

**ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL
BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE
MINUTES
September 18, 2023**

Mayor Graham, Councilor Hyatt, Bloom, Dahle, Kaplan, DuQuenne, and Hansen were present. Pete Wallstrom from Momentum Rafting, Andrew Gast from Mt. Ashland Ski Resort, Lisa Beam from Pie + Vine and Skout Tap House, Clarinda Merripen, from the Black Sheep, Elijah Katkin from the Brickroom, Eric Herron from Cascadia Prime Commercial Real Estate, Eric Strong from Full Circle Realty, Mark Philhower from Full Circle Realty, and Jordan Willing from Blue Marble were present. Eric Pool from Full Circle Realty was not present.

1. Introduction

Mayor Graham opened the meeting at 5:32 pm.

2. Short overview presentation of steps/initiatives since May 2022 Business Roundtable
City Manager Joe Lessard provided a presentation included in the packet.

- Business Roundtable Discussion – City of Ashland – 2023-2025 BN Budget
- Pedestrian Wayfinding Services
- Pilot of New Downtown Trashcans
- Beautification of Tourist Destination Areas
- Business Beautification Grant Program
- Even Support Grant Program
- Introduction of Online Permitting Module – Citizen Self Service
- Development Services Coordinator on City staff
- New Food Truck Ordinance adopted in May
- Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Development Process MAC
- Economic Roundtable of March 6, 2023

Thought Questions for the Roundtable:

a) *What is the Sense of the Ashland Business Community Looking Forward?*

- a. *Where do you see as issues and growth opportunities for the local/regional economy?***
- b. *What is the changing landscape of Ashland's tourism?***
- c. *What is the changing landscape for real estate (residential & commercial markets)?***

Business participants answered the questions with the following:

Jordan Willing/Blue Marble/The Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) is the main draw of the town and there has been a decline of people attending their plays. It was important for OSF to

understand their customers, which typically were elderly people from the Bay areas who valued traditional plays with some pushing the edge. OSF needed to cater to that audience. Aggressive panhandling occurring downtown made people feel less safe. He suggested cleaning up the Railroad District and to think creatively to open more opportunities.

Eric Strong/Full Circle Realty/Thought that access was important. The reasons people came to Ashland was shifting. Access to trails and outdoor activities was growing. One challenge to accessibility for young families was home costs.

Lisa Beam/Pie & Vine/Skout/There has been a drastic shift in how we meet the tourist market. She noted challenges for restaurants when OSF shortened their season and closures related to covid and smoke and its impact on staffing. Finding consistency in tourism was critical. She supported beautification and cleanliness improvements. They were important to people's experience. There were growth opportunities to use outdoor spaces and the theaters between OSF seasons.

Andrew Gast/Mt. Ashland Ski Resort/Mt. Ashland experienced 20% more visitation over the past year. They were having capacity issues and challenges supporting the increase. Ashland was trending to more of an outdoor recreation destination. They were doing a lot to build on the non-ski season. Transportation to the mountain was a challenge for them. Another challenge was how to make Mt. Ashland part of the fabric of the community.

Eric Herron/Cascadia Prime Commercial Real Estate/Livability for Ashland was an issue. Ashland was livable if you had the means and if you do not, you are pushed to the side. Having a better transportation system and continuous bike lanes would be helpful. Tourism seemed to be shifting more towards outdoor recreation. The demographic of visitors was also changing from 65-75-year-olds to 35-55-year-olds in Sprinter vans with their children. Downtown landlords improving their buildings would be helpful.

Clarinda Merripen/The Black Sheep/Commented on businesses being down 40-50%. A positive was regional travelers coming to Ashland. Ashland should target attracting visitors Bend, Grants Pass, Yreka, and northern California. Another problem was the length of stay per were declining to three days. Transportation for staff was a challenge as well.

Elijah Katkin/Brickroom/Inflation and cost structure margins for small business was changing and used the price of a hamburger as an example. He suggested using OSF theaters for events other than plays. The city owned the buildings. Ashland needed to attract 25-45 year old visitors. There has been an exodus of people from 27 to 45 years old.

Mark Philhower/Full Circle Realty/Supporting outdoor activities were huge in addition to OSF. Possibly partner with the Britt Festival to have other events and live music. Transportation was

critical. Add a focus on mountain bike riding and skiing. Remote workers were coming to Ashland. It was something that should be promoted as well.

Pete Wallstrom/Momentum Rafting/Outdoor tourism was growing. There was white water rafting within a day. An issue was affordable housing. Economic diversity was good for the town and business. The city could make it easier to put up on events. Trail infrastructure was important.

Mr. Willing explained the success of his business was partially being lucky in finding a space to grow as a company. Commercial real estate boiled down to the way land was used. There was not much land in Ashland. He suggested having five preapproved ADU designs that bypassed the permit process.

The group discussed transportation methods some used that included making concessions to staff who used RVTD or paying employees to drive coworkers without cars home after a shift.

b) How Can We Build Economic Resilience?

a. What are our risks/weaknesses going forward?

b. What are our strengths/opportunities going forward?

c) What can the City of Ashland do to support the local economy?

Business participants responded with the following:

Pete Wallstrom/Momentum Rafting/Make it easier to build affordable housing, review zoning, and make it easier to put on events and build trails.

Elijah Katkin/Brickroom/Agreed with Mr. Wallstrom and added address height restrictions. Another suggestion was having a budget for wayfinding.

Clarinda Merripen/The Black Sheep/Increase communication between council and local business, possibly through a coalition. Make it easier to pay OLCC fees and improve pest control to tamp down the rat issues. She clarified the coalition could provide council a five update every council meeting.

Eric Herron/Cascadia Prime Commercial Real Estate/If OSF theaters were city property then they belonged to the public. Ashland needed to create resiliency for economic growth. Mr. Katkin added improving the band shell area and allowing alcohol in the park could be addressed by the city.

Andrew Gast/Mt. Ashland Ski Resort/Look into entertainment at night for winter travelers. Wayfinding for the ski area. Post little signs advertising there is a ski area.

Lisa Beam/Pie & Vine/Skout/View Ashland as a product. Increase beautification efforts. Work on consistently in utilizing Ashland twelvemonths a year. Bring Ashland, as a product into current times and make it a regional draw.

Eric Strong/Full Circle Realty/This town is risk adverse. People are caught in the expectation of what Ashland has been. Push the boundaries and take risks on new opportunities.

Mark Philhower/Full Circle Realty/Diversity is important and expanding on what we have to offer. Use real estate more efficiently. Easing up on requirements for ADUs would allow people to afford a house and rent out the ADU and create a wider range of people who could live here now.

Jordan Willing/Blue Marble/Agreed with Ms. Beam. He suggested adding comedy shows, working on alcohol permits for concerts in the park. There will be complaints, but the benefit of bringing people together outweighed them. Look at low hanging fruit, have a cookie cutter ADU, and simplify the application process. For the long term, convert farmland that is not being used.

Ms. Merripen noted the city needed to investigate property management companies.

Community Development Director Brandon Goldman noted changes to the ADU process and agreed on setting funding aside for preplanned units. Some land use obstacles had been eliminated no longer requiring a planning action. He shared government changes, that had made ADUs more assessable. Staff was also reaching out to other cities on their processes. He went on to address the housing inventory and potential land with council and the business representatives.

Interim Parks Director Leslie Elderidge explained the efforts being made to allow alcohol for permitted special events in the parks. They were Instituting park hours to deal with transients sleeping overnight. Updating the band shell was viable and something they were also looking into. They were also looking into wayfinding for trails.

The group further discussed housing, recruiting for year-round events and conferences, and having a community calendar and beautifying southeast Ashland as a gateway to the downtown.

The Roundtable concluded at 7:30 p.m.

Respectively submitted by:

Attest:

Clerk of the Council Pro Tem Dana Smith

Mayor Tonya Graham

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September 18, 2023
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