

Town of Concrete Economic Development Commission
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Town of Concrete
Economic Development Commission

Meeting Agenda

May 10, 2023 - 6 p.m.

1. Call Meeting to Order
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Roll Call
4. Old Business
 - i. Vision Statement Discussion
5. New Business
6. Other Business
7. Announcements - Next Workshop – June 14 - 6pm
8. Adjournment

**Economic
Development
Commission Members**

Ger van den Engh

Karla Massingale

Dinah Kinney-Chair
Pro-tem

Anne Bussiere - Chair

Wiley Moore

John Boggs

Sharon Riels

Town Council Liaison

Stephanie Semro

Economic Development of Concrete, WA

The natural hub for exploring and enjoying the North Cascade Mountains

first draft of an introductory narrative, February 20, 2023

Aim and purpose of the Economic Development Committee (EDC)

The EDC makes recommendations to improve the economy of the town of Concrete and its immediate surroundings. Economy is defined as the wealth and assets that are controlled by the local residents. Actions require effort and money. Not all actions are equally effective. The committee will provide a rationale for ranking the proposals according to cost-benefit ratio, realizing that the value of assets is often subjective.¹

Concrete, location

The town of Concrete is the last provision post on SR 20 that connects the San Juan Islands with the Western Mountain States. From here, the road winds into the Cascades and for 60 magnificent miles offers panoramic scenery with views of endless forests before reentering the populated world in the Methow valley.

The location of the town is equally spectacular. It is nestled between the Skagit River and its valley's northern edge that rises up to lake Shannon. Beyond the lake lies the Mount Baker Wilderness; to the east Sauk Mountain; to the South Snoqualmie National Forest. From almost any point, snow covered peaks are visible year round. It is an area of great beauty, still relatively unspoiled in character. The area is rich in wild life. The river is the last stream in the lower 48 states where 6 salmonid species spawn. The valley is home to elk, deer, bear, mountain goats, bobcat, beaver. Bald eagles abound. Fishers, cougars, and wolves have been spotted. The area is an important wintering ground for uncommon birds like Mergansers and Barrow's golden eye. Present, but not easily observed, are the Spotted owl and the Marbled Murrelet.

Attraction

The prime asset of Concrete is access to nature. The densely populated cities, Seattle and Vancouver, are within a two-hour car ride. There is a small airport for private planes. A bike trail brings cyclists from Burlington. Hundreds of miles of hiking trails criss-cross the mountains. The town is close to the Pacific Crest Trail and the Pacific Northwest Trail. A network of forest roads offers access to remote campgrounds and trail heads. The area is readily accessible for

¹ Example of criteria for ranking economic measures:

The import and export of capital into the region associated with commercial transactions;

The proportion of import of wealth; Asset generation and loss; Cost of productivity

a relaxed day's visit or an extended, strenuous backpacking expedition in the Pacific North West Mountains.

The town

In the late 1800's, the town, then called Baker, grew around a lime stone quarry and industrial cement production. At its peak, the area was home to a few thousand workers. The locally produced cement was used to build some of the first electricity generating dams in the US. To this day, electrical power is still the main product of the area. Since the town's hey day, the population has steadily declined. It currently is home to about 300 families, or about quarter of its peak population. Durable building materials were readily available, and structures associated with the industrial past can be found throughout town; many of them in an advanced state of neglect. Some of the industrial sites have been abandoned and are now being used as parks and recreational space, giving the town a spacious ambience.

In the center of town is a large village green on three sides bordered by scattered residential buildings and a few churches. Along the fourth side runs Main Street, the commercial center of town. There are several restaurants and stores, a small movie theatre, a public library, an artesian bakery, a hardware store, a post office and various county and state services. The building style has an early 20th century charm. Despite their attractive character, many of these buildings have been systemically vacant. The empty storefronts and the defunct industrial structures create a run down first impression. The most prominent industrial artifact in town is a huge abandoned cement silo that a film crew decorated with the message: "Welcome to Concrete". This is the first monument the visitor encounters when entering town.

The SR20 bypass

In summer, a steady flow of traffic passes the town on the Cascades Highway. Spread out along the highway are businesses that cater to the traveler: gas stations, restaurants, small grocery stores. Since most immediate needs are readily satisfied by the highway establishments, only a small subset of tourists take the detour through Main Street and visit the town center of Concrete. In winter the Cascades Highway is closed and traffic dwindles to trickle. The lack of visitors in winter causes the economy to have a cyclical, seasonal character. A profitable summer must make up for the lack of business in winter.

Commercial activity in the immediate surroundings

The main product of the area is electrical power. The second main revenue source is timber. Logging is managed by large timber companies and to a lesser extend by DNR. Throughout the valley there is dispersed cattle and grass farming. There are a few berry farms, a couple of struggling wineries, and lately, a few cannabis farms. Agriculture (and the population density in

general) is limited by available water. Although the winters are generally wet and soggy, the summers are warm and dry. Often a dry spring spell interferes with a second hay harvest. The local small-scale farms cannot compete with the large mechanized operations elsewhere in the US. Local farmers aim at speciality products such as organic produce, grass-fed beef, free-range eggs. Such high-value products are in demand in Seattle. But these markets are also becoming harder to exploit. The big agro-businesses are increasingly aiming at the premium quality produce consumer and are creating their own "organic" brands. For instance chicken manure, an important source of fertilizer for the small scale organic farmer which used to be free for the taking, is now monopolized by the big agro-businesses and has become very expensive. Stringent regulations are also an issue. Due to outdated rules, the number of mobile butchers has dwindled to critically low levels. One on the farm butcher has a waiting list of over a year. Leading to the bizarre result that some farmers place orders for animals that are yet to be born.

Wealth of the region

The region's main products, electricity, timber, agricultural product, are not managed or controlled in town. The revenue from these sources largely ends up elsewhere. The population is too small to support the few local businesses in a significant manner. In addition, economic productivity is near non-existent. So even if locals would spend all their disposable income within the town, the area would still lose money. Macro-economics dictates that the resulting net loss of capital must be compensated with an external revenue influx. Attracting more tourists that stay longer, is one approach. More effective perhaps, is to make the area attractive for residents whose revenue originates from the outside: retirees, people who create valuable intangible products (IP, software, art, literature) that are marketed outside the region. This category of professionals can be expected to be attracted by the town because of its natural setting, open space, and healthy environment. Improvement of the connectivity with the surrounding natural areas and promoting the reputation of the town as a forward-looking environmental community, are an important factor in the economic equation.

Restoration of Main Street as a symbol of lessons learned.

Concrete's main product, carbon-free energy, is generally recognized as essential component of a strategy that avoids environmental disaster. In addition, the extensive surrounding forests efficiently sequester the carbon dioxide that is released in more populated areas. From this perspective, Concrete fits well into a more environmentally aware future. Rather than appearing in a state of neglect, thoughtful restoration of existing buildings becomes a symbol of conservation of resources that previous generations took for granted. Businesses that emphasize healthy food, a summer farmer's market, and the promotion of exercise and other healthy activities would reinforce this image. Main Street and the industrial monuments could be presented as a lesson to avoid environmentally destructive practices in the future, rather

than a nostalgic walk down memory lane. A good start would be to recommissioning the emblematic silo, symbol of forest destruction and mining, as a climbing wall. Hiking trails could be build that allow visitors to use the town as a center for physical activity. Access from town (by foot) to the Skagit river should be opened up. The use of bicycles could be encouraged. Such measures would be helpful in placing the town firmly in the 21st century while preserving its historical character.

Revenue of the town of Concrete

Sales tax?

Real estate tax?

Sewage?

State for police, health, ?

Airport?

Spring Water?

Strength & Weakness

Future

Recommended Ranked Actions

Comments to Ger's EDP Draft

From John Boggs

1. I spent several days going through a repetitive review and reflect on Ger's draft. It's obvious he spent some time and effort on it and it deserved more than a cursory once-over.
2. I found a few typographical errors or word choices that should be corrected, if the submission is to be accepted.
3. I found other places where my perspective, philosophical outlook, and opinion varied from his. That's not a bad thing, although it points out that we have not collectively come to any consensus regarding some basic definitions or where we hope to go with our revised EDP. Until we do, it will be extremely difficult to script a plan that we not only all agree on, but one that reflects the community that we represent.
4. We should also keep in mind that the EDP is incorporated as Chapter 8 of the Concrete Comprehensive Plan. The Comp Plan includes 9 chapters and covers 7 elements: Land Use, Housing, Capital Facilities, Utilities, Transportation, Economic Development, and Parks and Recreation. Chapter 2 titled, *Background* includes a description of Concrete and the Upper Skagit Valley. Those two sections apply to all the elements for which the Comp Plan is written. I suggest that we complete the update of the EDP before we offer to revise another section.



**Town of Concrete
Economic Development Commission Workshop
April 12, 2023**

DRAFT

Call Meeting to Order: The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. Chair Anne Bussiere led the gallery in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: Economic Commission Members: Ger Ban den Engh, Dinah Kinney, Anne Bussiere, Wiley Moore (via Zoom) and John Boggs.

Karla Massingale and Sharon Riels were absent.

Liaison: Stephanie Semro.

Audience Members Signed In: None.

Old Business: Meeting and Workshop Minutes – January 11 Meeting, February 8 Workshop and March 8 Workshop: John made a motion to approval all minutes. Ger seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Vision Statement Discussion: Dinah stated there is a lot of information in this statement that is already within town documents or chamber information. She stated that she would like to see the original Economic Development Plan statement updated instead of starting completely over.

John stated he believes they were tasked with updating the current plan and not starting over with an additional two years of work putting a new plan together.

Dinah stated she believes they should be updating the priorities and stating what has been done or accomplished that is listed in the current plan and then choose the next projects from what is listed.

Ger discussed their appointments and what he believes they are, as a group, expected to be doing.

Discussion ensued on changes that could be made now to the current plan. Dinah stated that she does not believe the intended outcomes need much changing or updating and that most remain relevant. Further discussion ensued on the goals, how to define and accomplish those goals and if these should be vague or have more details.

It was stated the vision statement should be just a couple of paragraphs, but the group also needs to figure out what they are going to work on for the next few years.

Updates: Anne stated that she believes an easy goal to accomplish would be a town wide cleanup. Stephanie stated that she spoke with the Town of Hamilton on their town cleanup, and she stated they believe it went so well because volunteers from the fire department assisted and some residents were told they would start getting fines if they did not start cleaning up their

properties. Discussion ensued on the town clean up and the costs associated with that. Anne stated maybe there is some type of incentive that could be offered to encourage people to participate.

Anne also stated that she believes updating the business sign on the highway would be one that could be accomplished easily so the sign can be readable to drivers.

Discussion also ensued on the housing needs and different areas in town that are being considered for development. Housing costs and how expensive those are for young and single people was also discussed.

Wiley joined the meeting by Zoom at 6:30 p.m.

Anne stated suggested some type of incentives for developers as well for building and developing in town.

John stated he believes there are code sections that contradict each other and working to get those updated and making sure they match planning directives, would also be helpful.

Discussion ensued on the Janicki project and how that will further increase housing needs throughout Eastern Skagit County.

Dinah stated that she would like to research further how to help or encourage the younger generation in getting jobs, how to interview for those jobs and what kind of programs are available to assist with this. Mayor Reed updated on a program the town is going to utilize this summer that allows the town to hire high school age kids, which the town is reimbursed for and gives these kids some work experience.

Discussion ensued on college programs versus trade schools and the different options on internships and how some high school students are getting college and trade school credits prior to graduating high school.

Dinah asked about ordinances for trash, grass, junk cars, abandoned cars and other things and what the town can do to enforce those codes. Mayor Reed reported the town is currently working on tightening up a few different codes.

New Business: John stated that with recent appointment to the town's HPLC that he will most likely be submitting his resignation from the EDC. He stated he does want to complete items he said he would work on prior to doing that.

Discussion ensued on trying to get a school employee on the commission. It was stated the commission will be downsizing to 5 so if John is to resign from his position, that position would not be filled.

Other Business: Discussion ensued on how to move forward and how to put plans into place and choose the projects they want to work on as a group. John stated that he believes everyone should be working on something and bring those updates back each month.

Ger discussed the funds received by PSE for having their location in town limits and stated he believes PSE should be contributing more financially to the town.

Further discussion ensued on the next steps, tourism, promotion, and improving the general economics of the town.

Announcements: Next workshop will be May 10 at 6pm.

Adjournment: Anne Bussiere made a motion for adjournment at 7:35 p.m. John Boggs seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Anne Bussiere, Chair

Attest: Dinah Kinney, Chair pro-tem