

Avery County Economic Development Committee
July 27, 2020
Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on July 27, 2020 at Avery County Cooperative Extension building, located at 661 Vale Road in Newland, NC 28657.

Present for the meeting were:

Phillip Barrier (County Manager), Ken Walter, Dave Smith, Susan Siirila, Clayton Harpold, Kate Gavenus, Dennis Aldridge (Avery County Commissioner), Eric Berg, Jerry Moody and Dennis Holland (Avery County I.T. Representative).

Member that attended online: Melynda Pepple

Member absent: Jesse Pope

(1) Approve and/or amend the June 29, 2020 minutes

Clayton Harpold made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 29, 2020 EDC meeting with no changes. Dave Smith seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

(2) Unfinished Business

A. Website Development Project Status Update: Jerry & Ken

Ken Walter advised the team that Melynda Pepple had set forth an idea which may be worth pursuing in terms of website development. She had suggested linking the Avery County Chamber of Commerce website with the Economic Development Committee website, and to use a firm in Asheville, NC to build the website and provide administration of the site thereafter. Also, it was noted that we could look to Dennis Holland and Kate Gavenus' son for assistance. Mr. Walter stated that the project should cost \$5,000.00 or less.

Discussion followed including the following points for consideration if the decision is made to move toward a collaborative project combining the Avery County Chamber of Commerce and the Avery County Economic Development Committee websites:

--Work with Boomer Sassman of Big Boom Designs in Asheville to work out issues such as adding a drop-down box at the top of the page through which visitors would choose the page they wish to review.

--Work on the design which could not be paid for by the Avery County Chamber of Commerce could be charged to the county (EDC account).

--Pay for maintenance of the website would occur quarterly.

--Utilization of WordPress may be an option.

--The cost for Local Intel would be \$4,750.00 for the first year, then \$4,750.00 to \$7,650.00 per year thereafter depending on additional modules selected. The initial cost for Weblinx would be

\$5,000.00 plus an annual \$260.00 fee for web hosting, \$200.00 per year for CMS Plug-in License / Maintenance and \$120.00 per hour for any additional customer support. Additional discussion occurred regarding the services we would get from the above-noted companies for the prices shown.

In response to a question from Jerry Moody about the end goal, Ken Walter stated that we want anyone involved in a new entrepreneurial venture, anyone who wants to expand a business, grow a business, etc. to go to the website and find relevant and current information that they need. He added that our current website is static, and our primary goal should be to have visitors to the website get the information they need in a few clicks. Additionally, visitors to the site should be able to see all the quality of life advantages Avery County has to offer. This information would be appealing to those looking to relocate their business and family to the area. Eric Berg added that there is a big gap in Avery County as far as what we can offer young people. He suggested that we look to becoming a mini-Asheville.

Dennis Aldridge stated that in terms of what the Avery County Commissioners would look at regarding website development/maintenance would be (1) what is the value; (2) who is the information reaching; and (3) what would be different in a new website versus what we have now. He also stated that we need to look at legal ramifications, e.g. what are we reverse-engineering ourselves into. Ken Walter responded and stated that we could look to Dennis Holland to serve as an administrator. He advised that we need to look at where we are compared to other EDC's, and that our current website does not compare to those that other EDC's in neighboring areas and that we need to be better than our competition. Also, he noted that the EDC component on the site would not take away from the Avery County Chamber of Commerce site. Mr. Walter suggested putting WebLinx and Local Intel off to the side and investigating the option of merging the EDC website with the Avery County Chamber of Commerce website. Discussion occurred regarding input from Dennis Holland and Boomer Sassman that would be necessary for accomplishing the suggested website merger. Ms. Pepple added that WebLinx and Local Intel would build the structure/platform for the website. If we move ahead with the website merger, the platform already exists (on the Avery County Chamber of Commerce site). Additional discussion occurred regarding the differences between the Avery County Chamber of Commerce and the Banner Elk Chamber of Commerce.

Clayton Harpold made a motion to table the matter of a website merger between the Avery County Chamber of Commerce and the Avery County Economic Development Committee website until further investigation and planning has occurred. Kate Gavenus seconded. No additional discussion occurred. The motion passed unanimously.

B. Retaining Employees Workshop

Following a brief discussion, the team agreed that proceeding with the Retaining Employees Workshop will not be possible in 2020.

C. Pool Opening Video

Phillip Barrier stated that there is no additional information regarding the pool opening video. He will reach out to the county attorney again about the matter.

D. Main Street America

Phillip Barrier asked if any towns in Avery County were currently participating in the Mainstreet America program. Kate Gavenus advised that there were none at this time.

(3) Phillip Barrier Updates

Phillip Barrier stated that there are no real updates since the last meeting, but that most projects noted at the last meeting are still moving forward. He stated that the Town of Banner Elk/Old Cannon Hospital property projects are not dead, but not progressing at this time.

Ken Walter noted that the project with Structall is moving ahead, and they hope to be operational by August of 2021.

Dave Smith indicated that he has reached out to another grocery store chain, and that the chain does show some interest.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 31, 2020.

The meeting adjourned at 5:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila