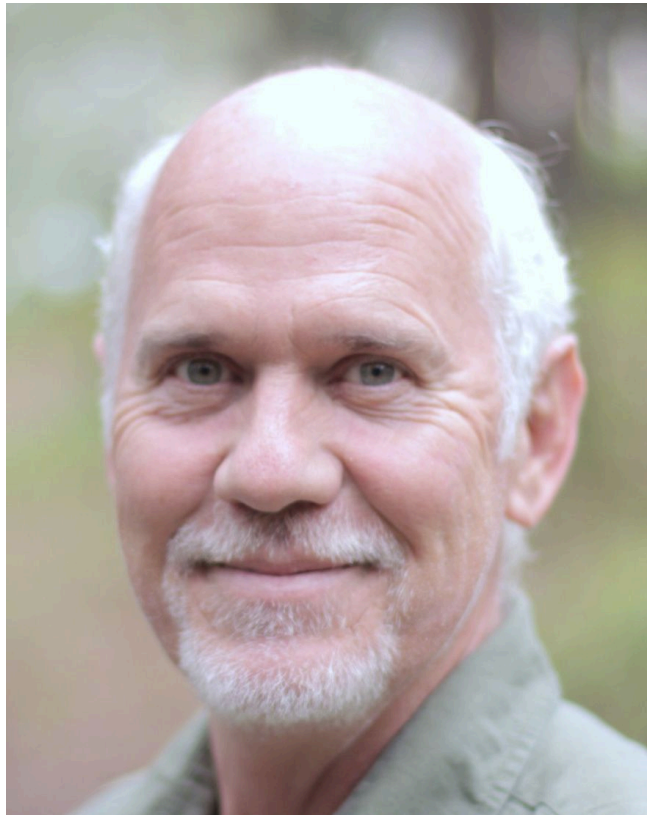


In My View: Corrective actions required

October 29, 2023



I have been contributing a column to the Del Norte Triplicate every week for more than a year and a half. Today is my 83rd consecutive column. As hard as I have tried to make sure that my sources are credible and the information I provide is accurate, it was inevitable that I would make a factual error.

Correction

In my column published on October 11, “Open Meetings Yield the Best Results”, I made my first significant mistake. I incorrectly stated that Harbor Commissioner Rick Shephard was an owner of Fisherman’s Catch.

I received a very cordial call from Rick Shephard to inform me of my misstatement. He told me that he recused himself from participating in the discussion and voting for the Fisherman’s Catch lease, because he has sold crab to this company, and he may again in the future. He is not an owner of Fisherman’s Catch.

I apologized for my error. Commissioner Shephard then told me that he is a longtime advocate for maintaining a strong commercial fishing industry in the Crescent City Harbor and is a booster for this project. He also acknowledged that there is a place for tourism businesses in the harbor.

Tri-Agency

I attended two meetings of the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority on September 28 and October 13. The first meeting was their regularly scheduled monthly meeting and they had a full agenda of actions that needed to be taken to move this agency forward.

Unfortunately, this meeting could not be held due to a lack of a quorum. The Tri-Agency Board is comprised of two representatives from each of the member agencies: City, County and Harbor. For any votes to be taken there must be at least four board members present including one from each of the member agencies.

On September 28, there were no City members present. Blake Inscore has been reliable in attending and contributing to these meetings, but the other City member Jason Greenough rarely attends. This lack of commitment hobbles the ability of Tri-Agency to make progress. Another City member should be appointed.

Try Again

On October 13, Tri-Agency scheduled a special meeting to take care of the business that was deferred from the previously cancelled meeting. In this case a special meeting was justified due to the real urgency to move ahead with reorganization.

This meeting had a quorum consisting of Harbor Commissioners Brian Stone and Wes White, County Supervisors Chris Howard and Dean Wilson and City Council Member Blake Inscore. The agenda and supporting documents were published and available on the County website.

This was a very productive meeting. Decisions were made and votes were taken that will help to move forward with the reform of this beleaguered agency. I was encouraged to see this decisive action.

Fiscal Decisions

This first order of business was authorizing the return of the \$70,000 that the County had contributed to the Tri-Agency. Apparently, this check was sent without proper authorization and the County asked for it to be returned. The Supervisors present explained that this funding was budgeted but that the Board of Supervisors wanted to hold off providing this funding until after the Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) is revised.

The second item was a discussion of the accumulated cost for having the County Counsel provide staffing and legal advice to the Tri-Agency Board. The County Counsel has now stepped back from this role, but he informed the Tri-Agency Board that if he was billing his time it would add up to about \$20,000.

It was recommended that the Tri-Agency formally send a request to the County asking to forgive this debt. The Board agreed to draft a letter and return to a subsequent meeting for approval before sending it. This seems reasonable that the City, County and Harbor should “donate” staff to Tri-Agency until they hire their own.

Revised JPA

The most consequential decision that the Tri-Agency Board made was approval of a draft revised Joint Powers Agreement. Prior to his withdrawal, the County Counsel prepared an updated agreement that addressed the concerns with past lending practices of this agency.

Under the section titled “Restrictions on Powers,” the following clause was added: “The AUTHORITY shall not operate any form of lending program, including, but not limited to, revolving loan programs, intermediate relending programs, or any other program which requires the AUTHORITY to borrow or otherwise obligate itself for the purpose of directly financing community businesses.”

This draft Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) will now be circulated to the member agencies for review and comment. This feedback from the members will then be brought back to the Tri-Agency for inclusion in the final revision of the JPA. This final agreement will then be returned to the members for final approval.

Future Planning

I was pleased to see the Tri-Agency Board setting a course for future economic development activities. They tentatively approved a Request for Proposals to hire a contractor which can provide Executive Director services to Tri-Agency.

Tri-Agency has been hampered from making progress because they have no staff. They have a reasonable strategy to hire an economic development professional to help the agency focus on the most viable projects.

This contractor will also “Advise the agency with respect to the availability of grants and procedures for obtaining grants and when so directed prepare grant applications.” Long term, this will help bring in outside funding to reduce the financial burden on member agencies.

Action Sequence

Though the Tri-Agency Board is planning the necessary steps on a parallel track, there is a sequence of actions that must happen for these plans to bear fruit.

First, the revised the Joint Powers Agreement must be approved by each member agency.

Then the member agencies will provide startup funding for Tri-Agency operations. Once funding is received, Tri-Agency can hire the economic development professionals needed to develop and fund projects.

This may take a few months, but it all seems possible.

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