

Minutes of Whatcom County EDI Board Meeting

Hybrid Meeting (Virtual/In Person)

April 27, 2022 – 10:00 a.m.

Board Members present at Meeting:

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive	Guy Occhiogrosso, Chamber of Commerce
Tyler Schroeder, Deputy Executive	Scott Korthuis, City of Lynden Mayor
Aubrey Stargell, Timber Industry	Barry Buchanan, Whatcom County Council
Ken Bell, POB Commissioner	Don Goldberg, Associate Development Org.
Atul Deshmane, PUD#1	Stephen A. Jones, Agricultural Industry
Kevin Hester, City of Nooksack Mayor	

Board Members absent:

Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham Mayor	
Jim Kyle, Fishing Industry	David Franklin, At-Large

Staff present:

Suzanne Mildner, County Executive Office

Guests present:

Mary Lou Steward, Blaine Mayor	Jori Burnett, City of Ferndale
Michael Jones, City of Blaine	

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Sidhu welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. Introductions were made – 11 board members present, and guests were acknowledged and welcomed.

2. Review of Public Utilities Improvement/EDI Fund

Deputy Executive Schroeder provided a brief overview of the fund spreadsheet and emphasized the loan repayment balance as well as the current cash balance. The EDI loan repayment balance was discussed and Executive Sidhu spoke briefly about the future of this portion of the fund and the consideration by the board that there be flexibility in the EDI loan structure; also, the board may wish to consider use of this loan repayment portion for the benefit of current projects. He also introduced the idea for discussion later on the agenda: setting the EDI project allocations into the county's capital projects budget for the upcoming biennium budget. DE Schroeder noted that he had confirmed with the State that rural sales tax income will continue through 2032.

3. Infrastructure Requests (formerly ARPA grants)

Mayor Korthuis introduced the concepts and ideas which have been discussed regarding a new model of presenting EDI-eligible projects for consideration to the EDI Board and County Council. The 50/50 split between EDI funds and city funds provides for increased buy-in from the city/jurisdiction and reduces the overall ask of the EDI fund (as compared to the previous program model).

Jurisdictions were asked to present a "white paper" on projects that are eligible for EDI funding and involve a "one-time" ask. At this time there are 10 such white papers before the board for consideration. Each request includes a loan/grant split as has been required in the past; however, with this new model the formula for grant to loan is $\frac{3}{4}$ grant and $\frac{1}{4}$ loan of the 50% EDI portion.

This is a shift in how the EDI Program worked in the past, wherein individual applications were coming forward one at a time; this model now is asking cities/ports/etc. to come forward to the EDI Board with a white paper which can be pooled with other requests and provides a competitive aspect to the review process. And the cities are being asked to bring 50% of the EDI-requested amount. DE Schroeder also reminded everyone in order for projects to be considered they must be included in the current CEDS Project list, OR included in the city's comprehensive planning document. Mr. Goldberg noted that he'd be happy to assist with the CEDS process.

Executive Sidhu noted that Water District 13 is working on a sewer improvement project and they expect to have an application submitted soon.

Following a few comments on the various projects presented today, Commissioner Bell expressed his support of this new EDI model and made a motion to move this slate of projects forward. Mayor Korthuis seconded the motion. There was a call for a vote on the motion. There being no further discussion, a vote was taken and the **motion passed unanimously 11-0.**

DE Schroeder asked does the board have an interest in choosing which EDI “bucket” to draw funds from? Everyone agreed that would be a topic for the next board meeting. Mr. Jones asked when this program will be brought to County Council? DE Schroeder said he expected by late May or so.

4. Proposed EDI Budgeting Process

DE Schroeder drew everyone’s attention to a memorandum that was included in the agenda packet. It provides an outline of a new proposal to bring EDI-funded projects into the county’s biennium budget review process. This would allow the county to start making projections and coordinated strategic decisions about where the funding will go. The basic framework for submitting an EDI funding request remains the same; only the submission timing as well as the vehicle for applying will differ. Every two years when the county enters the biennial budget planning process, cities/jurisdictions would be invited to submit a white paper for a proposed project, and projects submitted prior to a deadline that will allow EDI Board review of projects. Then EDI recommended funding requests would be submitted by county administration to the County Council as part of the biennium budget review/approval process.

These current projects (white papers) are a start in that direction. And a June 30th deadline for this year’s EDI white papers will allow additional time for cities/jurisdictions to bring in more projects/ requests. There will be another EDI Board meeting this July to review proposals and continue this discussion. Mr. Occhiogrosso commented that he is in favor of this and likes the idea of being strategic in planning. He noted its important that the EDI Board remain involved at the early stages of this planning.

Mr. Jones thanked Mr. Schroeder for reaching out to him and Mr. Burnett and others in the early stages of discussions regarding this change in process and procedure for the EDI Program. He greatly appreciates being involved in the planning. Mr. Burnett echoed the sentiment.

Councilmember Buchanan expressed his support of this idea and the overall program.

5. Other Business

Executive Sidhu asked for any additional business or comments. Mr. Occhiogrosso asked if Executive Sidhu or Councilmember Buchanan, or both, could make a presentation to the City Council (Bellingham) regarding affordable housing and address the recommendations of the Business and Commerce Committee. Executive Sidhu said he’d be happy to do that and will work with Mr. Goldberg ahead of time to prepare for such a presentation.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

NEXT MEETING DATE: TBD

Respectfully Submitted,
Suzanne Mildner, EDI Board Clerk
Whatcom County Executive Office