

CALL TO ORDER

Session 24-09 a Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Commission was called to order by Vice Chair Deborah Brown at 6:01 p.m. on October 8, 2024 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska and via Zoom Webinar, and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONERS AREVALO, BROWN, YOUNG, STEPHENS & ZUBEK

ABSENT: COMMISSIONERS DICKINSON & MARKS (BOTH EXCUSED)

STAFF: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR ENGBRETSSEN & DEPUTY CITY CLERK PETTIT

AGENDA APPROVAL

Vice Chair Brown requested a motion and second to approve the agenda as presented.

YOUNG/ZUBEK MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS UPON MATTERS ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

Gloria Wahl, city resident, cited a study from a professor of economics at Erasmus University in the Netherlands, noting that while each cruise ship landing in the Netherlands generates about €60,000, nitrogen emissions cost roughly €550,000 per landing. She referenced a separate study from a psychology professor at the University of Bergen in Norway that indicated that campers and backpackers spend more per person than cruise ship passengers. Recalling from her own personal experience cruising the Inside Passage, Ms. Wahl suggested that cruise lines do what they can to encourage on board spending from their patrons. She emphasized that she never wants Homer to become like Sitka.

Scott Adams, city resident, questioned why Homer would want to receive two or more large cruise ships per week. He referenced Sitka's recent struggles with the cruise ship industry, and suggested the City take a step back and see how Sitka remedies their own problem with the amount of cruise ships they're seeing. Switching his focus to the land allocation plan, he stated that it's his belief that leases should be up for competitive bid. He reasoned that it's harder for someone with a brick-and-mortar shop to stay competitive with someone who has virtually no overhead.

RECONSIDERATION

CONSENT AGENDA

A. EDC Unapproved Minutes of September 10, 2024

YOUNG/STEPHENS MOVED TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 10, 2024.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

VISITORS/PRESENTATIONS

STAFF & COUNCIL REPORT/COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. EDC Staff Report

Community Development Director Engebretsen delivered a verbal report, noting the following:

- Flyer included in the packet for the Comprehensive Plan Community Worksession
- Update regarding staffing in the Community Development Department
- Copy of the business survey results included in the packet

There was brief discussion regarding grants to additional properties that the City is aiming to purchase in the Bridge Creek Watershed Protection District.

B. Chamber Director Report

Community Development Director Engebretsen shared that the Chamber is hosting a luncheon on Wednesday, October 16th at Kenai Peninsula College that will be focused on providing an overview of the 2024 tourism season. She added that the City will follow with a “State of the City” presentation in November.

C. Homer Marine Trades Association Report

D. Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District Report

E. HERC Update

Community Development Director Engebretsen stated that the City has been in contact with the Department of Environmental Conservation regarding the City’s funding through the State. She added that the project is chugging along slowly.

F. Housing Update

G. Planning Update

Commissioner Arevalo provided an update regarding the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee.

PUBLIC HEARING

PENDING BUSINESS

- A. Business Licenses
Memorandum EDC-24-015 from Community Development Director as backup

Vice Chair Brown introduced the item by reading of the title and deferred to Community Development Director Engebretsen, who directed the Commission to her staff report and the draft memorandum included in the packet.

The Commission and Ms. Engebretsen reviewed the document, with the Commissioners posing questions and suggesting minor edits throughout the memorandum.

AREVALO/ZUBEK MOVED TO FORWARD THE DOCUMENT TO CITY COUNCIL AS AMENDED.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

- B. Cruise Ships
Memorandum EDC-24-016 from Community Development Director as backup
Email re: Cruise Ship Documentary from Ms. Gloria Wahl

Vice Chair Brown introduced the item by reading of the title, noted the email from Ms. Gloria Wahl, and deferred to Community Development Director Engebretsen, who provided a verbal explanation on her memorandum in the packet.

The Commission and Ms. Engebretsen reviewed the memorandum. Edits to the memo were offered by the Commission, and there was brief discussion regarding a tourism management plan and pollution.

ZUBEK/YOUNG MOVED TO FORWARD MEMORANDUM EDC-24-016 TO CITY COUNCIL AS AMENDED.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Land Allocation Plan
Memorandum EDC-24-017 from Community Development Director as backup

Vice Chair Brown introduced the item by reading of the title and deferred to Community Development Director Engebretsen, who reviewed her memorandum in the packet. She noted a recent proposal seen by the Port & Harbor Advisory Commission that is proposing to lease City-owned property on the Spit for the purpose of adding another fuel dock.

AREVALO/YOUNG MOVED THAT THE EDC RECOMMEND THE CITY KEEPS THE OPTIONS OPEN ON THE LAND ALLOCATION PLAN AND ALLOW FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION.

Commissioner Young reasoned that someone wanting to invest and develop something that could be used appropriately would increase quality and lower cost. He added that he views having two fuel docks in the area as beneficial.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

Ms. Engebretsen noted that about 5 years ago, the Port and Harbor Commission identified several areas along the harbor where development would make sense. She added that Michael Yourkowski's property is one of the leases included in these areas and will be expiring in 18 months, which is when the renewal process will start. She and the Commission reviewed the options that the City and the property owner have when the time comes for lease renewal. Comments from the Commission included the following:

- The location is good and doesn't obstruct the view of the harbor
- It seems reasonable for Mr. Yourkowski's property to be on the table to lease the overslope, and the overslope should go to bid with the adjacent lot as this could bring more cost-effective development

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

- A. City Manager's Report
CM's Report for September 23rd, 2024
- B. Datafy Destination Summary
- C. Homer Comprehensive Plan Rewrite – Community Worksession Flyer
- D. EDC Annual Calendar

Vice Chair Brown noted the informational materials. Commissioner Young volunteered to deliver the October 14th report to City Council.

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

Scott Adams, city resident, emphasized the strain that larger cruise ships cause for the facilities down at the harbor. He shared that he felt that 6 cruise ships a year would be a good number to start with. He advocated for the quality of life for citizens in Homer, stating that they don't want to be bombarded by tourists every day. Speaking to the land allocation plan, Mr. Adams noted that the lots on the harbor are one continuous lot, but argued that the lots should be treated as individual lots.

Gloria Wahl, city resident, commented that commonality of language would be helpful in regulating the cruise ship industry in Homer. In terms of the tourism season, Ms. Wahl stated that Homer needs to recognize that people travel year-round. She added that the cruise ship itineraries are set long in advance, often years ahead of schedule. She thanked the Commission for their time and effort spent addressing cruise ships.

COMMENTS OF THE CITY STAFF

Community Development Director Engebretsen noted that it was good to have two things to send off to Council.

COMMENTS OF THE MAYOR/COUNCIL MEMBER (If Present)

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION

Commissioner Stephens shared that she is getting a better idea of what it means to be a Commissioner.

Commissioner Zubek stated that this was the first meeting that she felt confident in what was going on.

Commissioner Young shared that he enjoyed the meeting. He noted the local election results, and added that he's hopeful to meet Mayor Lord.

Vice Chair Brown noted that it was a quick meeting. She added that she got married a week ago, stating that this might change things in terms of her position on the Commission. She shared her astonishment for the position that some public officials in Homer took regarding the expansion of the hospital during the recent October election. She stressed the importance of listening to desires of the public while setting aside personal biases.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Vice Chair Brown adjourned the meeting at 7:36 p.m. The next regular meeting is Tuesday, November 12, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. All meetings are scheduled to be held in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers and via Zoom Webinar.

ZACH PETTIT, DEPUTY CITY CLERK I

Approved: _____