

Council looks at establishing redevelopment committee

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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CLEARLAKE – The Clearlake City Council agreed to further explore establishing a committee to act in an advisory capacity for the city's redevelopment agency.

Clearlake Vision Task Force Steering Committee members Robert Riggs and Jim Scholz took the suggestion to form the committee to the council last month, as Lake County News has reported.

City Administrator Dale Neiman said that, from the staff's perspective, forming the committee is a political decision, so the staff didn't offer a suggestion on how the council should act.

However, Neiman added, “We have an obligation to let you know what the pros and cons are.”

Neiman said that, in his experience, government bodies generally form advisory committees to help reach consensus on a very difficult problem, after which the groups are disbanded.

If eminent domain is included in a redevelopment agency's plan, a project area committee should be formed, said Neiman. The city once had such a committee, but in 1989 six of 11 members of that committee were deemed to have a conflict of interest.

In November of that year, the City Council voted to disband the committee, which agreed to the action. The council then formed an advisory committee, said Neiman. That also later was disbanded.

Neiman said an advisory committee shouldn't participate in issues related to potential litigation, negotiation and approval of loans, or selling property. He said most cities also don't allow advisory committees to make recommendations on budgetary and financial matters.

He suggested that five tasks that would be appropriate for an advisory committee are amending the redevelopment plan, forming economic development strategies, potential uses for project fund bond proceeds, developing first-time homebuyer guidelines and reviewing low-income apartment projects.

Councilman Roy Simons, who had been a member on the city's original project area and redevelopment advisory committees, said legislative bodies rely heavily on committees, and he wanted to see this one formed.

Community members are asking the agency to listen to them, Simons said. “Give this committee a chance.”

Council member Judy Thein said an advisory committee can help stay connected to the community. She asked why Neiman was proposing a more formal advisory committee rather than the more informal approach offered by Riggs and Scholz.

Neiman said he felt they needed to establish membership guidelines and responsibilities if they're going to form the committee.

Clearlake resident Rick Mayo, who said he has been involved with the city's redevelopment effort since the beginning, told the council that people in blighted areas often don't have input on the issue, and so he questioned if redevelopment actually does more harm than good.

“The citizens are aced out of the process. The government decided what it wanted for the town,” said Mayo.

“It has to work for the whole community or it's not going to work for anybody,” he added.

Mayo raised concerns about eminent domain. Because the city's redevelopment agency didn't use eminent domain in its first 12 years, it expired in 2002 and so isn't an issue, said Neiman.

Vice Mayor Chuck Leonard said he has in favor of an advisory committee as long as it doesn't take a lot of city staff time.

Council members offered recommendations about how many members the committee should have, ranging from five up to 12.

“The more people you add the more difficult it is and the more time it takes,” advised Neiman.

Neiman said he's planning to meet with Riggs and Scholz on Friday morning to discuss the committee further.

The council directed staff to bring the discussion back with some additional ideas and suggestions. Mayor Curt Giambruno said he wanted to continue the subject to a meeting when Council member Joyce Overton, who was unable to attend the meeting, would be present to offer her thoughts.

Mayo said he wants to see the city progress, and the advisory committee “is a good start.”

Council approved donating surplus equipment, offers proclamation

Police Chief Allan McClain received the council's approval to surplus outdated radios, scanners, master controllers and a repeater and donate them to the Lake County Office of Emergency Services' Disaster Action Response Team. Several other pieces of surplus equipment will be donated to the California State Firefighter's Association Committee for Volunteers.

In other council business, Giambruno presented Ed Strohmeier of Strohmeier's Plumbing with a proclamation of appreciation for the company's work on updating the Austin Park restrooms.

Ilene Dumont of People Services gave an update on the group's remodeling of its Lakeshore Drive building, completed with \$139,000 from the city plus \$100,000 from the organization. Giambruno thanked her for upgrading the building, which he said had made a difference in that part of town.

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