

Avery County Economic Development Committee  
February 24, 2020  
Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on February 24, 2020 at the Avery County Commissioners Board Room at the Avery County Administrative Complex, located at 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC 28657.

Present for the meeting were:

Phillip Barrier (County Manager), Ken Walter, Dave Smith, Kate Gavenus, Melynda Pepple, Susan Siirila, Jesse Pope and guest Dr. John Boyd, Mayland Community College.

Absent from the meeting were:

Clayton Harpold and Eric Berg.

The meeting was moderated by chairperson Ken Walter, and began at 5:02 p.m.

1: Approve and/or Amend the January 27, 2020 Meeting Minutes:

Melynda Pepple made a motion to approve the January 27, 2020 minutes as presented. Dave Smith seconded; the motion carried unanimously.

2. Phillip Barrier Updates:

Dawn Carpenter, Administrative Assistant, has sent out invitation letters for the March 19, 2020 Lunch and Learn workshop.

Mr. Barrier has been in contact with a representative who is looking at High Country Square, across from Best Western in Banner Elk. The representative is investigating locations for starting a microbrewery. Mr. Barrier stated that the potential owner is the same person who operated Flat Top Brewery.

Development of a hotel in Banner Elk, at the location of the old Cannon Memorial building, is on hold due to right-of-way issues.

AT&T contacted Mr. Barrier via conference call regarding installation of fiber for internet. The plan discussed would allow AT&T to pay the first \$10,000.00, and the services would be for businesses only.

Mr. Barrier stated that by July, there should be announcements regarding other grants for internet provision. The ARC grant information should come out in August.

The Quik Shop in Newland has been sold to AMAYLLC for \$400,000.00.

Two retired schoolteachers plan to open a coffee shop in Newland.

Mr. Barrier participated in a telephone call today with a supermarket chain that had looked at the old Lowes Foods building in Newland. They indicated that a market study was not favorable. We will continue to pursue other market chains.

In Yancey County, greenhouses will be installed at the old OMC (Outboard Marine Corporation)

location. The high-tech greenhouses will be used to produce lettuce. This will create approximately 100 jobs, paying an average of \$50,000.00 per year.

Dr. Boyd added that Yancey County bought the property on which the greenhouses will be installed. Mr. Barrier stated that the project has been in the works for the past 12 years. Additionally, he noted that Hickory Springs Manufacturing in Yancey County is closing and that approximately 100 people will be laid off at the closure.

Discussion occurred regarding vineyards in the area, and pest control issues.

### 3. Dave & Phillip: Newland Strip Mall Property Development Status

Mr. Smith stated that the company he is working with is still moving forward with development of the old Lowes Foods property.

Dr. Boyd stated that he will come back and do a presentation to the group on the development of the Three Peaks Enrichment Center in Mitchell County when more information is available. There is an event planned for March 24, 2020 at which a SOAR representative from Kentucky will do a presentation.

### 4. Unfinished Business:

#### --A. Workshop scheduled for March 19, 2020

Jesse Pope is confirmed as a speaker. Kate Gavenus has confirmed with Pat Mitchell of the NC Department of Commerce that she will serve as the keynote speaker. Melynda Pepple will re-contact Fallon Boland of Grandfather Golf and Country Club.

Ken Walter and Eric Berg will go to the library the day before to set up the meeting room. Food will be catered by Little Deer Cafe in Linville. Jesse Pope can loan audio equipment, a screen and projector from Grandfather Mountain if needed.

The room at the library, where the event will be held, can seat 40 people at tables. If there are more than 40 people who attend, they can be seated, but not at tables. Melynda Pepple will do an email blast to all Chamber of Commerce members reminding them of the event. Susan Siirila will work on an agenda and ordering floral decorations from Ingles. Jesse Pope stated that Grandfather Mountain can provide beverages.

#### --B. Status of Pool Opening Video

The cost for completion of re-working the pool opening video will be \$150.00.

Jesse Pope made a motion that an expenditure of \$150.00 be approved for final work on the video. Melynda Pepple seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Other videos that may be produced later on include videos on renovations at the high school and Cannon Memorial Hospital.

#### --C. Mayland Community College Job Readiness Boot Camp

Dr. Boyd stated that the Job Readiness Boot Camp program is targeted at individuals coming out of a correctional institute or similar situation and will help integrate them into the workforce. Mr. Walter stated that such individuals may need help with resumes, interview skills, etc. and offered the participation of volunteer EDC members. Mr. Pope shared information regarding Avery County Schools CTE programs including apprenticeships, internships, etc. Discussion occurred regarding the proposed changes to the school calendar year.

#### --D. New EDC Members

Mr. Walter noted that we may have spots open for new members after May 2020. A review of the terms of current EDC members occurred. Mr. Walter reminded the group that the EDC is here to respond to businesses, not to dictate how businesses are to conduct their business. Mr. Pope asked for clarification on how EDC members are selected. Mr. Barrier and Mr. Walter

reviewed the application and selection process.

--E. Mainstreet America

Ms. Gavenus noted that she had spoken by telephone with Liz Parham regarding the Mainstreet America program. She learned that Mainstreet America will not do a 2020 cycle.

--F. Marketing Firms

Mr. Walter noted that he had sent emails to members regarding marketing firms. He asked the group for feedback on whether we wish to ask the County Commissioners for additional funding of \$5,000.00 to pursue hiring a marketing firm. Ms. Gavenus stated that she sees us lacking data, and that the links to the data shows a need for more interactivity. Discussion occurred regarding Dan Lohr, a possible marketing representative to look at.

Mr. Walter will invite Mr. Lohr to do a presentation to the EDC.

Melynda Pepple made a motion to request an additional \$5,000.00 for marketing.

Jesse Pope seconded; the motion carried unanimously.

Dave Smith will contact Northstar for more marketing information. He will request that a representative of their agency contact Mr. Walter to schedule a presentation to the EDC.

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Mr. Barrier asked the group if we should invite town managers from around the county to join us for EDC meetings twice a year. The group agreed that it was a good idea to do so.

Dr. Boyd shared information about Promise Scholarships, which is funding available to engineering students at Mayland Community College. The scholarship will cover tuition for two years. He stated that there may be a similar scholarship available for nursing students later on as well.

Mr. Walter stated that he went to the Rural NC/Golden Leaf Grant program last week, and that they have their own person who maintains their data, who provided a wealth of economic development information - for the decades ahead, in our 11 county area.

Discussion occurred regarding workforce availability, housing for the local workforce and associated issues that the lack of available housing in the area brings about.

Ms. Gavenus made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Pepple seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 6:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila