

Is Tri-Agency on Life Support?

May 19, 2024



The Tri-Agency Economic Development Joint Powers Authority (JPA) held a meeting May 2, for a discussion and possible action to recommend to member agencies to terminate the Authority pursuant to the JPA. The three agencies which comprise Tri-Agency are the City of Crescent City, County of Del Norte and the Crescent City-Del Norte County Harbor District.

The bone of contention apparently is the prioritization of wind power development. Or is it?

Tri-Agency has experienced a tumultuous past. Accumulated debt incurred to the Dept. of Agriculture totaling almost \$290,000 eventually was settled via installment payments to the Federal government. Joint Powers economic efforts have been virtually nonexistent.

In a related Closed Session item, community watchdog Linda Sutter alleges malfeasance in a lawsuit filed in Superior Court. Sutter states, "Everyday Tri-Agency remains open, it is in violation of the California Brown Act. The JPA has no budget, no office, no staff. Tri-Agency is a waste of public funds." Sutter alleges nearly \$40,000 has been spent on legal costs / attorney fees between 2018-2020.

The current Tri-Agency Authority is comprised by City Councilor Ray Altman and Mayor Blake Inscore, Supervisor Chris Howard and Board of Supervisors Chair Dean Wilson, and Harbor Commissioner Wes White who is the current chairman of the Tri-Agency JPA. These five elected make up the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority.

Last Summer, under considerable scrutiny and discussion, all three member agencies voted to continue Tri-Agency. Each Governance agreed to fund the JPA, accordingly:

- Del Norte County \$70,000.
- Crescent City \$30,000.
- Harbor District \$10,000.

Both the City and Harbor agreed to add Wind Power development to its document. Del Norte County declined to add the Wind Power component to its partnership agreement. Then, the wheels came off the bus.

An impasse was created.

All three agencies must agree on all aspects of its Joint Powers Agreement or the JPA collapses.

All three Tribes, the Tolowa, Elk Valley Rancheria and the Yurok Nation in Del Norte have expressed opposition to Wind Power Development.

Del Norte County requested and has received its \$70,000 contribution returned to its General Fund.

Public Comments kicked off the discussion. Linda Sutter asked for a state fuel excise waiver to help stimulate the Del Norte economy.

Then, discussion heated up considerably. The discussion became emotional. Commissioner Howard said it would be a mistake to dissolve Tri-Agency, citing its once past contributions to the Del Norte economy. Howard cited no examples of Tri-Agency economic contributions.

Commissioner Altman made the motion to recommend dissolving Tri-Agency to its members. Commissioner White seconded the motion. Commissioner Inscore declared the impasse centered over Wind Power development and saw no pathway to move forward, pointing to the County's unwillingness to re-discuss its opposition; that discussion would need a super majority 4/5th vote by the Board of Supervisors, highly unlikely based on the Board's previous vote on wind power.

Inscore lamented, "We have no place to go." Altman called for the question and Inscore recoiled in a clearly hostile manner. "We're not done yet," he emphatically stated. (discussing the impasse). Altman asserted his right to call the question and said the agency does not function and serves no purpose.

White praised the Wind Power component discussion, and declared, "We must be at the table discussing windpower. It is wrong not to be at the table, wrong, wrong, wrong!"

Inscore buried his face in his hands, then sat up and called the County's decision to oppose Wind Power development as "foolish." The impasse was now firmly secured. Heels were dug in.

Wilson defended the Supervisors decision to oppose the Wind Power development as "long term, decades down the road before any possible benefits would come to Del Norte."

Howard made a motion to table the entire question of terminating Tri-Agency. There was no second. An alternate motion made by Chairman White and seconded by Wilson to adjourn the discussion to the full boards for a vote on termination was passed by consensus.

A second vote to return the City's \$30,000 and the Harbor's \$10,000 contributions was also approved by consensus.

The appearance of kicking the can down the road was palpable and the reality exists, without funding, the Tri-Agency Economic Authority JPA is and remains on life support.

The question will soon be scheduled at an as yet, unannounced meeting JPA meeting.