
IN MY VIEW: Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies

April 18, 2024

I attended the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors meeting on April 9 to see what they would do with the Joint Powers Agreement for the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority.

The question for the Supervisors was whether to concur and adopt the same version of the JPA that the Crescent City Council and the Harbor Commissioners approved or refuse to change their minds. The only difference is a clause that the County added that disallows activities involving offshore wind.

For Tri-Agency to resume leading our regional economic development effort, the same JPA must be adopted by each of the member agencies. If the County continues to refuse reconsideration and does not approve the revisions made by their partners, Tri-Agency will likely be stalled.

CEDS

I think it is unfortunate that so much time and energy has been spent debating the pros and cons of offshore wind energy. This has resulted in a stalemate. The County is highjacking the agenda before Tri-Agency can be assembled to choose the best economic development programs to pursue.

I testified at the Supervisors meeting and suggested that Tri-Agency should focus on implementing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan (CEDS), which is an action plan for collaboration to accomplish shared goals for economic development in Del Norte County.

The CEDS was prepared under a joint effort of Crescent City, Del Norte County, and the Crescent City Harbor District, and contains an action plan with unrealized goals and objectives that Tri-Agency could take on. I highlight below a few examples of goals and projects that Tri-Agency could work on.

Create New Jobs

CEDS Goal 1 is to “diversify the regional economy to include technology-based firms, light manufacturing and health care enterprises that provide at least living wages to local workers.” Two good ideas in the CEDS are to “attract internet commuters and ensure adequate capacity and redundancy in the broadband network.”

There is a section that focuses on healthcare with interlocking objectives. “Attract and expand a greater range of specialty health care services, create an inventory of health care services available in Del Norte County, identify existing health care gaps and engage a group of industry representatives to determine the constraints to filling the gaps.”

To help fill these gaps, the CEDS recommends we “coordinate with workforce education and training agencies to maximize the opportunity for local healthcare training programs.”

Workforce Support

CEDS Goal 5 is to “enhance education, workforce training, housing and healthy lifestyle opportunities in the County to support existing residents and businesses as well as the workforce of the future.”

The CEDS proposes to “support expansion of career technical education programs in the K-12 school system and attract or develop additional vocational education programs, focused on skills needed by local industry as well as future technology industries.”

The CEDS recommends housing actions to “prepare market information that can help attract developers to build more workforce housing, as well as evaluating local zoning and permitting processes to remove barriers for all types of housing.” Lack of affordable workforce housing is a major impediment to economic development. This must be addressed with more urgency.

I asked the Supervisors to consider this question, “If not Tri-Agency, who will do this work?”

Do Over

Since the Board of Supervisors previously voted on this decision, the second time was harder. Three independent yet interrelated actions were necessary to be taken in order, for each of the subsequent items to be considered.

First, a motion to suspend the rules of order must be approved to allow the Supervisors to reconsider the Tri-Agency JPA. This action requires 4 votes to pass. Contingent upon the passage of the first item, next they need to approve a motion to reconsider the Tri-Agency JPA.

Contingent upon the passage of the first and second items they could vote to adopt the Tri-Agency JPA, Amendment, removing Section 5.05.E of the Board’s previously approved version of the JPA which restricted the Tri-Agency’s ability to “support or pursue activities involving the off-shore generation of wind energy.”**No Compromise**

After public comment, when it came time to take action, Supervisor Starkey made the motion to “suspend the rules of order” to reconsider the Tri-Agency JPA. Supervisor Howard seconded the motion. Supervisor

Short stated that he “was not willing to waiver on protection of fishing and was not willing to suspend the rules.”

Supervisor Borges seemed annoyed that this issue was before him again. He said, “What’s the point of having rules if we’re not going to follow them. Let them (the City and Harbor) change their votes!” The first motion failed. Short, Borges and Wilson voted no, Starkey voted yes, and Howard abstained. The die was cast.

Technically, the Tri-Agency still exists with the current, outdated joint powers agreement, but if the County refuses to contribute the \$70,000 that they previously committed, Tri-Agency will be hobbled. The City has already contributed \$30,000 and Harbor met their commitment to pay \$10,000. The County is holding out.

Now What?

Ironically, the Supervisors had a discussion of a proposed new Strategic Action Plan earlier in the agenda when staff recommended that the County should “add economic development services” to the County staffing. The County currently has no one working exclusively on economic development.

The Supervisors are developing a Strategic Action Plan which they say will set priorities for what the County should do. If they are going to do nothing, this will be easy. We don’t need another plan. We need action.

Kevin Hendrick is a 31-year resident of Del Norte County. kevinjameshendrick@gmail.com