospects. Giesen said that he had relayed the city council resolution regarding the speed study on highway 52 to MnDOT but has not had a response as to their next steps yet, even after a few follow up messages. Kingsley said that he had heard that a MnDOT crew was recently in town working on the speed study. The board was pleased to hear that update.

Giesen gave an update from Harmony Telephone Company, which said they were hiring for a few office positions and working on securing funding for additional fiber optic internet projects. It was noted that fiber construction in Harmony might not begin until late 2020 or early 2021 because of recent unforeseen delays.

Giesen reported that a grant that he had helped write for about \$22,500 for the ambulance department was awarded by the Minnesota Department of Health. This 100% grant was to give ambulance crew members additional pay and for personal protection equipment. He also noted that he had submitted a grant application to USDA for about \$21,500 for a new ambulance cot and motorized lift system. This award has not been made yet.

### **Other Business**

Skaalen inquired if the board wished to meet as scheduled on July 2, 2020 or if they wanted to push it back to July 9, 2020 to avoid the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday. Consensus was to meet on the normal meeting date in July. Skaalen indicated that he preferred to meet in person as opposed to the electronic meetings allowed during the pandemic; the board concurred.

Hearing no objections, Skaalen adjourned the meeting at 8:46 AM.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for July 2, 2020 at 7:30 AM at the Community Center.