

Chamber, EDC present merger plan to council

By Jeanne Davant

Manitou's economic development and promotion organizations have sketched out a plan for consolidating their operations and hope to have it implemented by Jan. 1, 2011.

Under the plan, the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Commission would combine into a new organization tentatively named iManitou. The new organization would work with the Business Improvement District under a contract agreement.

A working group composed of representatives from each organization crafted the plan, Chamber President Bianca Codiga told City Council on Tuesday night, with liaison support from Councilman Matt Carpenter.

"The key decisions were made by the working group," Codiga said. "At this point, there are still some final details to work out."

The new organization would maintain the strengths of the original organizations but have a slimmed-down structure so as to operate more efficiently.

The name reflects iManitou's essential roles: to provide information, strengthen community relationships; promote and enhance the visitor experience; and retain and support local businesses.

iManitou would be a membership organization with several levels of membership available. Tier I would offer a basic level of service; all Manitou Springs businesses that pay sales taxes will be eligible/Other membership services, such as additional marketing in the Visitors Guide and rack cards in the office, would be provided on an a la carte basis. Lodging properties would receive a higher level of basic services because they pay both sales and lodging taxes. Out-of-city, nonprofit and service businesses could also join the organization.

Within the next few months, the current organizations would appoint members to iManitou's initial board of directors. The Chamber would appoint three members; the EDC, two; and the BID one. City Council would appoint one at-large member to represent the community, as well as a nonvoting Council liaison.

The board would develop an economic development strategic plan and hire a chief operating officer to supervise the organization and staff. Other employees would include an administrative assistant, visitor experience and special events director, visitor experience and special events coordinator, other paid staff and volunteers.

Representatives of the three organizations met "in response to the heat the EDC and Chamber were getting in regards to our funding and the city's budget," said Dave Symonds, past Chamber president. During budget sessions last year, Council members had to make tough decisions to cope with an anticipated deficit and questioned the amount of discretionary funding they were contributing to the economic development organizations.

In response, the Chamber, which had a surplus of several hundred thousand dollars, returned \$40,000 of its funding to the city.

During discussions about the budget crisis, the organizations realized that consolidating their efforts could save money, create efficiencies and provide a better working relationship with the city, Symonds said.

"There's so much confusion as to who's sponsoring and managing different events," said Adams Mountain Cafe owner Farley McDonough. The three organizations also are tapping into the same volunteer and funding pools.

"When we got into the meat of this, it was really shocking how much overlap there was," McDonough said. "We're not losing anything we think of as priorities ... The focus will still be visitors, business and the community."

The new organization would contract with the city for specific services, which would ensure accountability and regular reporting to Council.

Symonds noted that city funding for economic development has decreased since 2008 and said the new organization will request \$250,000 from the city for 2011, a \$10,000 reduction from this year's funding level. Additional funding would come from membership fees and special event revenues.

"We think that's very doable to provide better services than we have in previous years," Symonds said.

Codiga said the biggest obstacle the working group encountered was what she called "past divisions. We've tried very hard to leave behind the past. We're still dealing with that."

There has been some opposition to the plan, especially since the decision to pursue the consolidation was made by votes of the existing organizations' boards rather than membership votes.

"We did the board vote after an entire month of opening a forum through newspapers, direct mailings, newsletters, phone calls and e-mails," Codiga said. "We did research the legal aspects to make sure what we were doing was correct and proper."

"There are some people who perhaps might be trying to look at this in a legal aspect," she continued. "When we heard of people talking on the street, we called them. We're now going to address the people that we can. We hope to hear concerns so we can find a positive solution."

Codiga stressed that the plan at this point is a framework.

"Even the name is not yet set in stone," she said.

Pool could get private operator

In other business Tuesday, Council got its first look at a management agreement for outsourcing operation of the swimming pool.

Under the agreement, a contractor would be allowed to retain excess revenues but would be required to continue offering a specified level of services and retain the current fee structure.

The city would continue to pay for utilities, but outsourcing management could save the city as much as \$77,000, Finance Director Mike Leslie said. Pool revenues have increased under Director Roy Chaney, although the city still had to provide \$130,000 for operations this year. In addition the city will pay \$36,000 for capital improvements to the pool under an energy-saving contract with Ennovate Corp. Council approved that contract last week.

Councilman Rick Barry said he was not yet on board with outsourcing the pool's management.

"I have problems with the city providing a private business with facilities and utilities, and get no financial profit," Barry said. "I understand the savings, but if I wanted to start a business, (this would be) a sweetheart sort of deal."

Barry said he also was uncomfortable with the idea that Chaney would be submitting a proposal for continuing to manage the pool.

"I can see someone else saying this is unfair," Barry said. "It could be a legal issue."

Mayor Pro Tern Aimee Cox said that while she was not opposed to the idea of privatizing pool management, she would like to see figures on current operating and capital expenses before sending out a request for proposals.

Leslie said he would provide those figures and would draft a request for interest. Responses could be compared with the current level of service and fee structure.

"We don't really know what the market is," Leslie said. "This isn't something we get done by Jan. 1, but I think it's worth investigating."

Council also...

- Heard an update on the Iron Mountain open space purchase. Mayor Marc Snyder said the city is looking at buying the first two parcels of the \$1.15 million property in September under a lease-purchase program. The city will have two years to buy the remaining parcel, which includes the house built by Tom McGee. Under terms of an agreement with McGee, the city must close on the second parcel in December; by moving up the closing date to Sept. 28, the city would save \$50,000, Snyder said. Cox cautioned that Great Outdoors Colorado would not participate in a lease-purchase deal and that if the city seeks a GOCO grant to purchase the third parcel, it would have to invest at least \$50,000. Planning Director Dan Folke said an appraisal of the entire 99 acres would be available by Sept. 28.

[Return to Article Index](#)