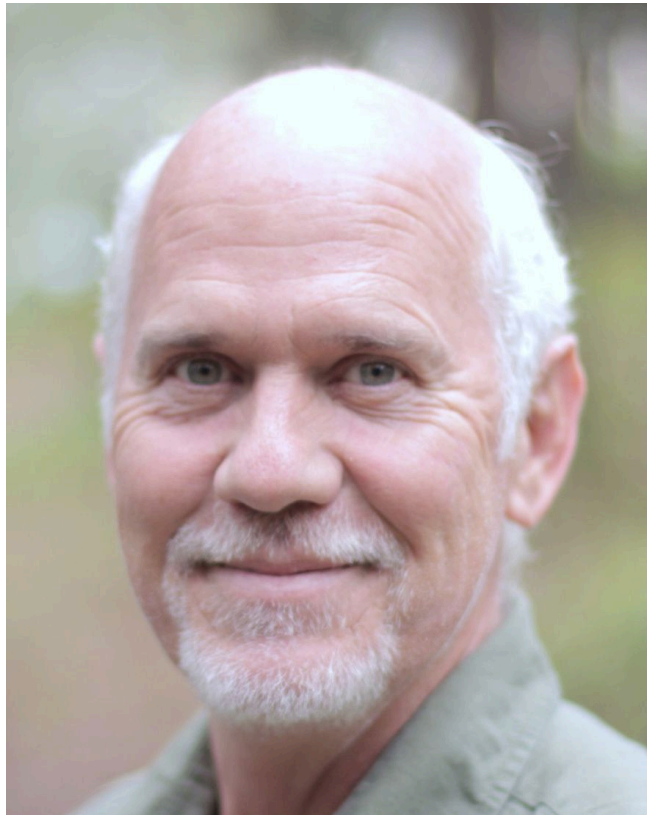


In My View: The contentious joint meeting

August 11, 2023



On July 25, the Crescent City Council, Del Norte County Supervisors and Crescent City Harbor Commissioners held a joint meeting to vote on the future of the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority.

Two options were presented: 1) Make a commitment to continue to be a member of the Tri-Agency; or 2) Direct staff to begin steps to withdraw and/or terminate the agreement that formed the Tri-Agency.

The Del Norte County Counsel, who has been filling in to staff the Tri-Agency, summed up the choices perfectly, “Fund it or kill it.”

Three Ring Circus

Although I attend the Harbor District meetings regularly, I do not often attend the City Council or Board of Supervisor meetings live. It was impressive to see them all together in person.

City Council Member Jason Greenough, and Harbor Commissioners Rick Shepherd and Harry Adams were absent, but the rest showed up ready to take care of business.

Sadly, there were a dozen people in the audience who were intent on disrupting the proceedings. They heckled and jeered at the elected officials as they tried to conduct the people's business. Very quickly the meeting devolved into a three-ring circus complete with clowns.

The Angry Mob

This was clearly an organized effort to harass anyone they disagreed with. They disapproved of the proposal that the Tri-Agency should continue. They had a right to attend this meeting and state their opinions. Each one of them had an opportunity to speak for 3 minutes on every agenda item.

However, their misbehavior and frequent interruptions violated acceptable decorum for participating in government meetings. At one point I noticed the Del Norte County Sheriff standing in the back of a room. It is legal to remove someone who is interfering with a meeting. Mob rule is not acceptable in civilized society.

There was a presentation on offshore wind energy on the agenda preceding the discussion of the Tri Agency. The horde complained bitterly that they did not come to hear about wind power. They opposed wind power and did not want to learn more. Their inappropriate antics stalled the meeting further.

Wind Power

One possible project that the Tri Agency could work on is to capitalize on the very likely development of a wind farm 20 miles offshore. Since these are federal waters there is little that can be done locally to stop this.

The smart thing to do is to understand how this permit process will work and be sure of having a seat at the table when the deals are made. There will be jobs and business opportunities. Funding will also be available to compensate communities for any negative impacts of wind power and we need to fight for our share.

The wind presentations by an engineer working on the Humboldt County port improvements and from the Humboldt Area Foundation on financial payments that Humboldt County has negotiated were very informative. But the anti-wind zealots did not listen or appear to learn anything.

Other Plans

It was awkward that the wind energy presentations were scheduled at the same meeting when they were deciding whether to continue to fund the Tri-Agency. Wind power is only one potential project, but the two issues became conflated.

For some, opposing wind power was seen as the same as opposing the Tri-Agency.

A few elected officials pointed out that there are many other projects in approved economic development plans that the Tri-Agency could work on. Regrettably, no one called out any specific projects, so these opportunities were vague. This left wind power as the only stated justification for the Tri-Agency.

Alex Domka, Economic Development Advisor with the UC Davis Cooperative Extension, offered guidance pertinent to the advantages of working together. He pointed out that a joint powers agency can improve cooperation and coordination by pooling resources, leading to a holistic, rather than a piecemeal approach.

The Votes

At the end of a nearly three-hour meeting, each Board voted.

County Supervisors Chris Howard, Darren Short and Dean Wilson voted to continue to fund the Tri-Agency. Based on past mistakes, Valerie Starkey was skeptical that the Tri-Agency could succeed. Joey Borges voted no because he thinks wind power will kill the fishing industry but offered no evidence to support this.

Three City Council members voted to continue with the Tri-Agency. Kelly Schellong and Blake Inscore were joined by Isaiah Wright who agreed to vote in support on the condition that local tribes be invited to join. Ray Altman expressed valid concerns about the possible environmental impacts of offshore wind and voted no.

Three Harbor Commissioners, Wes White, Brian Stone and Gerhard Weber, voted to continue to work with and fund the Tri-Agency with the condition that local tribal governments be invited to join.

I think including tribal governments is a good idea.

Amend the JPA

It is not certain that any tribes will be interested in joining the Tri-Agency, but Elk Valley Rancheria Chairman, Dale Miller spoke briefly at the meeting stating that they want to be good community partners. It is in their mission statement to act “for the good of the tribe, county, community and region.”

To enable new members to join the Tri-Agency, the joint powers agreement (JPA) must be amended, and a clause must be added to allow tribes or other agencies to enroll. Any revisions must be approved by each of the current member agencies at their regular meetings. This will give the public a chance to review and comment on these changes before they are approved.

Sense of Urgency

Before the vote, successful local businessman Kevin Hartwick reminded everyone that the Tri-Agency has achieved many great accomplishments and that more can still be done if we continue to work together.

Hartwick quoted Jim Hooper, who helped to form the Tri-Agency nearly 50 years ago. Mr. Hooper once said that success will require “persistence, determination and a sense of urgency.”

This is still good advice today.

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