

CITY OF ISSAQUAH
Economic Vitality Commission

5:30 PM
 June 16, 2021

Virtual Meeting

MINUTES

COMMISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT

Alternate Meeting Format: On March 6, 2020 the Mayor declared a civil emergency due to the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19). On March 24, 2020 the Governor issued Proclamation 20-28 relating to the COVID-19 emergency and open public meetings. The proclamation has been extended. Due to these factors, the meeting was held using a remote meeting platform.

Commissioners Present:

Kathy McCorry, Chair
 Jon Edwards, Vice Chair
 Thomas Brown
 Corby Casler
 Ashwin Muthuvenkataraman
 Joan Probala

Commissioners Not Present (Excused):

Christopher Beaudoin
 Therese Garcia
 Tom Rogers
 Art Freas, Alternate
 Chris Reichley, Alternate
 Anjali Remme, Alternate

Administration/Staff:

Jen Davis Hayes, Economic Dev. Mgr.
 Benton Coblenz, Economic Dev. Coord.
 Gary Schimek, Utilities Engineering Mgr.
 Allen Quynn, Pubic Works Sr. Engineer

CALL TO ORDER

McCORRY called the meeting to order at 5:33 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a) MOVED BY PROBALA, SECONDED BY BROWN that minutes of the May 19, 2021 meeting be approved as presented. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

AGENDA ITEMS

a) **Storm and Surface Water Master Plan Update, (D)**

Presented by:

Gary Schimek, Utilities Engineering Manager
Allen Quynn, Senior Engineer

Schimek introduced himself and provided an overview of the purpose of tonight's presentation on the City's Storm and Surface Water Management Master Plan (Master Plan). He explained the direction that staff is seeking from the Commission tonight, as follows:

- (1) What are the Commission's thoughts on the proposed criteria to prioritize issues and actions? (2) How aggressive should the City be in addressing climate change within the context of the Plan? (3) Should the City develop a policy to guide funding across our stormwater programs (i.e., stormwater conveyance and flooding, water quality, and habitat)? (4) What stormwater issues are most important to the Commission right now?*

Schimek gave some background information ("Stormwater 101") about stormwater management, including stormwater runoff, pollution, and possible solutions. He continued by describing the

desired outcomes of the Master Plan; the planning/regulatory context; and the update overview and schedule, including next steps.

Quynn continued the presentation, including a discussion of the City's stakeholder engagement activities, starting in 2019, to date; preparation of a basin characteristic report for the six basins under the City's purview; issues identified for each basin (flow issues, water quality, habitat, erosion, maintenance); and the metrics proposed for prioritization.

Schimek continued his "Stormwater 101" presentation on climate change projections and options, including examples, and a funding balance proposal. He asked for questions at this time.

BROWN asked for the three program areas in the funding balance proposal (stormwater conveyance and flooding, water quality, and habitat), do we know what percentage each program represents. That could be used to help prioritize them, he said. Schimek said that is a good approach, and referred to the slide that showed the number of reported issues. He continued the data indicates that managing flood control and flooding is the most significant issue, but it depends on the basin. Another approach would be to do a preliminary assessment of costs, and use that as a basis for prioritization.

PROBALA spoke in favor of developing a baseline of current conditions against which taking actions could be compared. In other words, "here's what we have now, and here's what climate change will mean." A graph of where water quality is now, and how it would be affected by more water as a result of climate change, would be a useful visual tool for the public, she added. Staff made a note of the suggestion. Quynn noted a report from the consultant that includes a baseline assessment for the six basins is being reviewed now by Ecology, and can be made available soon, likely in early July.

BROWN spoke in favor of developing an issues chart that indicates what the impacts of climate change are on quality of life. He gave examples of how water quality issues impact his life. Schimek agreed, and said the team will define the metrics more closely. Initially, we can treat all issues equally, but eventually we will have better metrics with which we can evaluate projects by assigning them points. Perhaps the community is most concerned about residential flooding, he continued, and would favor increasing the prioritization scores for projects that are most closely associated with flooding. Another example is the effect of material from tires, known as 6PPDQ, on the environment, particularly fish habitat. The team is looking for feedback from the community and boards and commissions on not only the metrics, but also "here's what we think should be prioritized, and why."

McCORRY said from a business community standpoint, there isn't much that an individual business can do to really have an impact on, say, a broad issue like water quality. It would be good to have some focus on what the business community can do by addressing impervious surfaces, future development, and other issues that directly involve businesses. She said maybe we could have that information for our next discussion, along with an overlay of the creek system and the business community. We know there will be a lot of new legislation at the state level this year on climate change, she continued. It is a global issue, not just a citywide issue. Even if Issaquah took dramatic steps to address climate change, it would only be a drop in the bucket. We need to bring our regional partners together and do some true collaboration. Schimek agreed, and gave examples of how regional partners are collaborating on water supply and recharge issues right now.

McCORRY said if Commissioners have additional thoughts or comments, send them to staff.

b) Commission Role Discussion, (D)

Presented by:

Kathy McCorry, Commission Chair

Jon Edwards, Commission Vice Chair

McCORRY said she and EDWARDS recently met with staff to discuss how best to lead this group, and how to make it the best EVC possible. We would like to hear from each of you what you think that would look like, she continued, as well as what economic vitality means to you, and what you think is the best pathway to achieving greatness.

EDWARDS said he is not interested in just meeting monthly and talking; that's not what he aspires to, and would like to explore what is possible for EVC and how it can best have a positive impact on the community.

MUTHUVENKATARAMAN said he would like to see EVC represent all businesses equally, and reach out to the entire business community. He gave details from his recent experience as a business owner.

BROWN spoke in favor of three goals: help make it easier to do business in Issaquah, for both existing and new businesses; provide resources and tools to help businesses increase revenue and profits; and promote business growth by focusing on how attractive a community is for businesses to come here, including schools, recreational opportunities, and so on. He continued giving input to the City Council on those things would be the best way to promote economic vitality for the City.

CASLER agreed with BROWN. She added she favors promoting community among businesses and individuals; listening to everyone; and realizing it takes everything--great schools, residents, sports fields, recreation, businesses—working together to provide an amalgam of a great place to live.

PROBALA said she also agrees with BROWN. She said it's important to see not just how businesses affect the community but also how the community affects businesses. She said she has reviewed the list of issues laid out in EVC's work plan, and said it's important to make EVC visible to the Mayor as well as the Council on these issues. She continued the Recovery Task Force focus, for example, should have been part of this commission. She said she favors making a plan of how we can support and get new businesses, and make sure existing businesses are thriving. That's what economic vitality is, and the EVC needs to have a plan and then deliver on it.

Davis Hayes displayed slides from the 2021 orientation session on "2021 Efforts" and "2021 Focus." She noted the ideas in these slides came from EVC discussions (pre-Covid) about what efforts EVC should undertake in 2021.

EDWARDS said the desire to be broadly representative seems to be a widely held view, which suggests that some listening exercises and activities are needed. He also spoke in favor of having a plan of specific items that EVC can accomplish; maybe the listening exercise can help us develop that list. He said EVC should focus on the things that are within our control to deliver that will move the dial forward for business owners.

McCORRY noted since all EVC members have different backgrounds and experiences as business people, perhaps it would be beneficial to spend 1-2 minutes each at every meeting to

bring issues affecting businesses of which we are aware to the table. That could include personal business issues, industry trends, concerns, positive things taking place, and so on. The Commissioners expressed general support for the idea. McCORRY will work with staff to make a place for it on future agendas.

EDWARDS asked about exit interviews; whether the City routinely conducts them, and whether it would be of value for EVC to contact business owners who have moved on from Issaquah to see what we can learn.

PROBALA noted because EVC only meets once a month, it does not have a lot of time and needs to focus on just one or two things that it can actively pursue and accomplish.

REPORTS

a) Business Openings, Closures, and Industry Trends: McCORRY reported a light manufacturing and office business has indicated it wants to move from Bellevue to Issaquah, and is actively looking now for 20,000 to 25,000 square feet.

BROWN said he is seeing increased foot traffic, especially at bars like Formula Brewery. He continued Costco Travel's sales force can't keep up with demand, and Costco IT is hiring as many people as possible who have specific skill sets. So as Covid restrictions are lifted, he definitely senses that business activity is increasing.

EDWARDS agreed, and said he has noticed large office buildings are starting to fill up with people again. Most tech companies are setting September for full occupation of offices, he said. BROWN agreed, and noted Costco IT will be on a 2-3-day hybrid model.

McCORRY noted the City and Chamber are working on a new source for employment, www.issaquahjobs.com, that is intended to help businesses with their employment needs. She continued she is aware that many businesses don't expect to be able to be fully staffed until October, after school schedules finalize and federal unemployment assistance ends.

EDWARDS asked whether EVC could inquire about whether the Issaquah School District can commit to full opening of schools in the fall, and said that uncertainty is having a huge impact on employment. He added other factors are when businesses are able to have full occupancy and when the social distancing restrictions from Covid are lifted.

Davis Hayes reported on new businesses soon to open, including Paseo (a Cuban sandwich shop) and several others that are negotiating leases now. She also explained that the two business centers in the Highlands may appear to have vacancies, but there is actually a long list of interested businesses on the waiting list.

b) City Council Report Out: Davis Hayes said the Council remanded the draft sign code to an Ad Hoc Committee of Councilmembers for additional work. She said City Council will consider funding for a Recovery Coordinator position, which Coblentz will be assigned part-time, and will work with the community to help determine needs of our organizations to provide input to the Administration and City Council on how best to spend the federal funding.

- c) 2021 Schedule: The next meeting, scheduled for July 21, will include a discussion on the City's Climate Action Plan and potentially a discussion of commercial vacancies in the City. Staff will be polling about availability for an August meeting.

PROBALA said she would like to follow up on EDWARDS' suggestion about conducting exit interviews. Is it possible for EVC to do that, she asked. Davis Hayes said one place to start is to look at business license application lists. McCORRY said the Chamber has a list of over 100 businesses that have left the City, and has reasons why they left for about 70 to 75 of them. McCORRY described the exit interview information available from the Chamber's efforts, and said with some modifications, that data can be shared with EVC. The reasons vary greatly, and not all have to do with Covid, she continued. What EVC can do with that data is another question, she noted.

Hearing that EVC wants a plan, McCORRY asked Commissioners to think about their availability for a few hours each month to do some homework on why businesses have left. EDWARDS said sharing that information would help us all address our biases by supplying us with fact-based information.

Staff will meet with McCORRY and EDWARDS in a strategy session about accommodating exit information in EVC's work plan for 2021.

OTHER BUSINESS / ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to conduct, McCORRY adjourned the meeting at 7:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowe
Recording Secretary