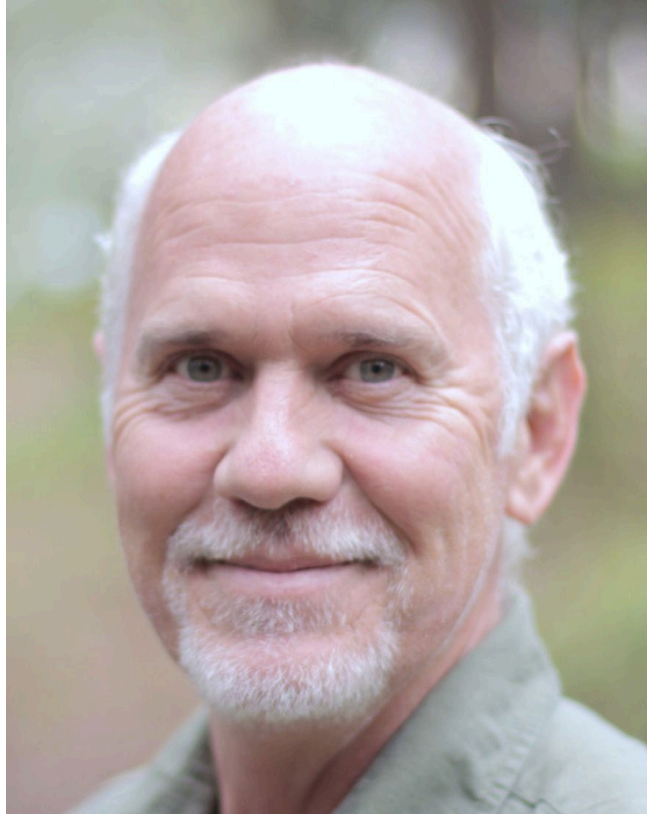

In My View: Joint powers disagreement

March 7, 2024



Since I started writing my column almost two years ago, I have written at least seven times about the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority. The first column was in June 2022. At that time the City, County and Harbor were discussing their intent to settle old debts and take steps to reform Tri-Agency.

These agencies have come a long way toward giving Tri-Agency a new purpose. The final step is that all three agencies must approve a revised joint powers agreement that will define in detail what the purpose and powers of Tri-Agency are as they move forward. They are close but there is a joint powers disagreement.

Prior Steps Taken

On February 20, 2024, the Crescent City Council considered adoption of the amended joint powers agreement and City staff wrote a very informative report on the history of Tri-Agency and the actions taken to date.

“Tri-Agency was originally formed in the aftermath of the 1964 tsunami to help drive economic recovery and has also been instrumental in projects involving the sewer, airport, and Visitors Bureau. Tri-Agency has

struggled to function in any meaningful way since it defaulted on a USDA loan in 2011.”

“On October 25, 2022, a joint meeting of the City Council, the County Board of Supervisors and the Harbor Commission was held to agree on a split of the \$160,000 of outstanding USDA debt.”

“On July 25, 2023, another joint meeting was held where each member agency voted to continue the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority. They agreed that the joint powers agreement needed to be revised to allow the inclusion of tribal members and prohibit Tri-Agency from serving as a lender of last resort.”

More Recent Actions

On October 13, 2023, the Tri-Agency Board considered a draft revision of the joint powers agreement and agreed to circulate the draft for comments from the member agencies.

On November 21, 2023, the County Board of Supervisors considered the draft revision and added a few changes of their own, including Section 5.05.E which states that Tri-Agency, “shall not support or pursue activities involving the offshore generation of wind energy.” The concern was negative impacts on fishing.

On January 23, 2024, the Board of Supervisors, with Supervisor Starkey absent, unanimously approved the amended joint powers agreement, including the ban on involvement with offshore wind. This was then transmitted for ratification by the other members of Tri-Agency. But they had other plans.

Be At the Table

On February 6, 2024, the Harbor Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the joint powers agreement excluding Section 5.05.E. It is especially compelling that the two fishermen on the Harbor Commission know that fishermen should be at the negotiating table even though they are opposed to offshore wind.

On February 20, 2024, the City Council also voted unanimously to approve the joint powers agreement excluding Section 5.05 E. Council members expressed an interest in protecting fishing but understood that it is better to be engaged. It was noted that the Harbor District cares about fishing, yet they want to be involved.

It is worth highlighting that the Harbor and the City agreed with 99.9 % of what the County approved. The only disagreement was Section 5.05.E. Now this must go back to the Supervisors to reconsider their position and go along with the two Tri-Agency member agencies or not. If they agree then Tri-Agency can move forward.

There's More To Do

At one of these meetings someone asked why offshore wind is being discussed so much. The reason is because the agreement approved by the County would needlessly limit the powers of Tri-Agency. Offshore wind development should be monitored, but it should not be the top economic development priority.

Some people have said it is not clear what the purpose of Tri-Agency is if not for wind power. However, the joint powers agreement refers to the approved Del Norte Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

(CEDS) as a guiding plan which identifies many projects that Tri-Agency can work on.

The CEDS includes an Action Plan with a list of specific objectives and actions that will enhance economic development in our community. The CEDS identifies specific projects related to the harbor, transportation, stormwater, wastewater, water systems, municipal/county facilities, county parks and recreation.

One More Vote

It has been seven months since the Tri-Agency began the process of updating the agreement that defines their purpose and powers. They are so close to succeeding, but it is still possible to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. If the County Supervisors do not reconsider their position, Tri-Agency could die.

Even if Section 5.05.E is removed, concerned County Supervisors do not give a blank check to Tri-Agency on offshore wind policy. There are checks and balances built into the voting structure that effectively gives the County a veto over any action. For a motion to pass at least one County representative must vote yes.

Economic Development

There is a need for more focus on local economic development in our community. Tri-Agency can start to focus on helping with this if all members agree and adopt the same version of the joint powers agreement. Until this happens this agency is in a dysfunctional stasis.

The February meeting of Tri-Agency was cancelled with no explanation. The next meeting is scheduled to start at 3:00 PM Thursday March 28. It is possible they are waiting to see what the Board of Supervisors do.

The next Board of Supervisors meeting is 10:00 AM Tuesday March 12. Check the agenda at delnortecoca.portal.civicclerk.com to see if this will be discussed. If so, please attend and encourage the Supervisors to approve the same agreement approved by the City Council and the Harbor Commissioners.

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