

Harmony EDA Minutes

September 3, 2020
7:30 AM

Community Center
Council Room

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

Also Present: Melissa Vander Plas, Devin Swanberg, and Chris Giesen

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

Minutes

The board reviewed the minutes of the August 6, 2020 meeting. Motion by Donney, second by Kingsley to approve the minutes as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Financial Reports & Claims

The board reviewed the loan portfolio and new home rebate program ledger. All loans were current. It was noted that the Batstone CPA and Estelle's Eatery loans were one payment away from completion. There was one claim from the Harmony Area Chamber of Commerce for the second half 2020 funding support in the amount of \$13,250. Motion by Sagen, second by Batstone to approve the financial report and claim as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Chamber of Commerce Report

Melissa Vander Plas was present to give the chamber report. She mentioned that the first half of August saw a decent flow of visitors, but the second half was noticeably slower. It was even slower at the visitor's center when the parking lot reconstruction began. She also acknowledged the letter she had submitted requesting the chamber's 2021 operations funding. She noted that the 2021 request was the same as 2020 in the amount of \$26,500. Giesen mentioned that the board had previously included this amount in the 2021 EDA budget approved last month. Consensus of the board was that no further action was needed to adopt the 2021 funding for the chamber as requested.

Vander Plas also submitted the following written report:

Harmony Area Chamber of Commerce Director's Report ~ September 2020

August Activities

~ Hosted promotions and marketing committee meetings. Fourth of July committee will resume meeting in September. We are optimistically planning several fall and winter activities, including city-wide garage sales on Sept. 19, Customer Appreciation on Oct. 15, a modified Haunted Harmony on Oct. 31, Small Business Saturday promotions in November and community tree lighting and Santa in December.

~ Began creating garage sale map and listings (deadline Sept. 14)

~ Reached out to members through mask distribution, membership and visitor guide advertising.

~ Created newsletters and forwarded information to members and residents

~ Worked with visitors and information for potential visitors when Annette and/or volunteer was not present

~ Reviewed several marketing opportunities

- ~ Attended Trail Towns Meeting, worked with its marketing committee for coop ad opportunities
- ~ Developed letter to Holiday Fest vendors for other fall “market” opportunities
- ~ Developed and sent letter to local Amish businesses with advantages for membership
- ~ Weeded out file cabinets and shredded, shredded, shredded anything over 7 years old

August visitor center activity

~ Annette was on vacation this week and will compile numbers for the Oct. meeting.

Goals going forward

- ~ Organize city-wide garage sales and business promotions on Sept. 19, invite local vendors to set up a “market” near distillery.
- ~ Continue membership follow-ups with former members who have not yet renewed in 2020 as well as with visitor guide advertisers regarding 2021 ads
- ~ Host Ribbon Cutting for Mindy Jones at Tin, Rust & Harmony – 10 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 19. Please mark this on your calendars and plan to attend.
- ~ Work with Promotions Committee to organize customer appreciation event, Haunted Harmony and other events coming in November and December.

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.

Experience Harmony Goals: Residential Rehab Discussion

The board reviewed a revised draft of the New Home Rebate Program that was proposed to allow rebates for major home renovations. Major renovations of currently vacant or seriously dilapidated properties that increase the home’s taxable value by at least \$50,000 (as determined by the county assessor) and increase the housing stock of the community would qualify for at least a \$2,000 rebate. It also proposes to similarly create \$3,000 and \$4,000 rebates for improvements resulting in \$75,000-\$125,000 increases in taxable value. The proposed changes would leave the existing criteria and rebate schedule for new home construction unchanged.

The board reiterated concerns from the last meeting regarding clearly expressing the purpose of the proposed changes – the board strongly agreed that the goal of the program is to create new housing stock and living units in the community and not award rebates for home improvement projects. Giesen mentioned that this goal is now stated prominently in the proposed guidelines and that those guideline changes will prohibit general improvement projects such as kitchen remodeling, additions, and basement finishing. The board discussed. Motion by Donney, second by Batstone to approve the revised guidelines as presented and to recommend approval from the city council. Motion carried unanimously.

Potential City CARES Act Relief Program Discussion

Swanberg and Giesen presented information in regards to the federal CARES Act funding the city received. Donney had requested that the board discuss and make a recommendation to the city council on the creation of a business relief program with a portion of the \$77,000 Harmony received. The board discussed at length. Swanberg noted that the city had a number of items that could utilize even more than the \$77,000 but that potentially \$20,000 or so could be utilized for a business grant program if the council desired.

Donney left the meeting at 8:44 AM.

The board was concerned that with such a small amount there wouldn't be a meaningful amount to be able to award to businesses in need and also evenly distribute the dollars. After extensive discussion, it was suggested that perhaps with the amount of money available it might be more beneficial for the city to utilize any remaining funds by purchasing cleaning supplies, PPE, and other items to protect community facilities like the visitor's center, community center, and library. The city would then also distribute such supplies and PPE to businesses that are in need potentially through the chamber of commerce. Swanberg mentioned that when possible, he would recommend purchasing such supplies locally, too. The combined benefit of supplies for the businesses and not having to levy for these expenses or use city general funds was thought to be the same or more beneficial than simply granting \$500 to potentially only a portion of businesses in Harmony, and therefore would have a much greater overall impact on the sustainability and health of the community. The board agreed.

Prospects/Community Update

Giesen gave an update on prospects. He reported that USDA announced that the grant application he wrote for a new ambulance cot and motorized lift was awarded in the amount of \$21,500. He also is writing two separate but similar grants for a potential fire department truck and off road vehicle purchase.

Giesen asked the board if they wanted to utilize the remaining amount of digital marketing budget for this year, which amounted to about one month of ads. Consensus of the board was to continue to wait on additional digital marketing and roll this year's unspent budget into the 2021 budget.

Giesen mentioned that he had not heard back from a recent industrial park prospect, but that in the last discussion they were still interested in development in the industrial park. The prospect and Giesen had discussed the new pricing schedule set at the last meeting and were looking forward to continuing the discussion. Giesen added that an inquiry had been made just the day before on the undeveloped portion of the industrial park for a warehouse type project, but no further details were given by this new prospect.

The board generally discussed opportunities for community's future development. Giesen reported that a concerned citizen had met with him earlier in the month to discuss ways to be more proactive on keeping the amenities of the community viable. The board agreed that with the current amenities and state of the world, Harmony has an opportunity to attract new residents, businesses, and visitors. Skaalen suggested perhaps retooling the community marketing strategy and Batstone suggested that in addition a more comprehensive development strategy might be appropriate. All agreed that there are opportunities that should be discussed further.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Motion by Kingsley, second by Sagen to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:35 AM.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for October 1, 2020 at 7:30 AM at the Community Center.