

Sidney, Nebraska October 6, 2025

A meeting of the Mayor and Council of the City of Sidney, Nebraska, was convened in an open and public session at 12:00 p.m. on October 6, 2025 in the Council Room. Present in person: Mayor Bondegard and Council Members: Kerkman, Kuhns, Radcliffe, Lee. Others present: Interim City Manager Josh Hanson, City Clerk Borchert, Attorney Strommen. Notice of the meeting was given in advance thereof by publication in *The Sidney-Sun Telegraph*, the designated method for giving notice, a copy of the proof of publication being attached to these minutes. Advance notice of the meeting was given to the members of the City Council and a copy of their acknowledgment of receipt of notice is attached to these minutes. Availability of the agenda was communicated in the advance notice and the notice to the City Council. All proceedings shown hereafter were taken while the convened meeting was open to the attendance of the public.

Mayor Bondegard informed the public of the location of the posted Open Meetings Act.

Interim City Manager, John Hanson, provided Council with a brief overview. Hanson stated that on August 26, 2025, City Council entered closed session to discuss the Economic Development personnel position. Following that discussion, Council voted to hold a public workshop on Monday, October 6 at 12:00 pm, at City Hall. Hanson said that over the past five years, the position has seen four different directors, disrupting continuity and long-term planning efforts. Hanson reported that this workshop would present an opportunity for the City of Sidney to evaluate the most effective and sustainable structure for driving Economic Development in Sidney and Cheyenne County. This would include: Establishing an Economic Development Corporation (EDC), continuing with a City-led model, or exploring hybrid or partnership arrangements. Hanson reiterated that this was a workshop and no decisions would be made at this time. Hanson encouraged any entities to come forward if they are interested in taking over Economic Development. Hanson said that after the presentation, Council and the Commissioners as well as the public would have an opportunity to speak.

Sarah Sinnett, President of the E3 Chapter and Cory Keen, Vice President of E3 came before Council. Sinnett addressed the public. Sinnett stated that E3 created the proposal that they thought was best at the time. Sinnett asked for respectful feedback and that this proposal was a starting point, not an ending point. Sinnett stated that E3 stands for Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. Sinnett said that currently, the City has Economic Development, E3 and the Chamber, which are not always aligned. Sinnett believes the EDC would bring this all together and be the best for Cheyenne County. Sinnett said that if this doesn't go through, E3 would continue. E3 started in 2021-2022 as a "one-stop shop" for business support. Alisha Juelfs is the Entrepreneurial Navigator. Juelfs helps find space, business plans and support networks. Melissa Norgard, Grant and Technical writer, has written 55 local business plans. This is done free of charge. E3 consulted with over 140 clients last year. Keen stated that E3, as well as other local businesses, have spent a week visiting other locations to understand what they are doing and how their government works to better their town. E3 has built a network with other locations to continue to get advice on best practices.

Sinnett stated that the goal of EDC is to strengthen economic vitality by expanding access to quality jobs, supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs, and driving innovative strategies that enhance our region's appeal. Sinnett stated that E3 will dissolve its current capacity and absorb the Economic Development responsibilities performed by the City of Sidney. The goal is to house three roles: Executive Director, which would be a new hire; Entrepreneurial Navigator, Juelfs; and Grant & Technical Writer, Norgard. Sinnett asked the City of Sidney to commit \$110,000 a year for 5 years for Economic Development; Cheyenne County to commit \$25,000 allotted to City for Economic Development for 5 years; E3 would commit \$200,000, a year for three years plus additional funding collected that has been raised from Youth Entrepreneurship Competition, \$10,000; and WNCC to commit office space free of charge for 5 years. Funding is not strictly salaries. Also included would be benefits, technology equipment, building a website and office supplies. At the end of five years, the EDC Board will philanthropically raise \$3.5M to be endowed to ensure the fund can live on in perpetuity without a burden to taxpayers. If it becomes a philanthropic organization, the city, the county and community stakeholders will still have an input as E3 serves the community.

The proposed board structure includes representatives in the following roles, serving two terms: 1 representative for the City of Sidney, appointed by Council; 1 representative from E3, appointed by legacy E3 Leadership; 1 financial representative, appointed via application; 1 community business member at large, appointed via application; 1 member from Cheyenne County, appointed by Cheyenne County Commissioners. Sinnett stated that the proposal currently states no term limits, but this can be revised and looked at every two years. Sinnett also stated that the EDC is not required to adhere to the Public Meetings Act, but the public is allowed to FOIA the information at any time for the use of public funds. This practice has been modeled after other relationships with the City. Sinnett has no problem with adhering to that. EDC will post their meetings in the paper, online and meeting minutes will be documented and available online. The public will be welcome to attend all meetings. The Cheyenne County Chamber and the Cheyenne County Tourism are not part of the existing agreement and remain their own entities. The EDC will continue to collaborate with the Chamber and Tourism on all pertinent issues.

Sinnett reported that the biggest issue to address is the LB840, sales tax revenue, that is earmarked for Economic

Development for Cheyenne County. EDC will have no control over that. Sinnett recommends changing the intake point of the requests, so people know that they can go to one place. Applications would still go to the Economic Development Advisory Committee to bring to Council. Historically, the Economic Development Director has sat on the Historic Board. Sinnett stated that per City ordinance, this is run by the Chief Building Official. The EDC would still attend the meetings.

Lee asked what the cost would be to fit someone into the (director) role. Sinnett responded about \$80,000 to \$100,000, straight salary. Kerkman asked if there were other EDC's that have combined the Chamber and Tourism. Sinnett responded, yes, but every community is different. Lee asked how many of the 129 communities having EDC, were started with taxpayer funds. Sinnett replied, almost all of them. Lee asked if E3 is willing to give up control and not take taxpayer money and to abide by what the contract says. Sinnett responded, yes. Radcliffe asked Attorney Strommen if there were any problems committing funds for the five years they are asking. Strommen responded that she would recommend annual renewal. Sinnett stated that EDC would have no problems with a contract stating expectations that were performance based. Lee asked if there was a say, by the City, who sits on the Community Center and the Chamber Boards. Strommen confirmed that the City does not have a say who sits on those boards.

Eric Pool, resident, stated that he has a problem with City transparency. Pool stated that he submitted a FOIA to the City and it took several requests to the Attorney General to comply. It makes Pool have a hard time believing that a public entity will comply even if it is written in a contract. Sinnett responded that since the EDC would be partially funded with taxpayer dollars, they would have to comply with the FOIA. Strommen stated that if it is shown that a substantial part of the funding is coming from the government entity, they would have to comply with the Opening Meetings Act and FOIA laws. Pool also stated that he thinks E3 does good work, but they are up against the ocean with the tax policy, the fiscal policy and spending policy. Pool asked Council to reconsider the vetting process, the hiring process and the interviewing process for the City position so folks have a chance to go before a panel interview without massive control. Keen asked Pool if there was anything in the proposal that Pool did like. Pool responded, what happens after five years? Pool said there is no accountability to the residents. Julia Contratto stated that Sinnett did answer that the contract could include being performance based. Sinnett also responded that neither she or Keen are being paid. Whitney Whatley stated that as a private business only certain information can be requested in a FOIA through a private entity. Whatley asked Pool what data he would want to report to show transparency. Lee asked if personal information was being requested or if taxpayer money from this company being given to this. Sinnett stated that the non-negotiable as an organization, that they will not give out confidential client information, but would be happy to state how many clients they work with. Lee stated that if money comes from taxpayer money, that information should be given. If they are asking for startup information and no money given, that should be private.

Mike Brown, resident, stated that if they are completely privately funded in 5 years, it takes away the FOIA concerns.

David Jensen, resident, stated things can be written into a contract to fix the problems, but it takes court, time and money. So basically, Jensen continued, that you (E3) want to take our tax dollars, \$135,000 and fund a private corporation. Sinnett stated that they would be a non-profit and would be audited. Additionally, it would change nothing how they currently operate. Jensen said the second that you (EDC) spend money, he is going to want to know and he FOIA's all the time. Jensen suggested that an Economic Director is hired and subcontract out specific things that the community wants done. Sinnett stated that is exactly what they are currently doing, but it will cost more. Sinnett said the current process is broken. That the City has been through so many Development Directors through the years. And it is a hard job. As a community we need to be supportive of that individual. Sinnett is advocating to do something different, even if it is not with E3.

Kerkman stated that what Council is talking about is having a powerhouse organization of business professionals that know business that can help businesses get started and sustain themselves. What E3 is asking is for transitional funding for 5 years and then they take over. If Council needs to find another solution, he believes that enough people that care and can make it happen. Concerning the LB840 money, every time you go to a retail store, you are going to be funding future businesses. Currently the Economic Director has brought to the committee, suggested funding of the LB840 money. Jensen reiterated that with a corporation, there will be no control. Lee stated as long as any corporation is City funded; the City could add to the contract that they have to be open to the Open Meetings act. Jensen stated that they could not be forced to do that without going to court.

Marguerite Pool, resident, asked Sinnett how she could suggest that anyone in the Economic Development position has not been successful. Sinnett stated that she did not state that. Pool stated that the prior leadership did not give the Economic Development position the opportunity to do the best performance that they could have been given. Pool also stated that the position on the Historic Board should fall upon the Chief Building Official responsibility. The City needs to take responsibility in interviewing (the Director) and giving them the tools to do the job.

Keen stated that he does not disagree with M. Pool, but he believes that is the second-best idea. Keen would like not to have to pay for the position, long term, and also do a good job.

Trey Newmann, Modern Moves, stated that E3 changed his whole business. Newmann did the business plan. E3 has also helped Newmann with other grants and is in favor of this business proposal. Newmann had experience when entities don't work together and is very inefficient. Newmann believes it to be a people's corporation.

Wendall Gaston, resident, stated that we are not a Home Rule state. Council can only do exactly what the Unicameral tells you to do. The way they designed the LB840 funds, names cannot be released of any money given out, unless the person that receives the money, says you can. Gaston stated that when he first moved here, a private entity, helped his business get started. The trend of having a private corporation or keeping it within the City goes in about 25-year intervals. With a private corporation, it is harder to obtain information. Even with a public entity you are restricted. Confidentiality is the same with a corporation or in-house. With LB840 money, you cannot push it one way or the other. Gaston continued that we are currently having problems finding someone to fill the position. As far as one program over another, Gaston said he can tell you that there are towns flipping back and forth about every 25 years. As far as Economic Development is concerned, more E3 type things are being set up for small businesses. Big business will not come here, we have to grow them. Gaston stated that he believes either program will work.

Brandy Stone, former Economic Director, stated that whether it's a corporation or to fill the Development position, you will face the same issues. Lack of unity. Stone stated that she hopes the LB840 is constantly addressed because there is great things that can be done with it. Stone also reminded the public that Economic Development is Cheyenne County as well as City. Stone encouraged Council to look at both sides. Lee asked Stone what was one thing that turned businesses away from coming here. Stone stated the lack of unity. Everyone watches social media. Other communities were chosen, versus Sidney, based on what they have seen on the internet.

Keith Grunig, Sweet Ice, stated that he has been in business for three months. They dealt with the Chamber, the City and E3. Each of them were very good. However, the three different entities were challenging. Grunig stated he wondered who do we go to? Grunig stated if the City could consolidate, whether it was within the city or a corporation. Streamlining is a big deal.

Amber Fields, owner of Safe at Home, stated she has received LB840 money. Fields spoke on how E3 has helped them. Fields stated she started with two people and currently employs 296 across the state of Nebraska. E3 has helped her with other communities, but her corporation stays local. She stated that the Chamber and Economic Development was wonderful. Fields said we all need to work together.

Lynette Elayne, resident, stated no matter which way Council goes, we need to come together. Elayne said that before the Council decides on Economic Development decisions, we have to decide what we are developing.

Richard Haupt, Haupt Landscaping, stated that if you could go to a person versus a group to help you, he would choose the group every time. Haupt wants to build his business and that will only happen with more businesses coming to town. A board of people that have the goal of Sidney in mind, he would entrust five- or six-people's views more than one. Haupt stated that the EDC would take all responsibility (tax dollars) off the City after 5 years.

John Hinrichs, resident, stated that taxes need lowered to get people to come here.

Phil Sanders, Cheyenne County Commissioner, stated contrary to what is reported, Sidney is not the highest taxed City in the state. Sanders also corrected the amount contributed by the county from \$25,000 to \$20,000. We have got to work together, this hatred, the bashing each other, social media is killing this community. Sanders stated that we need to reach out to each other, shake hands and agree to disagree. Let's work together and quit hammering each other.

E. Pool stated that lowering the levy does not lower taxes.

Sinnott suggested that the public review the proposal, review other options and make a recommendation to Council. Private citizens that are not in E3. That way there is full transparency.

Joe McCarn, Director of Chamber of Commerce, thanked Council for the opportunity to be a part of this important discussion about the future of Sidney and Cheyenne County. McCarn said that this is about more than growth. It's about alignment, sustainability and assurance that we are all working towards the long-term goals. The Chamber is not seeking to take over the duties of Economic Development. The Chamber focuses on helping existing businesses grow, supporting workforce development. Connecting businesses with resources. Cheyenne County's future depends on collaboration.

McKailie Conger, business owner, stated she loves the idea of a corporation. Steve Castle, resident, stated that maybe Council should hire an Economic Developer and if things don't change under the new leadership, then consider a corporation. Jim McFarland, resident, had concerns about businesses that fall into a "black hole". Sinnott stated that money from the corporation can not be paid to a business. Taylor Wills, Potter resident, E3 helps businesses write a business plan. Vicky Loghry said if you want less taxes we need more people, more people means more water, more electricity, more everything else or we need to make other tough choices. Richard Haupt added that people are so worried about taxes, maybe its time for a change. Maybe the separation would be good for Sidney, moving forward. Bill Major, resident, was concerned about the 6th Street area being blighted. Part of Economic Development is showing people that want to live here a beautiful city. And Major said, we don't have that. Phil Sanders stated that he doesn't know where this is headed, but he suggested a meeting with the Commissioners and other stakeholders to give time to figure out what we are going to do.

Sinnott stated that she can't control property tax. The easy way to address property tax is to create sales tax. And that is what they are trying to do.

Adrienne LaBay, Sidney Sun Telegraph, asked about the FOIA requests based on EDC getting taxpayer dollars.

Strommen reiterated if the taxpayer dollars going into the company is substantially funded by the government entity, they are susceptible to the FOIA requests. You have to look at how much money they are taking from the government to go into the company. The standard is substantial. LaBay asked what happens after the 5 years when EDC is no longer funded by tax payer dollars. Sinnett responded there is no governing law that says you can legally do this. Sinnett said that if they (EDC) are not listening to the community and doing what the people want, we are no longer doing our jobs. Sinnett stated that as long as they are involved, they will give the information when it is asked for. Sinnett stated that they would sign a contract, if that is what they need to do. LeBay asked what happens after 5 years, when things change, other people come. Sinnett stated that she can't make promises. The only way she can do that is if she insists that she continue to be involved. Sinnett stated that she won't do that, but she will put her name in the hat, but if it's a point of contention, she doesn't have to lead it. Sinnett stated that Sidney has the most amazing business owners in this county with the upmost integrity. There is also bylaws that they have to adhere to.

David Jensen, stated to let the people have a say. Give it a year, maybe two years.

Alisha Juelfs, E3 Navigator, stated that this is just an option, started by a group with a passion. There is no guarantee for what E3 can do or what they can provide. Juelfs said they can present facts. The amount of lives and businesses that they have already touched, the amount of networks that they have already created, the relationships built out of trust and out of showing up. E3 has a proven track record. Whether it is decided to move forward as the acting agency or a stand-alone agency, their work is not done in Cheyenne County.

Meeting adjourned at 2:23 pm.

ATTEST: /s/ Brandon Bondegard, Mayor

ATTEST: /s/ Lori Borchert/City Clerk