

CITY OF ISSAQUAH
Economic Vitality Commission

6:00 PM
June 18, 2024

MINUTES

Tibbetts Manor, 750 17th Ave.
NW, Issaquah

COMMISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT

Commissioners:

Chris Reichley, Chair
Anuradha Tadepalli, Vice Chair
Shalini Bansal – excused absence
Christy Garrard – excused absence
Landon Halverson - virtual
Jennifer Larson
Kymberly Lee
Nicoleta Mocanu – excused absence
Barb Pexa

Administration/Staff:

Jen Davis Hayes, Economic Development
Manager
Farel Otieno, Economic Development
Coordinator
Juliana da Cruz, Economic Development
Coordinator
Jared Schneider – Emergency Manager -
virtual

Adam Levensohn, Alternate
Jake McGill, Alternate
Kelly Richardson, Alternate

CALL TO ORDER

REICHLEY called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

Chair Reichley noted that a quorum was present and Chair Reichley called up Commissioners Levensohn, McGill, and Richardson to serve as regular members for the meeting. Chair Reichley asked the members to introduce themselves and note their summer plans as a way of introducing new Commissioner Adam Levensohn.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a) Minutes of May 15, 2024

Commissioner Kelly Richardson moved to approve the meetings as presented and Commissioner Jake McGill seconded the motion.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No members of the public were present.

AGENDA ITEMS

- a) **Emergency Management & Resiliency for Businesses (D)**

Presented by:
Jared Schneider, City's Emergency Manager

Emergency Manager Jared Schneider gave an overview on the prevalence of disasters in Washington state and the impact that emergencies can have on businesses. He noted that per climate impact studies, by 2050s, our summer and winter hazards in Washington are becoming more prevalent and more extreme. The City is actively planning for natural and

human caused hazards, but because hazards can impact wide regions, resources to respond to any one hazard or incident may be limited.

Jared then provided an overview of Issaquah's most common hazards, including flooding, landslides, earthquakes and liquefaction, wildfire. There are two types of wildfires in Western Washington: brushfire and burns. Brushfire are relatively small and are smothered relatively quickly because there is a concentration of resources to bear on the fire. Burns are considered a megafire and occur when the conditions are perfect for wildfires; hot temperatures, high easterly winds, low snow pack, and lack of precipitation. Due to the unique characteristics of Washington forests, our forests are full of fuel, and in megafire events, property protection is unlikely. Issaquah is taking a multifaceted approach to address forest health, home and business hardening, emergency response, and public awareness. Issaquah is contracting with an engineering firm to conduct an evacuation study to understand how best to expedite evacuations in the case of an emergency. The City is also piloting a Chipper Days program in the Forest Rim neighborhood to remove woody debris that will reduce the ready spread of wildfire. The City is also doing evacuations, EOC trainings, and simulation exercises to prepare for disasters.

Jared provided an overview of how businesses can prepare for wildfire and other risks. The first step is to identify and understand the hazards and the assets that could be at risk from these hazards. Next, the business should consider what impacts to their business as a result of these hazards. Finally, businesses should prepare, make a plan to respond to hazards, ensure proper insurance coverage, etc. Commissioner Jennifer Larson noted that there is a gap in the businesses' awareness of the resources available from the City that could be available to business' employees. Do businesses have access to a Sat phone numbers from the City? Jared responded that yes, the City will run shelters (resilience hubs) in response to many hazards. In an emergency, the City will most likely have a representative dedicated to supporting businesses in an emergency.

A goal of Emergency Management and Economic Development is to create a one pager for small businesses to have on hand with information in case of an emergency to know how to proceed. It is a goal for Emergency Management, Economic Development, and the EVC to discuss and brainstorm ideas to disseminate this emergency management planning information. Commissioner Tadepalli suggested that there be three one-pager documents to help businesses be ready to respond to an emergency before, during, and after. Specifically thinking about the hazards that are most applicable to businesses—for example most of the businesses exist in the Issaquah valley and flooding might be more likely than wildfire, for example. Chair Reichley noted that insurance is a concern for emergency preparedness because insurance providers are pulling out of regions in state in response to hazard risks. Jared provided some examples of work happening on the state and federal level to respond to these changes in the insurance and hazards market. In some cases, demonstrating the proactive measures that the City is taking to reduce flood or other hazard risks can be presented to insurance companies to contest rates or to argue for a lower rate. Chair Reichley has heard some anecdotes that some insurance coverage has been dropped for some property owners on Tiger Mountain. Chair Reichley noted that ED staff should consider asking in BREs if businesses are prepared for cybersecurity events. Jared urged the EVC and businesses to sign up for emergency alerts, build an emergency kit for two weeks of supplies, and make a plan and practice it.

b) **2024 Business Survey Update (D)**

Presented by:

Farel Otieno, Economic Development Coordinator

Economic Development Coordinator Farel Otieno provided a high level overview of the 2024 Business Survey. More in depth analysis and in person interviews are scheduled for July. We received 237 survey responses but when we deleted duplicates, we had 207 responses. This is about 8% of the total businesses in Issaquah. The responses to the 2024 survey is a lower than 2020 and 2016 but the timeline also differed. The Commission noted that the decline in

response may be a result of survey fatigue and there being many concurrent surveys. It could be that our survey was too long and respondents fell off. The Commission noted that in many industries, survey responses have been dwindling—survey fatigue overall. The Commission agreed that the survey should be shortened overall to reduce fall off.

Commissioner McGill noted that we should compare the breakdown of business survey respondent demographics to the actual demographics of Issaquah. In 2024, there was a decline in the number of dissatisfied or very dissatisfied businesses.

The majority of businesses surveyed had an increased or stable profits and are looking to hire. 15% of surveyed businesses in 2024 said their profits decreased and cited lack of customers and high competition. The top three challenges cited in 2024 by businesses surveyed were: space, lack of advertising, and traffic. This compares interestingly to 2020 which were: traffic, competition, and space.

Commissioner Tadepalli suggested that the Data Committee come up with an interview guide so that any single Commissioner has a sheet of interview questions to rely on. The Commission requested to be more prepared with the data and the objectives of the interviews before going out to do interviews. The City will coordinate the scheduling of these interviews and Commissioners will sign up for these interviews as they are available.

The Commission noted a special interest in the intersection of startup and home based businesses. It would be helpful to understand more about what services small businesses expect to receive from the City (for example, an expectation of advertisement?) compared to what services the City does provide.

Interviews: Jake, Kelly, Barb, Kim, Jennifer, Adam
Data Analysis Volunteer: Anu, Jake, Kelly, Kim

REPORTS

a) **Industry Trends, Business Openings & Closures (D)**

Presented by:

All Commissioners

New daycare going in on Mall Street (old Style Encore)

There are some business concerns in Grand Ridge Plaza in the highlands that some businesses are considering relocating.

If public safety is a concern, Police Chief Schwan is willing to speak to groups to hear their concerns and build the communication thread.

b) **Economic Development Action Plan Update (I)**

Presented by:

Economic Development Staff

Economic Development staff spoke about recent developments to implement the EDAP, including workshops for businesses and tourism planning.

c) **City Council Report Out (I)**

Presented by:

Farel Otieno, Economic Development Coordinator

Chair Reichley noted the thank you letter from the City Council.

d) **2024 Schedule (I)**

Presented by:

Chris Reichley, Chair

There may be a change in the July 17 EVC date. We will poll the Commissioners who are not present at the meeting today and follow up with the Commission.

OTHER BUSINESS / ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Tadepalli asked for another update on Light Rail Planning which is on our August meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 PM.

The next meeting is currently scheduled for July 17, 2024.

INQUIRIES

Please contact Jen Davis Hayes at (425) 837-3414 or jenh@issaquahwa.gov.

Note: Times listed for meetings topics are approximate and items are subject to change.

(A) Action, (D) Discussion, (I) Information