

Meeting Notes
Development and Engineering Advisory Board Economic Development Summit
1 - 4:30 p.m. July 19, 2012

INTRODUCTION

James Howsley, DEAB Chair, welcomed the group and discussed how development groups and their initiatives can get isolated into silos. The purpose of this summit is to bring all groups together for a frank, honest conversation about what can be done collectively.

James also introduced the moderator, **Jeanne Lawson of JLA Public Involvement**, and had all participants and audience members introduce themselves.

PRESENTATIONS

Oliver Orjiako, Clark County Community Planning, passed out a handout and explained the process for updating Clark County's comprehensive plan. Oliver said one of the most important steps will be reviewing the Community Framework Plan, which was adopted in 1993. Oliver said he anticipates a "check in" with the community to see how the community's vision, as reflected in the framework plan, has evolved in almost 20 years since its adoption.

A work session with the Board of County Commissioners on the framework plan has been scheduled for August 29, and the entire comprehensive plan will be updated by June 30, 2016, Oliver said.

Marty Snell, Clark County Community Development mentioned three priorities and briefly described some initiatives the county is undertaking in each area:

- Time – Clark County has a pilot program for a 60-day review with engineering and planning review happening concurrently. A handful of projects have gone through this process, and the county already is talking about making this a permanent process.
- Money – Clark County is partnering with the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce to examine the process for reviewing commercial buildings and tenant improvements. Currently, the process is "one size fits all." The county wants a more tailored approach, which should reduce costs to businesses. A work session with the Board of County Commissioners is scheduled for 11:00 a.m. July 25.
- Customer service – Marty said customer service is at the heart of the county's permit center. The county will look to improve the permit center, with a 6-9 month implementation schedule.

Kevin Gray, Clark County Environmental Services, said his department's No. 1 priority is reasonable stormwater regulation that satisfies the county's municipal stormwater permit, protects the environment and balances all Growth Management Act values.

Kevin noted that the county is involved in stormwater litigation at the Washington Court of Appeals. The county also is monitoring proposed regulations for the new stormwater permit, which will be published on Aug. 1. These regulations will have significant implications for the community, including a mandate for low impact development. Kevin said there will be a 30-day appeal process following the Aug. 1 publication during which the county and others can challenge.

Another priority is aligning regulations for critical areas at the local, state and federal levels, he said.

John Peterson, Clark Regional Wastewater District, said five years of planning have gone into the creation of a regional sewer partnership, the Discovery Clean Water Alliance, which involves Clark County, Clark Regional Wastewater District and the cities of Battle Ground and Ridgefield.

John reviewed three key parts of the fledgling partnership:

- Owning and operate a regional system consisting of sewage treatment plants and large sewer transmission lines.
- Building a major capital project: a sewage transmission line along Interstate 5 from Ridgefield and connecting into Clark Regional Wastewater District's system and the Salmon Creek Treatment Plan.
- Consolidating local collections systems between Clark Regional Wastewater District and the city of Ridgefield.

John said the community has had business prospects look at property along the Interstate 5 corridor, from the Clark County Fairgrounds to Ridgefield and La Center, but they have gone elsewhere because of inadequate infrastructure, including sewerage.

The following documents provide more information about the Discovery Clean Water Alliance:

- [Clark Regional Wastewater District-City of Ridgefield paper](#)
- [Discovery Clean Water Alliance fact sheet](#)
- [Discovery Clean Water Alliance presentation](#)
- [Discovery Clean Water Alliance transmission line](#)

Lisa Nisenfeld, Columbia River Economic Development Council, said the council adopted a strategic plan last fall and has focused on several issues:

- Lands for jobs – Sufficient land base for employers.
- Business growth – Helping existing business expand, which likely will be how the community emerges from the ongoing economic downturn.
- Entrepreneurship and education – Education is the basis for all economic development, especially in the knowledge economy.

Lisa said the development review process needs to be accelerated, which means faster permitting, adding that the area's permitting timelines are "extremely noncompetitive" compared with other states.

David Ripp, speaking for Camas-Washougal Economic Development Council, said the council consists of the two cities along with the Port of Camas-Washougal. The council is examining a number of incentives and economic development tools, including industrial revenue bonds and new tax credits.

Matt Hoffstetter, Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber recently conducted a poll of its membership and identified a problem: small businesses that do not hire professionals to guide them through the review process for opening a new business or expanding/renovating an existing one.

Matt said the chamber has been working with Clark County Community Development, specifically Marty Snell, Jim Muir and Jon Dunaway, to come up with “a finer tooth comb” to assist these types of businesses. One example is the county is working on a “business certificate” process for simple changes in occupancy.

Mike Bomar, DEAB, Southwest Washington Contractors Association and Responsible Growth Forum, said the contractors association seeks to provide more job opportunities for local contractors. Mike talked about developing a jurisdictional matrix showing permitting requirements at the local, state and federal level. The association is interested in reducing the time it takes to obtain permits.

Avaly Mobbs, Building Industry Association of Clark County, said her group represents 10,000 employees locally. The county BIA chapter is No. 1 in the state and No. 4 in the nation in membership growth, which indicates that something is happening in terms of economic recovery.

BIA has intervened to defend the county’s stormwater program and has lobbied against expanding National Pollutant Elimination Discharge System requirements, Avaly said.

A healthy business climate relies heavily on a healthy housing stock, she said. BIA supports delaying the payment of impact fees until the sale of the home and the occupancy of commercial buildings, she said.

BIA also supports setting up something locally that is similar to the Community Investment Initiative in Oregon, <http://communityinvestmentinitiative.org/>

Kathy Holtby, Port of Vancouver USA, said there needs to be streamlined, predictable and cost-effective permitting on the state, federal and local level. The port was able to recruit Farwest Steel, and testimonials about that process are going around the world.

Another company, Sapa, decided to come to Vancouver after the port agreed to make tenant improves to the former Panasonic building, she said. The total cost was \$1.3 million, with \$800,000 coming from a state low-income loan from the state.

Kathy said the port currently is at 98 percent occupancy. Following the closure of Panasonic, the port’s occupancy was 82 percent.

The port also received a \$5.7 million grant from Washington Jobs Now that will help pay for infrastructure improvements to the Centennial Industrial Park, she said. The port hopes to have the park ready for new prospects in 12-24 months.

Brent Grening, Port of Ridgefield, said the port has 100 acres of raw land. There is not a lot of available space in Ridgefield. Infrastructure improvements, including sewer capacity through the Discovery Clean Water Alliance, will be critical.

David Ripp, Port of Camas-Washougal, said the port also is 98 percent leased, with only 3,500 square feet of space available out of 150,000 square feet. The port is working on Steigerwald Commerce Center, a heavy industrial park, and has received a \$1.5 million grant through Washington Jobs Now.

David said the port can see a major transportation project being built right in front of its offices with the Washington State Department of Transportation's work on State Route 14. The project is moving quickly, and completion has been bumped up to November 2012, he said.

Catherine Rich, Identity Clark County, said the Columbia River Crossing will remain a major focus, along with other transportation priorities.

Sam Crummett, City of Battle Ground, said his city has tried to speed up the development review process. At the beginning, both sides record key dates on a three-month calendar. The best example of how this process has been successful is Vancouver Clinic.

Chad Eiken, City of Vancouver, mentioned four issues and priorities for his city:

- 1) Create a culture of customer service among development reviewers
- 2) Forge a culture of collaboration between departments
- 3) Fix outdated, unnecessary regulations. Vancouver has eliminated its downtown design committee. It still has design guidelines and standards, but the review is done at the staff level.
- 4) Embrace technology. Vancouver is moving to electronic plan review and hope to have that in place next summer.

Chad said the city is working to improve the way information is presented on the city's website and seeing what improvements it can make without code changes. Planning and engineering reviews take place concurrently and applicants can opt to submit building plans at the same time.

Chad said the city has pre pre-application conferences. For 15 years, the city has provided a single point of contact to make the process easier on the applicant.

David Ripp said the major holdup on the Stiegerwald Commercial Center has not been local officials but the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Kathy Holton said short time frames are essential. Business prospects want something now or in no more than six months, and they do not want to go through protracted processes. There is a lot of pent-up demand in the economy, but companies with money to spend continue to hold back because of uncertainty

Lynn Valenter, Washington State University Vancouver, said the university is putting its business students to work helping businesses grow, not necessarily startups but ones that have been in business for three to five years.

Lynn said the university continues to discuss developing a research park but that is a long-term project.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Following the presentations, **Jeanne Lawson** asked participants to write three top issues, one per card, that they would like to see addressed in the next 18 months.

County staff arranged those cards on a purple “sticky board” under seven broad categories:

- Infrastructure and funding
- Culture of customer service
- Regulatory reform
- Pre-planning
- Community vision/alignment
- Communication/partnership
- Land

Marty Snell briefly reviewed many of the issues listed under the seven categories.

Lisa Nisenfeld said CREDC recently received emails from someone who was outraged by his or her experience with permitting. There were such long delays that the six-month application had expired. Perhaps when a deadline has been missed, the permit center should start paying back some fees, she said.

When the economy rebounds, we could have a surge of expansion and investment, Lisa said. Will the community be ready to handle this sudden increase?

Mike Odren, DEAB member, said there definitely has been an improvement in customer service locally. Today, the process is far more proactive and collaborative than it was 20 years ago, when it was “us vs. them.”

Mike said he is surprised it took so long for the county to go to a 60-day process when the city has had a 90-day process for five to seven years. He added that he routinely talks to government staff members who do not know what other local governments are doing.

Lisa Nisenfeld said local communities should be looking to use the “lean” process, which she described as the most transformative process she has ever seen.

Axel Swanson, Board of Clark County Commissioners, said he and County Administrator Bill Barron have looked at what King County has done using the lean process, adding that Cowlitz County used lean a little during his tenure there.

Marty Snell said lean is all about stripping something down to its bare essentials and rebuilding it. Marty said his highest priority is to replace the county’s Tidemark electronic permit system. New permitting systems have much more routing and notification options, which in turn fosters concurrent and parallel reviews, not sequential reviews.

Helen Devery, DEAB Vice Chair, said the real delays are at the state and federal level. Helen said she, as a professional working in this field, does not know what is being done to address this issue at the state and federal level.

Kevin Gray said the community's focus should be on instigating change at the state level. The public and private sectors need to work more closely together. The county cannot accomplish much alone as a local agency and not even when working together with other counties, he said. It's only when it forges a public-private partnership, combined with general populace support, that the particular issue gets attention. At the state level, people with common interests and goals can work together and affect positive changes at the Washington State Department of Ecology and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Eric Golemo, DEAB member, said that when he talks to people at the state level, he is often surprised about how little they know about what is going on at the local level.

Axel Swanson said there is substantial agreement on many issues. The county and community pushed hard on stormwater in the Legislature this last session, but there needs to be this type of meeting in Olympia to develop a short list of priorities.

Lisa Nisenfeld briefly reviewed an eight-point plan that CREDC is developing.

Helen Devery said she has not participated in this type of summit or forum with state officials and suggested the group might need to have this discussion at a different level.

Oliver Orjiako said too often, local communities react to rules instead of helping write them.

James Howsley said the Growth Management Act was supposed to be a "bottom up" approach toward planning, but instead it has morphed into an Oregon-style "top down" model, not only for stormwater but for critical areas as well

Brent Grening said he talks with other ports and there is considerable frustration with Washington State Department of Ecology. There is a complete disconnect between managers and the next layer down in the organization, the people who are directly involved in local projects, he said.

Marty Snell said a group of planners from Southwest Washington have been meeting with Tom Klingman from the Department of Ecology.

Marty said it took three legislative sessions but a bill finally passed for Department of Ecology to work with eight stakeholder groups to look at thresholds for what is exempt from SEPA review and perhaps look at the SEPA checklist, which is now 40 years old.

Marty said Department of Ecology has not looked at SEPA rules since adoption of the Growth Management Act. It needs to eliminate redundancies while keeping environmental protections in place.

Eric Golemo said relatively few bills get enacted into law because there are all kinds of ways to kill a bill. Administrative rules are a far different story. Typically hearings only deal with how to implement new rules, not whether they should be enacted in the first place, he said.

Helen Devery noted that the Washington State Department of Transportation has no future funding to pay for additional transportation infrastructure and maybe it is time to take another look at tax increment financing.

Greg Jellison, DEAB member, said the current program is little more than a lottery.

Helen Devery said she suspects there will be an increased emphasis on public-private partnerships to help fill funding holes.

Eric Golemo said grant money goes to ports and other governments, but the private sector does not have the ability to secure funding, even through a lottery system.

John Peterson said the regional transmission line along the I-5 corridor is a \$25 million project, with \$20 million coming from two Public Works Trust Fund loans.

John said the regional partnership has identified \$600 million in potential sewerage infrastructure to be built in the next 25 years. The community needs to be a step ahead so it has sites ready for development but not too far ahead where it have valuable infrastructure installed but no revenue flow to help pay for it. This reinforces the need for better coordination and to make targeted investments, he said.

Lisa Nisenfeld said it ultimately be up to the Board of County Commissioners to reconcile competing interests in updating the comprehensive plan. She said she attended a recent hearing on the “Growing Healthier Plan” and it seemed as if the county was approaching this issue from two different directions.

Lisa said the community needs to optimize its job producing lands and must ask itself if it wants to continue to have 30-35 percent of its work force community to Oregon for jobs.

Greg Jellison said he remembers when Padden Parkway was developed. Because federal dollars were used, it was necessary to study the cumulative effects of building this infrastructure. The community was trying to create jobs but federal officials were far more concerned about the environmental impact of development that could be induced.

Marty Snell said Clark County found itself in the same issue with the Salmon Creek Interstate Project. Construction was delayed by a year because of concerns from the National Marine Fisheries Service in an area that was inside an urban growth boundary and was already largely developed, he said.

Jeanne Lawson said she can name at least three other jurisdictions that have had similar problems.

R. Tom Smith, a commercial real estate broker, said he represents some projects on 192nd Avenue. The feedback he hears is that local officials are good to work with.

Greg Jellison said there needs to be as much as consistency as possible for local standards for streets, water and sewer.

Greg said relationships are important. Local officials get to know the engineers, attorneys and other professionals and work with them well, but a small business might have a different experience.

R. Tom Smith said the city of Vancouver has information online that provides step-by-step guidance for applicants.

Lynn Valenter said WSU Vancouver is a long-term developer of a plot of land. That role is changing because state capital dollars will not be coming to the university as they have in the past, which may cause it to look for more public-private partnerships.

Jeanne Lawson and **James Howsley** wrapped up the summit. James said he expects to continue this conversation.

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