

Economic Vitality Commission
3-15-17

**CITY OF ISSAQUAH
Economic Vitality Commission
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 15, 2017

Hailstone Feed Store/
Shell Gas Station

232 Front Street N.
Issaquah, WA 98027

<p>MEMBERS PRESENT Kristi Tripple, Vice Chair Richard Gabel Jeff Howlett Laura Milikan Ethan Stiles</p>	<p>STAFF PRESENT Jen Davis Hayes, Economic Development Manager Andrea Snyder, Economic Development Manager</p> <p>DIA BOARD MEMBERS/OTHERS PRESENT Keith Watts, President Christina Bruning, Vice President Joe Deutschman, Member Brenda Devore, Executive Director Karen Donovan, Past Executive Director Jeff Tanka, Member</p>
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CALL TO ORDER

Devore and Watts made some introductory remarks to welcome participants to the meeting.

TRIPPLE, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:43 PM, and thanked the Downtown Issaquah Association (DIA) for hosting tonight's meeting. She asked participants to introduce themselves and give some information about their activities, interests, and experiences with Issaquah's economic development.

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMIC VITALITY COMMISSION (EVC)

TRIPPLE gave some background on the inception of the EVC and its purpose. Davis Hayes referred to the City's 2015-2018 [Economic Development Strategic Plan](#) (available online), specifically to the Plan's goals and strategies.

OVERVIEW OF DOWNTOWN ISSAQUAH ASSOCIATION (DIA)

Watts, DIA President, gave a presentation on the mission of the DIA and some thoughts on how DIA and EVC can work together to make the community an even more livable, exciting place to live and work. His presentation included a description of the DIA Board of Directors and its membership. He said the mission of the DIA is to promote and enhance the vitality of historic downtown Issaquah through programs and events that celebrate its unique culture.

He asked Davis Hayes if she would like to add anything at this point about the City's economic vitality vision before continuing. Davis Hayes referred to page 20 of the Strategic Plan. She noted when the plan was developed, participants did not settle on a single vision statement because the plan was intended to be both very specific and all-encompassing. Rather, the participants identified components that led to the goals and strategies that are included in the plan.

Watts continued his remarks about the DIA's accomplishments in 2016. Working with the downtown community and others, he continued, downtown gained 9 new businesses, 32 new jobs, and realized \$50,753 in private investment and \$771,575 in public investment. Volunteers contributed about 1,734 hours toward the economic vitality of downtown.

CURRENT EVENTS AND ISSUES FACING DOWNTOWN

Devore continued the presentation with a description of highlights of downtown Issaquah events, including Issaquah Goes Apples, the Zombie Walk, Gas Station Blues, International Music Day, Historic Pub Crawl, and so on. She noted that about 32 events are planned for 2017. The participants discussed their favorite events. STILES spoke in favor of the annual Fenders on Front Street that occurs on Father's Day, and Davis Hayes mentioned the Gas Station Blues series. Devore said the DIA's objective is to provide ideas and best practices for merchants on how to capture new business during these events, and asked EVC members to e-mail her with any ideas they may have for future events.

STILES asked why most of the downtown events are scheduled on weekdays, which can be challenging for residents who work outside the City or have families to attend. Watts replied the primary reason is to promote downtown Issaquah as a weekday destination. The merchants don't normally need more foot traffic on weekends, he continued, and in fact sometimes weekend events have resulted in overwhelming the merchants. He said more family-friendly events are held elsewhere in the City on weekends, but for the downtown corridor, our focus has been on promoting more weekday events.

GABEL asked do you include Gilman Village in your downtown Issaquah event planning. Watts said our focus has been on the central business district, but we do collaborate with them on some of our shopping and wine-tasting events.

Watts continued his presentation on the DIA's goals for the coming year, and explained the impacts that losing about \$90,000 in City funding this year will have on its ability to achieve its goals. He gave details about the DIA's plans for the Shell Garage exterior improvements.

Watts thanked the City's Economic Development Department generally and Snyder, City of Issaquah Economic Development Manager, specifically for her contributions as a DIA board member. He said she has been an invaluable player whose contributions will have an impact for years to come. Davis Hayes said the City will be hiring for Snyder's replacement, and in the meantime, to contact her for assistance.

DISCUSSION OF DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC VITALITY EFFORTS THE EVC CAN HELP SUPPORT

Watts gave DIA's perspective on ways that the EVC can work with the DIA to achieve common objectives, including support for the Streetscape Plan and the Olde Town Plan update coming up this spring; participation on revisions to City codes that govern the use of land in downtown Issaquah later this year, specifically support for changes to design code and standards that would have a significant impact on downtown; and support for the search to identify parking solutions for downtown.

TRIPPLE asked for more details about the Streetscape Plan, which the Council will be taking action on in April, and how the EVC could best indicate its support. Snyder suggested writing a letter to Council from EVC and also attending the April 17 City Council meeting to provide public comment. It was the consensus of all EVC members present that staff work with TRIPPLE to draft a letter in support of the Streetscape Plan. Snyder noted the online survey on the Streetscape Plan closes this Friday, so it is not too late to make comments. She also said staff can send a link to DIA and EVC members so they can view the presentation made to Council on the Streetscape Plan. TRIPPLE said the Plan covers a wide range of improvements, including some low-cost changes that businesses can incrementally do on their own as well as larger projects.

Watts and Devore continued their presentation on the importance of showing support for organizations that provide activities such as tours that help create deeper connections between

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residents and the community, and gave examples. TRIPPLE agreed, and said many don't charge admission and it is important that they receive our support. Devore continued by listing the ways EVC can support and stay aware of the DIA's activities, including writing letters of support to the City Council; registering on the City's Website to receive updates; subscribing to the *Issaquah Insider*; attending Council meetings and giving public comment; providing advocacy to ensure the DIA receives funding support during budget deliberations; and attending DIA meetings with community merchants and property owners. She also gave details about the DIA's outreach via social media, including Facebook, e-news lists, and so on.

TRIPPLE said expanding the DIA's presence on social media expansion is a good way to reach people outside the City as well as City residents. Devore agreed, and noted that two interns are starting work with the DIA tomorrow on that effort.

GABEL asked about the code changes that would allow for façade improvements downtown. Watts said the City's codes dictate what can be used on the building facades, but the codes don't always fit the vision that the DIA and others have for downtown. He spoke about the program that matches funding from the City with B&O taxes from business and property owners and which could be used to make façade improvements. STILES said thinking about how to maintain downtown's character via code changes, are there features that the DIA favors that would be unique to downtown. Watts replied yes; we have identified those features that would maintain and enhance the historic look and feel of downtown. In many cases, he continued, we do have a design code for downtown, but property owners have asked for more flexibility in applying them. Snyder gave examples, such as a specific color palette for downtown that would not include bold, neon colors, and the number and appearance of signs. We want to maintain downtown's historic look, she said, and it isn't the City's intention to shackle business and property owners with code that made sense for Issaquah 30 years ago, so the existing code is being revisited.

Participants discussed the difficulties faced by businesses on Front Street who are unable under present City code to enhance the facades of their secondary entrances that face the Depot. Watts noted that parking that maintains downtown's character is also the DIA's goal. He continued lots of properties along Front Street are owned by single individuals and are small lots, and we are trying to keep our unique businesses as opposed to just allowing national chain businesses that you can find anywhere.

Davis Hayes noted the Central Issaquah Plan evolved, at least in part, as a way to relieve pressure from development being put on downtown Issaquah and the hillsides. Watts referred to the Streetscape Plan as a way to maintain downtown's historic character. TRIPPLE added there is also more affordable housing in downtown, relatively speaking, as well as its having a unique business character, and said the Streetscape Plan is an important component to slow down traffic commuting through the City on Front Street and keep it walkable.

MILIKAN asked about how extensively Route 200 is being used. Snyder said her impression from talking to people at open houses and in community meetings is that most residents don't know it exists. Milikan said originally Route 200 operated from 6 AM until 6 or 7 PM, and now it only operates from 9 AM to 3 PM, and not at all on weekends. Snyder said the City had to work hard to maintain Route 200 the last few years, as Metro Transit had proposed eliminating it. Bruning said the DIA would be interested to hear of the EVC's ideas for routing improvements, and agreed that Route 200 is a good opportunity for some additional focus.

Devore continued her presentation on a series of four itinerary cards (Family Fun, Play Outdoors, Shop, and Arts & Culture) developed by the DIA to stimulate economic activity in the community. She noted the cards have been placed at the Marriott Hotel, Snoqualmie Falls Lodge, and other

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businesses outside the immediate community that attract both residents and visitors. She asked EVC to offer any suggestions they might have on where else to place them.

Bruning noted the Council will shortly consider addition funding for DIA to partially replace Main Street funding shortfalls, and said any support the EVC can offer would be useful. She said she would send more information. TRIPPLE said the EVC can do a quick vote online and send an e-mail or letter.

TRIPPLE thanked the members of DIA for hosting the meeting, and said it has been informative and helpful. Donovan asked what does the EVC plan to accomplish in 2017. Davis Hayes replied the EVC has chosen to focus on the moratorium topics that the Council has identified need to be addressed. Developing a city-wide housing strategy, clarifying visions for the ten neighborhoods identified in the Central Issaquah area and vertical mixed-use development are three examples. TRIPPLE noted there is a lot of information to get through, and the EVC expects to be kept quite busy in 2017 looking at the six moratorium topics that the Council has identified. Watts asked whether EVC plans to meet quarterly. TRIPPLE said EVC tried meeting quarterly, with more frequent meetings of subcommittees, but decided to move to a monthly meeting format beginning in January 2017.

Devore asked the EVC for any suggestions on the best ways to get community input. Davis Hayes said the City is continually exploring the best ways as well, and has found that public meetings and on-line surveys are effective. She noted that staff has been using focus groups of business owners and property owners for some topics, such as affordable housing and neighborhood visions, and that those focus groups have been helpful.

Devore said the DIA is planning a spring business owners meeting, and will extend the invitation to EVC members. Davis Hayes added EVC is getting four new members, out of a total membership of ten, in May. With so many new members, she continued, we might consider another joint meeting, especially after the moratorium topics have been addressed, possibly with the DIA, EVC, Chamber of Commerce, Highlands, and other organizations that support Issaquah businesses.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

NEXT MEETING/ADJOURNMENT

Snyder said her last day working for the City of Issaquah is tomorrow, and thanked everyone for having had opportunities to work with the City and community.

The next EVC meeting is scheduled for April 19, 2017, at 5:30 PM in the Pickering Room at City Hall NW.

With no further business to conduct, TRIPPLE adjourned the meeting at 6:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowe
Recording Secretary

These minutes are a brief summary of the Economic Vitality Commission meeting. For more information or clarification, please contact the Economic Development Department at 425-837-3444.