

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF AVERY**

The Avery County Board of Commissioners held a Special Meeting with the Avery County Economic Development Committee on Monday, April 29, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Boardroom, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss economic development in Avery County.

Members Present: Martha Hicks, Chair; Dennis Aldridge; Wood Hall Young, Jr.

Members Absent: Tim Phillips; Blake Vance

Call To Order

Chair Hicks called the meeting to order at 5:15 p.m.

The County Attorney was consulted due to the fact that the EDC did not have a quorum present. They did have a quorum with one member present via telephone. The County Attorney stated that there should be no vote or any action taken during this meeting.

Dennis Aldridge stated that he had the privilege of being one of the commissioners representatives on the EDC. I have been able to be in a lot of discussions that EDC has had trying to come up with the concerns, projects, points of emphasis, plans but some realistic and forward thinking projects to be a part of. It is hard when you are doing economic development and it is hard to get any measurable results. I congratulate the EDC for doing all they have done. I was able to be at the High Country Council of Government meeting two months ago and one of the regional EDC folks was there talking about the larger footprint businesses coming in and some of the surrounding areas the old textile furniture businesses are being revitalized. There are things like that we don't have. The discussion here has been very good in that those limitations do not define what we may be able to do. We are still working toward that end giving parameters of our structure and resources. That is where I see us at recognizing what is before us and the goal being to increase the awareness of Avery County as the best place in the state to live. One of the things as the leadership is to let people know we are not on the titanic and we are not sinking; there are some really good things happening and we need to build on that. We need to keep our focus on things that are accomplished and can be accomplished. We have some good things happening and we need to get that message out.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. said he thought from the beginning of this that we have put a lot of focus on what we don't have or what we are not doing and the fact that we will never be a manufacturing county or this or that but I think what we need to do is focus more positively on what we do have throughout the county. I think we need to focus on the entire county in the way that we realize what each individual part of the county has to offer. That is what we need to expand on. Phillip has worked tirelessly on getting someone in the old Lowe's Building. Mr. Walter stated that it was the EDC website that

prompted the initial telephone calls. Mr. Dave Smith has put in an incredible amount of time and effort. He is the lead person on the IRC building as well as the old Lowe's building. Mr. Young stated yes we need another grocery store but if that is not feasible how about a Tractor Supply. I appreciate what you have done and what you are doing.

Mr. Walter stated that the second junior achievement program at Avery High School has just been completed. We are trying to instill in our youth entrepreneurship in Avery County which might be something they would consider some day. We have been very proactive to put out the good news message of Avery County. We have a lot on our plate but we need direction.

Chair Hicks thanked everyone for being at the meeting. I think this committee has worked very hard to accomplish things. My biggest concern is the lack of internet service. I would like to thank Melynda Pepple for the grant the Chamber of Commerce received for internet. Mr. Aldridge stated that the people at Linville Falls are ecstatic that they have good internet service. Mr. Barrier said that he had spoken with Lightleap and 93 new clients have internet. 72 of those people were underserved or not served at all. The capacity in that area is up to 600 because of this grant. Chair Hicks said that a lot of people did not understand that Avery County is a Tier 2 county and most of the grants are Tier 1 counties.

Mr. Young said that there is the possibility of several apartments coming to Newland. Hopefully this will be moving forward pretty quick.

Jesse Pope attended the meeting via telephone. Mr. Pope said thinking about economic development and thinking what we are trying to do in recruiting staff for Grandfather, unemployment is incredibly low and it is a challenge to hire people. I try to keep a local staff. One of the challenges that we have is when we are trying to relocate people to the area is schools. I think the renovation to the high school is going to be a big boost to economic development. Mr. Pope questioned if there has ever been an entertainment or occupancy tax in Avery County. Mr. Young stated that the county had their hands tied when it came to the occupancy tax. For this to be done adequately would take a lot of cooperation from the municipalities which already has this.

Mr. Walter said that there were three goals that EDC would like to discuss. These are things that the Board of Commissioners might want to consider going forward. The first one is pretty self-explanatory; the development of an Arts, Craft & Agricultural Products Market.

The second goal refers to the culinary arts program at the high school. We see this as a venue that we would like to see supported.

The other goal is a pitch to the gated community members in the hope of enlisting their interest and/or support.

Mr. Young stated that he did agree with them but personally the educational system is doing the young people a disservice by not offering more vocational education. I see a shortage in the next 20 years with people that can do the physical work, that can build houses, that can fix a car, etc. Mr. David Smith stated that there was a local plumber came to the junior achievement program explaining about the career and we are trying to get these young people to realize this. We are trying to give them an alternative.

Clayton Harpold, EDC member, stated that the kids in the culinary arts program need to go on to a culinary arts school in order to become a chef manager but they don't need a four year degree and don't need to be racking up debt to go into a very lucrative job. Also, Mr. Harpold mentioned that there needs to be some promoting of Avery County. The promo video from the website needs to be put out there.

Mr. Walter asked for any comments or suggestions on the three goals. Mr. Aldridge said that he thought there were opportunities to support the culinary arts program but maybe not in terms of hardware. Mr. Harpold said that we would need to recognize that there are other programs out there also.

Mr. Clayton Harpold left the meeting at this time so the EDC did not have a quorum so the meeting was adjourned.

Adjourn

Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Dennis Aldridge to adjourn this meeting at 6:09 p.m. Motion unanimously approved with those in attendance (3-0).

Martha Hicks, Chair
Avery County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST: _____
Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk