

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING

July 10, 2023

MONTGOMERY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

CALL TO ORDER

Vice President Jeff Angelo called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Jeff Angelo – Vice President
Carol Langley - Treasurer
Ryan Londeen – Secretary
Wade Nelson – Board Member
Byron Sanford – Board Member
Dan Walker -Board Member

Absent:

Also Present: Gary Palmer, City Administrator
Dave McCorquodale, Assistant City Administrator
Diana Cooley, Deputy City Secretary

CALL TO ORDER

OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were made.

CONSIDERATION AND POSSIBLE ACTION:

1. Review of goals and discussion of strategic planning for MEDC.

Jeff Angelo said the only agenda item is open discussion on the amendment to the Bylaws and asked if any amendments will be proposed.

Mr. McCorquodale said that will be one of the things covered, but it is a little broader in terms of discussing what works, what has not worked, and look at the Bylaws and see if there is something in there that makes the system run better than it does today.

Mr. Palmer said the reason they want to have this workshop is because there are changes happening with the EDC with the loss of the president and this could be an opportunity for them to look at what they are doing, they way they do business, and how they are set up. Mr. Palmer said he would like to have an open discussion on what everyone thinks has worked and what has not worked for the EDC. Mr. Palmer said his

thought is they should consider retuning the Bylaws and looking at bringing on a full or part-time director instead of having a president executing the agenda for many reasons. Mr. Palmer said he wanted to have this discussion and talk about how to move forward.

Wade Nelson said he would agree in regard to getting someone qualified to be a director who has done this before. Wade Nelson said the whole reason for EDC is to attract businesses and industries that contribute to the area. Wade Nelson said they can be very selective with it, but without business there is not much to go on. Wade Nelson said they do have some good components in place.

Jeff Angelo asked if he is saying maybe they should consider getting someone who does this for a living and asked if there are there such people available. Wade Nelson said absolutely.

Carol Langley said an Economic Development Director in Navasota is one example. Carol Langley said around five years ago Navasota was a sleepy little town and now they have an Economic Development Director who knows how to get the grants, is full time, and is a go getter. Jeff Angelo said it would be nice to have someone who actually has their boots on the ground and moving the ball when they are in between meetings. Carol Langley said EDC can pay it and can afford it. Carol Langley said this person will do it all in regard to going to the City, attend City Council meetings, present their reports, and visit with the community. Carol Langley said this person will be with the Chamber, which the Chamber is good in our area. Carol Langley said even Conroe's Chamber is always inviting us to do things with them. Carol Langley said it may be time they think about doing something like that.

Wade Nelson said yes, it is a missing piece and they should be communicating with The Woodlands and with Conroe on a continual basis.

Carol Langley said they have tried to hire someone, but they just did not have the right title or the right duties because they have had three or four different people they thought were helping MEDC and then they find out that is not even their job anymore. Carol Langley said she is thinking it is time the City may need to do this.

Ryan Londeen said they were entertaining the idea of having someone who was solely focused on planning events and they were willing and open to hiring someone. Ryan Londeen said he thinks it is better money spent on someone who can help direct MEDC while they are doing their day-to-day duties. Ryan Londeen said from what he can tell from his research, the bigger the city, like a city like Conroe you have staff and they can help manage things like the website or coordinate with the Chamber which he thinks would be a good asset. Ryan Londeen said it is a matter of what qualifications they are looking for, what are the duties and responsibilities they are going to set for this person, is it full or part-time, do they have a budget for it, and where are they taking the money from.

Byron Sanford said he is glad everyone is feeling positive. Byron Sanford said Texas Municipal League currently has three positions in Dayton, Red Oak, and is not sure of the other city but he read those job descriptions. Byron Sanford said he has been here two years and knows all the frustrations and how do they tap into HGAC other than a casual show up. Byron Sanford said they need a huge economic shot in the arm and the only way to accomplish that is when you look on TML there is a range from 80 thousand to 130.

Byron Sanford said the 80 is going to be for the assistant. Byron Sanford said Red Oak and Dayton are similar to us in size so somewhere in the low 100 range, but they need to be looking for someone who has been there and done that. Byron Sanford said this is not a place to try out as this is hard, yet necessary because they have so many obstacles and such a need to make connections to these places that can help them with funding. Byron Sanford said he can say city hall wise and with Gary onboard and meetings they still have pending and have already had, he is really pushing hard for what they can do to get funding. Byron Sanford said the McCown Street was projected at one million dollars but in today's dollars it is probably double that. Byron Sanford said he has heard there were other efforts to redo McCown because the soil was not right. Byron Sanford said when he hears that he thinks they need someone who can take the three million dollar job and say they can do it for that amount and obtain half of that amount as a grant and bid it that way. Byron Sanford said we bid our projects on the basis of people who can find funding. Byron Sanford said if they had someone working full time working those types of connections they could filter it out for them. Byron Sanford said in the school business a part-time grant writer is not a grant writer at all. Byron Sanford said the school districts that were able to bring these monies in had someone full time looking for it. Byron Sanford said when he reads those job descriptions they want the person not just going to Chamber but being well connected with everyone in the Chamber. Byron Sanford said they want someone in the HGAC and not just showing up occasionally or even over the internet is not good. Byron Sanford said they are establishing relationships. Byron Sanford said case in point, Jeff Angelo had sent him an email regarding a battery making company and he followed up on. Byron Sanford said by the time he did follow up, the company told him they had already decided. Byron Sanford said they do not have the staff power right now and so by the time he follows up he loses it. Byron Sanford said he did send them correspondence to consider them in the future.

Byron Sanford said they are running out of green space and options and they need to be very strategic in how and what they do. Byron Sanford said this person needs to be someone who has strategies, TIF and term agreement experience that can help with planning and development. Byron Sanford said he thinks it all ties together with some of the problems they have had. Byron Sanford said there is a piece missing on their staff.

Jeff Angelo asked how do they find these people and for that kind of money this person needs to know what they are doing. Jeff Angelo asked if these people are from outside the community or does it even matter. Wade Nelson said it definitely matters and they need to be from outside the community.

Ryan Londeen asked if there are consulting firms that can help. Ryan Londeen said instead of hiring an individual person like when they hire a city attorney, they are not necessarily on staff, they are just hiring that firm and asked if there is something similar for an MEDC director.

Mr. Palmer said there could be. Mr. Palmer said depending on what the Board wants to do, if it is something you want to have as a consultant, they can create an RFP for a consultant if it is something you want to have for a direct hire. Mr. Palmer said there are organizations such as the International City Manager Association he is in. Mr. Palmer said there are economic development associations. Mr. Palmer said he has a good network of people he would put this out to. Mr. Palmer said he is meeting with the Navasota EDC Director tomorrow to discuss some things, but yes, our jobs are all about relationships and he will tap into those to try and find the best person.

Jeff Angelo said he thinks they have outgrown what they had and he thinks it is time to get someone that can roll the ball for them.

Mr. Palmer said if you go to any city that is doing economic development well, you know those cities are going to have an economic development director.

Ryan Londeen said he did some research and that was the common theme where they all had a director and knew what to do.

Mr. Palmer said we live and die on our volunteers however, when it comes to some things, you have to have that level of accountability to make sure we are getting the work done we want to get done and we just do not have that with the way they are currently set up.

Dan Walker said he agrees that if you bring someone from the outside you want to check and see what they will bring to the table because obviously they are going to be intermeshing with Conroe, The Woodlands, and the communities around us. Dan Walker said they are going to have to have credibility to bring to the table to where other communities want to get involved.

Jeff Angelo said one of their biggest restraints has been the lack of traction. Jeff Angelo said they sit and meet and come up with great ideas and send it out to nowhere land where nothing ever happens. Jeff Angelo said month after month they sit in frustration. Jeff Angelo said this is not about what is the goofiest costume they can come up with, they need some true business strategy that helps grow the community. Jeff Angelo said they do not have it right now and have not had it for quite some time. Jeff Angelo said he thinks it is a good idea. Jeff Angelo said he does not know where to begin but he is ready to start.

Dan Walker said as far as adjusting the Bylaws, he thinks they are going to have to have a professional come in as it is not just them saying I do not like this or that. Dan Walker said he thinks they need to have someone who is an expert to give them advice and let them take a vote on it.

Ryan Londeen asked if having a director is something that is added to the Bylaws or do they replace the president.

Mr. Palmer said his recommendation is to have the Chairman appoint a subcommittee to work with him and Mr. McCorquodale. Mr. Palmer said they would review templates on bylaws from other cities they know do it well. Mr. Palmer said he has written several charters and they can create this and provide options to everyone. Mr. Palmer said they will work with the subcommittee and come back to the entire Board to decide if they like it or not and keep moving forward from there. Mr. Palmer said he does not think they are in a hurry on this. Mr. Palmer said Council needs to appoint a new committee member and then based on the Bylaws this committee decides who the President will be. Mr. Palmer said he thinks this is an opportunity for them to pause, decide how they want to be set up, and make sure the Bylaws are reflective of that.

Jeff Angelo asked if they make those adjustments prior to Council appointing another director or is there a time limit for that. Mr. Palmer said he would go ahead through the evolution of adjusting the Bylaws. Mr.

Palmer said he assumes Council is going to want to receive applications for a period of time and does not think it is going to take an inordinate amount of time reviewing the Bylaws and work all this out. Mr. Palmer said the Council is going to need to approve the Bylaw changes but he does not think that is going to be a very cumbersome process, maybe two months and then an extra member can be appointed or maybe it is decided to decrease the amount of people. Mr. Palmer said at this point let us open it all up and make sure the Bylaws reflect the way we want to do work. Mr. Palmer said if you want to replace the president with a director then we need to change that or not mention it at all. Mr. Palmer said he does not see this being a very difficult process. Mr. Palmer said it is just capturing how you want to work into a document.

Wade Nelson said in regard to the hiring process, maybe they do not go with a national search but a statewide search instead. Mr. Palmer said yes, they can do that and see what that attracts. Wade Nelson said he thinks it makes sense to hire within Texas because they understand Texas as it is a bit different than most states. Wade Nelson said there are a lot of RFPs that go out weekly and we need someone here to search through those.

Dan Walker said he would suggest some EDC members are present in the interviews also. Mr. Palmer said yes they will discuss all that. Mr. Palmer said he just wanted to find out from everyone what problems have there been in the past that they can rectify in the future, what issues have you had as a Board, and do you like meeting here at city hall or would you prefer to meet somewhere else. Mr. Palmer said while all of this is going on he just wants to make sure they are taking the opportunity to correct things in the right way.

Dan Walker said he thinks they all have a great vision for the City but they just need to figure out how to make it happen.

Mr. Palmer asked if they have ever captured that vision in a plan. Jeff Angelo said in the last workshop they did they had a very good understanding of what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it, they just did not have anyone to do it. Jeff Angelo said they just do not have anyone within the group that is capable of putting in the time. Jeff Angelo said they need to find someone who can work for MEDC, the City, and the community at large and get paid for it. Jeff Angelo said if they have the money they need to find the right qualified candidate.

Ryan Londeen said he does not think they have a plan written down. Ryan Londeen said they may have different understandings of what their plan is. Ryan Londeen said he has seen other cities have an economic development plan in place or a strategic plan. Ryan Londeen said we have a City Comprehensive Plan but he thinks that was free by the university so you get what you pay for. Ryan Londeen said he has seen other comprehensive plans that are much more comprehensive and helpful. Ryan Londeen said maybe it is money well spent on doing something like that where MEDC can partner with the City. Ryan Londeen said maybe they do need to get together and say this is all that we agree on and this is how we want to grow Montgomery economically. Ryan Londeen asked do they want to focus on events, developing downtown, put in a business park or do tax abatements which are all different questions but he does not know if they are all on the same page because they do not have a page to point to. Ryan Londeen said it may be good to look into what options are out there as far as developing a strategic plan.

Mr. Palmer said they are going to be doing some priority setting, a two-year strategic plan with City

Council. Mr. Palmer said it is just a matter of going through the mission, vision, values, and identifying your goals and objectives. Mr. Palmer said he likes two pages because it is something you can have on hand and read through quickly. Mr. Palmer said once that is done with City Council he would like to do the same evolution and do a two-year strategic plan for EDC that is based off of those priorities that are identified by the City Council.

Jeff Angelo said that is a great idea and the City Council needs to start the ball rolling. Jeff Angelo said they need to have the same interests in mind as they move forward. Jeff Angelo said they have been saying that from day one and that is why everyone got together last time to see what the right and the left hand is doing.

Jeff Angelo asked when the City Council plans may be somewhat pliable to see if they can participate in that. Mr. Palmer said the first week in August.

Byron Sanford said they have 10 workshop totals through December and they have already had a couple preliminaries. Byron Sanford said Mr. Palmer has brought each one of them to the table over time to create some by in and input as they go in individually and bring that to the workshop to try and get a consolidated direction toward that end. Byron Sanford said Mr. Palmer has already taken Ms. Patricia Campuzano's position under administration. Byron Sanford said we definitely want festivals, activities, and a pulse to come alive in this City. Byron Sanford said they were affected and have been affected getting people to visit us. Byron Sanford said part of that assignment under Mr. Palmer is they are working already on how that can come together. Byron Sanford said this position they are looking at does not have anything to do with festivals and activities but has to do with economic jobs. Byron Sanford said one thing the councils that he has been on have not stocked in is they want Montgomery to be a place where they live, work, play, and worship. Byron Sanford said they have to work here and somehow draw the jobs here where they do not have to go far and when they go to lunch they stay here. Byron Sanford said there are a lot of factors involved such as looking at a city hall solution. Byron Sanford said there are really not any differences in their goals, but Council starts the ball and finishes with their votes. Byron Sanford said they are still on the same page in terms of creating those jobs. Byron Sanford said there have been how many people come to the microphone and say there is nothing here for the youth to do. Byron Sanford said if he had connection he would have a bowling alley, five theaters and bounce houses.

Jeff Angelo asked if anyone has been to Helen, Georgia. Jeff Angelo said that is the kind of town that started with an idea to make it like a Swiss Alps village. Jeff Angelo said they put activities all around the city. Jeff Angelo said there needs to be a reason to get people to visit here and the only way to do it is to create interest and activities. Jeff Angelo said we need to create an interest to get the people to come here. Jeff Angelo said you do not have to be great to get started, you just have to get started to be great and they need someone to spark them in this way. Jeff Angelo said they are just business people and do not have the municipal prowess or the time like Mr. Palmer has. Jeff Angelo said they are certainly willing to sit on committees that will help empower. Jeff Angelo said they want to move forward but they just need someone to pull the cart.

Jeff Angelo asked if they were all in agreement that this is not a bad thing. Carol Langley said it is a good thing. Byron Sanford said he thinks that way and has not heard of anything negative yet.

Mr. Palmer said he would recommend appointing a couple people to work with him and Mr. McCorquodale. Mr. Palmer said he is putting together what it looks like if they hired someone full-time or part-time and will come up with a job description. Mr. Palmer said they can go out there and see what the market is doing and he will talk with the Navasota Director and some other directors to get a good sense of what the market looks like. Mr. Palmer said after they do the strategic plan with City Council he will come back to EDC and they can spend half a day and do a strategic plan for the EDC and incorporate everything they have discussed into that plan. Mr. Palmer said right around that time will be the time City Council will want to appoint another member and they should be well into the process at that point.

Jeff Angelo asked Carol Langley if she would be able to give them some guidelines as far as finances go so they know what they are able to spend. Jeff Angelo said he is certainly willing to be on the committee and anyone else who is willing to participate who also may have the time or energy to devote to it. Jeff Angelo said he is more than happy to help out in any way they can to find that person. Jeff Angelo asked if anyone else would be interested to be a part in this. Mr. Palmer said the time commitment would be maybe a couple meetings. Ryan Londeen said he does not mind. Mr. Palmer said there needs to be three people participating. Jeff Angelo said Dan Walker, Ryan Londeen and himself are available.

Ryan Londeen asked if they need to have any type of meeting with business owners or maybe they invite business owners to come and talk with them. Mr. Palmer said an open forum. Ryan Londeen said an open forum type thing that is of interest to the business owners or that is of interest to them. Mr. Palmer said it is a great idea if you have the time to do it. Jeff Angelo said they definitely need to be talking to the business owners but you do not want it to become a gripe session. Mr. Palmer said that is what it is going to be. Jeff Angelo said we all have pet peeves regarding the way things are done but the way things are done sometimes are not always the way they look. Jeff Angelo said you need to know the whole picture and people do not always understand how city government works and why. Jeff Angelo said if there is a way to create a positive environment where folks could meet in conjunction with the area chamber that might make it a bit less of a gripe session. Ryan Londeen said at least with the gripes they can understand some of the troubles people are having and get their feedback.

Jeff Angelo asked Mr. Palmer how they would go about having an open forum and if they would do it online. Mr. Palmer said if they wanted to do this in person they would dedicate a space, advertise the meeting, and hold the forum. Mr. Palmer said he thinks that is a great idea. Mr. Palmer said any time you have a chance to include the public in what you are doing it is a good idea.

Jeff Angelo said since they are in the middle of a transition and if they were able to come to them and say these are not just plans, this is the way we are moving forward, he thinks having something concrete to be able to share with them, from his perspective as a business owner, he would love that and he would love to know what are we going to do about this or that. Jeff Angelo said he thinks they need to have more traction on what they are going to do.

Mr. Palmer asked if they have ever had an open forum before. Mr. McCorquodale said they have had developer roundtables in the past. Mr. McCorquodale said they had some issues with developers who felt they were not being heard. Mr. McCorquodale said four years ago they had a series of roundtables specifically for developers to share their thoughts on what it was like to do business in the City.

Jeff Angelo said you know there are people out there who have ideas and thought about it which is the reason he volunteered on this Board, and they feel like they cannot get traction because they do not have the means to pull it off. Jeff Angelo said if they can hear them as they are finalizing strategies, they can maybe incorporate some of those great ideas, finding the ones that stick and the ones they can pay for, and go from there.

Mr. Palmer said he thinks it is a great idea and when looking at a strategic plan, that would be one of the elements. Mr. Palmer said for the EDC we want to increase our networking and our relationships with other businesses. Mr. Palmer said they would do that by having open, quarterly meetings for people to give their input and distribute newsletters as part of the plan. Mr. Palmer said they are going to look at the broad goals and then define how they are going to get to those goals by those individual objectives. Mr. Palmer said having those meetings would be one of those objectives. Mr. Palmer said having a meeting before they get into the plan would be good. Jeff Angelo agreed. Mr. Palmer said their jobs are all about networking and relationships and any time they have a chance to build that they need to take that opportunity.

Jeff Angelo said the next step is to pick a date and push forward in getting people in the community together to come up with a plan.

Mr. Palmer said he will get together with the subcommittee to create a job description. Mr. Palmer said they will have their strategic planning meeting with Council, then will schedule a date for EDC to create their strategic plan and at that time possibly discuss setting up a public forum.

BOARD INQUIRY

Jeff Angelo asked about the wayfinding issue. Mr. McCorquodale said there would be a joint meeting with City Council, Planning and Zoning, and EDC next Monday at five o'clock at City Hall. Mr. McCorquodale said there will be two or three design concepts presented in which to choose from so they can begin working on the approved design that is agreed upon.

Carol Langley asked how many projects the MEDC has approved and are working on at this time other than the signs and McCown Street. Mr. McCorquodale said those are the two large projects. Carol Langley asked if both those items were in the booklet the Downtown Master Plan they received. Mr. McCorquodale said yes. Carol Langley asked if those are the only two projects that MEDC has approved and is working on. Mr. McCorquodale said yes. Mr. McCorquodale said there are other things such as having their presence in the events and festivals and funding the new position to make sure they are managed, maintained, and continually getting better.

Carol Langley asked if they know which events they are still involved in for the City. Carol Langley said they need to find money for this new position and she wants to know what events they said they might pay for that may not need to be anymore. Jeff Angelo said they do not have anything new coming up so it may be things they have already committed to in the past that they may not have spent money on yet. Carol Langley said she knows there was a pet parade on the list for five thousand dollars. Carol Langley asked if they have done it or are they going to do it.

Wade Nelson asked if it makes sense for the EDC to be involved with that or is that more appropriate for somebody like Shannan Reid and the Chamber. Mr. Palmer asked to be involved in what. Wade Nelson said the festivals and all the events. Mr. Palmer said he does not think he has ever worked somewhere where the EDC has been involved this deeply in sponsoring special events. Jeff Angelo said it seems like the only thing they really do. Dan Walker said they do not have any other plans. Jeff Angelo said they have just outgrown this. Mr. Palmer said he imagines EDC is doing special events just because the City did not have the capacity to do it themselves. Wade Nelson said maybe the Chamber is more appropriate for something like that. Mr. Palmer said it could be or they could bring it in house. Wade Nelson said yes, a different division within the City.

Carol Langley asked if EDC is paying half of Patricia's salary for doing the events. Mr. Palmer said he does not know the ratio but he knows they are paying some. Mr. McCorquodale said that is what was in both budgets last year. Mr. McCorquodale said the EDC agreed on half. Mr. McCorquodale said the intention was the Public Works department and the administration general fund was going to pay for half the salary to try and institute more of a parks and recreational function, but the new Council seems to not want to move toward doing anything with parks and recreation other than what they have now. Mr. McCorquodale said to him it was mainly the larger events like the Christmas parade. Mr. McCorquodale said it never really materialized. Mr. Palmer said he thinks at some point it needs to be headed back to the City to manage.

Byron Sanford said he and Carol Langley go to a lot of the Chamber events and he has noticed early on before he became Mayor that there was a very low number of our City people attending. Byron Sanford said looking at events and going through the Chamber and getting our people interested in Chamber activities is going to be a chore pulling them in. Byron Sanford said it has been said before but part of their big issue is downtown especially with the overabundance of insurance and real estate and they do not have a balance. Byron Sanford said that goes with how that all fits together economic wise and strategies with TIF to make that revitalization happen and that is what is missing because that whole thing needs to get connected. Mr. Palmer agreed.

Wade Nelson asked if they could invite Brad Stafford to one of their meetings. Mr. Palmer said sure. Wade Nelson said he has said he will do it for free to help guide them in the right direction and provide some information on grants and share how they did it. Jeff Angelo said at least they will know what to look for in the person they hire so they can hold them to account because they do not even know what normal looks like.

Carol Langley asked Mr. Palmer if he will ask the lady from Navasota if the EDC pays for those events in Navasota. Mr. Palmer said yes. Wade Nelson said the events and festivals are great but he does not think EDC should be handling that.

Ryan Londeen said they keep having these conversations every time regarding is it the events or is it downtown or do they want to educate. Ryan Londeen asked if they can have this discussion during the strategic document which is where they get into the details. Ryan Londeen asked do they want to focus on downtown and how do they do that, do they want to focus on events, how do they do that and who does it. Ryan Londeen said maybe they could have another workshop to discuss this. Mr. Palmer said they cannot have that conversation here as the dynamics are different. Mr. Palmer said they need to dedicate a couple hours for these discussions. Ryan Londeen said they need to determine what they want to focus on and how they will achieve those goals.

Mr. Palmer said he will ask the lady at Navasota about their events and he will ask for a copy of their budget too.

Ryan Londeen asked does it require a budget amendment to pay for the MEDC director's position. Mr. Palmer said they can put it in for next year's budget which is coming up October 1st.

Carol Langley asked if there are any dates for MEDC's budget workshops. Mr. Palmer said not yet. Mr. Palmer said the new Finance Director is starting on the 17th and when she gets here he will reach out to someone and they will start working on it. Mr. Palmer asked Mr. McCorquodale how they typically do that. Mr. McCorquodale said it is a series of a couple workshops and they would go through each line item. Carol Langley said it was usually done for them. Mr. Palmer said they can take a look at the budget during the strategic planning session and decide if it is an activity the Board wants to do or not. Mr. Palmer said he could do it though.

Ryan Londeen asked if the committee for the director's position is also going to go through the Bylaws. Mr. Palmer said it is up to everyone. Mr. Palmer said his thought was just the director's position, but if you want to take a look at bylaws he can get some examples together. Mr. Palmer said he thinks it is a great idea. Jeff Angelo said they should do it all together. Dan Walker said if they are talking about hiring someone they need to have the Bylaws already set.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Ryan Londeen and seconded by Byron Sanford to adjourn the meeting at 6:51 p.m. All in favor.
(6-0)

Submitted by: _____
Diana Cooley, Deputy City Secretary

Date Approved: _____

Jeff Angelo, MEDC Vice President