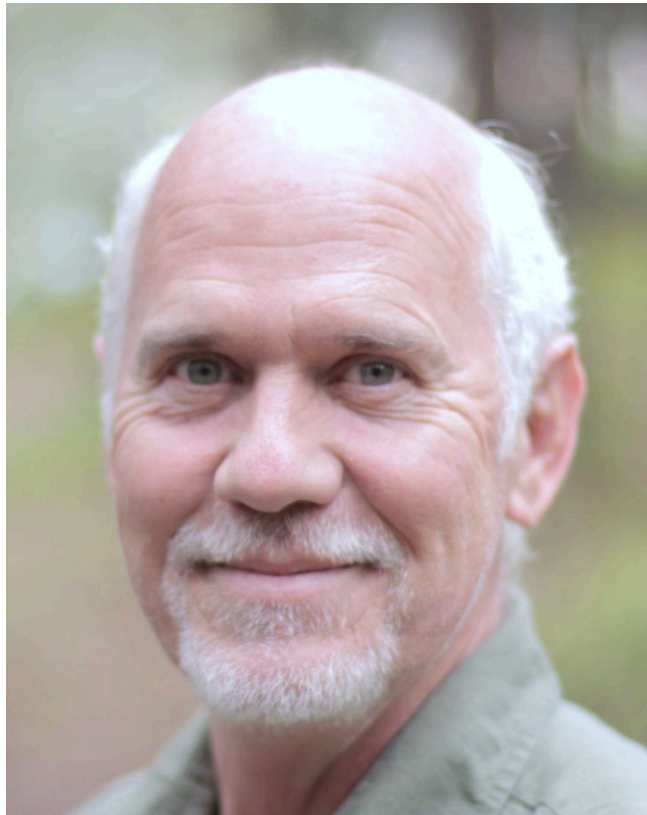

In My View: What are they for?

January 20, 2024



The Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority held a Board of Directors meeting on January 4. The meeting was attended by Supervisor Chris Howard, Harbor Commissioner Wes White and City Council members Blake Inscore and Ray Altman. Only a few members of the public were in attendance.

Alec Dompka, an economic development specialist from UC Davis University Extension, gave an update on the preliminary results of a Needs Assessment that they are conducting for our county. This is an effort to identify what is lacking or needed for our community to have successful economic development programs.

Needs Assessment

The four most mentioned needs are increased staff capacity, housing, offshore wind, and increased collaboration. It was found that there is a need for increased staffing to work on economic development. Although some agencies have staff who work on economic development, they also have other duties.

Housing was identified as a critical need that impacts economic growth. The general shortage of housing makes it harder to recruit teachers, medical professionals, peace officers and other workers. People are

leaving our county because of a lack of affordable housing.

Many people have an interest in learning more about the potential of offshore wind development and wanted an unbiased source of information. Those surveyed also identified a need for increased collaboration between government agencies on economic development. Tri-Agency could have a role in meeting all these needs.

CEDS

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development designed to build capacity and guide economic prosperity and resiliency in a region. The CEDS must be updated every five years to qualify for funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

The Del Norte County CEDS is due to be updated soon, but the results of the Needs Assessment shows that our CEDS is still relevant for Tri-Agency to use today to guide their activities. Seventeen of the 23 issues identified in the Needs Assessment are already identified in the Del Norte CEDS.

There is a laundry list of economic development projects in the Del Norte CEDS that Tri-Agency could work on.

Based on the Needs Assessment, Alec Dompka concluded that there is a need for county-wide economic development coordination and implementation.

Joint Powers Agreement

The Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) defines the purpose, powers, and restrictions of the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority. Updating and approving the revised JPA is a condition for the member agencies to continue to participate and contribute funding for the continued operation of Tri-Agency.

The JPA defines the purpose of Tri-Agency is “to implement, coordinate and administer general economic development programs on behalf of the member agencies, including but not limited to, public works projects, projects which raise the economic and educational levels of the residents of Del Norte County, projects which provide jobs, and projects which assist industrial development.”

In response to concerns over past Tri-Agency lending practices, a restriction on their powers was added to the prior draft. Tri-Agency “shall not operate any form of lending program, included but not limited to revolving loan programs and intermediate lending programs...”

Offshore Wind

After the revised draft JPA was circulated to the member agencies, one new addition was requested by the County. It is a restriction of power which states Tri-Agency “shall not support or pursue activities involving the offshore generation of wind energy.”

This was added to appease one or more Supervisors who oppose offshore wind development, but this policy statement is the political equivalent of hiding your head in the sand. If we don’t talk about it, it won’t happen.

Offshore wind will likely happen off our coast and there is very little local government can do to stop it.

Even if we have concerns or complaints about the possible negative effects of offshore wind, we are better off being at the negotiating table. If we are not involved there is a no chance that our concerns will be addressed or the negative impacts mitigated. Tri-Agency is the obvious choice to represent our concerns.

Community Benefits

Wind development companies will often negotiate Community Benefit Agreements (CBA) with local governments to help financially compensate for negative impacts that may result from offshore wind development. Tri-Agency is well positioned as a regional agency to negotiate a CBA for our community.

If Tri-Agency is prohibited from pursuing “activities involving offshore generation of wind energy,” then they would be prevented from negotiating mitigation and community benefit agreements. If local agencies are not coordinated, wind companies will more easily divide and conquer to negotiate less beneficial agreements.

The Tri-Agency Board members each appeared to recognize the detriment of adopting this new restriction on JPA involvement with offshore wind, but conceded that they did not want to allow this one issue to torpedo the Tri-Agency all together. Accepting this new amendment may be politically expedient but it is bad policy.

Hope Abides

It is my continued hope that the City, County and Harbor can come to agreement on a reformed Tri-Agency, but I am starting to lose faith that this will happen. It is a bad sign that the agency is facing such strong headwinds and it may not be possible to bring this across the finish line.

I strongly recommend that the County agree to remove this prescribed restriction on involvement with offshore wind. It doesn't make sense to withdraw from consideration a potential new industry.

People can be skeptical but there is no harm in continuing to monitor this process. There might be harm if we disengage.

To the people that are opposed to entrusting Tri-Agency with regional economic development, I ask: if they are against Tri-Agency, what are they for? Who will lead economic development, if not Tri-Agency?

I think we should give Tri-Agency a chance to succeed. I am glad to see that the Tri-Agency Board of Directors is pressing ahead to reanimate this moribund agency.

The member agencies are not moving with the urgency I think is warranted, but there is forward progress.

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