

Avery County Economic Development Committee
September 30, 2019
Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on September 30, 2019 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, Clayton Harpold, Kate Gavenus, Dennis Aldridge (County Commissioner), Melynda Pepple, Eric Berg, and Susan Siirila.

Absent from the meeting were:

Jesse Pope and David Pollard.

The meeting was moderated by chairperson Ken Walter, and began at 5:01 p.m.

1: Approve and/or Amend the August 26, 2019 Meeting Minutes:

Clayton Harpold made a motion to approve the August 26, 2019 minutes as presented.

Melynda Pepple seconded; the motion carried unanimously.

2. Guest Speaker Rick Owen, Town of Banner Elk

Mr. Owen was unable to attend the meeting as scheduled.

3. County Manager's Report – Phillip Barrier

(1) Budget updates: Approximately \$2,000.00 has been spent from the advertising budget. The invoice for Junior Achievement has been paid at \$121.00. The advertisement for the Chamber of Commerce Business Guide publication will come from this fund as well.

(2) Rural NC Events: Upcoming events related to the NC outdoor economy, such as Energizing Rural NC, are coming up in Asheville, Sanford and Raleigh NC in October & November and possibly conflicting with the last day of the current Leadership Avery group. Discussion occurred regarding the Lunch & Learn Workshop, scheduled for March 2020. ,

(3) There are currently 55 job openings available at Baxter Healthcare in Marion, per their web site.

(4) Regarding broadband, Mr. Barrier stated that he had talked with representatives of Charter and learned that a developer has offered to pay for services, and this information will go to the planners. One has to be in an area and pay to have broadband brought into the area. Mr. Barrier noted that home sales have been lost in a development because of this, but that he could not indicate which development. Mr. Barrier stated that he is still in talks with

Skyline/Skybest, and that they are always willing to participate in discussions. He stated that they simply indicate that installation is a slow process.

4. Dave, Phillip & Ken: IRC, Run Amok Meadery and Newland strip mall property development status.

Dave Smith reported that, regarding the Lowes Foods property, that a bid of \$594,000.00 had been offered by 'bidder 13' when the property recently went to auction. He stated that it sounds like the bid will be accepted, and that whoever put in the bid is a user or represents a user.

Guest at meeting: Christon Clark, Avery County Habitat for Humanity Director

Mr. Clark stated that he attended the meeting anticipating hearing guest speaker Rick Owen.

He gave a report regarding Habitat for Humanity in Avery County. He noted that they are currently building their 50th home, the third in their newest development at Trice Fork Mountain Road. He stated that over the past 20 years, Habitat for Humanity has spent approximately \$5 million in home construction in Avery County, and that they bring in 350-400 volunteers annually. Volunteers serve for one week at a time and come from all over the country. He reported that they are currently housing a homeless family. He stated that housing is one of the biggest issues in Avery County, and added that if individuals in the workforce cannot afford to live here, it creates a big problem. He passed along statistics regarding affordable housing, including rental properties as well as information on costs associated with single family homes versus apartment rentals.

Mr. Clark stated that Habitat for Humanity in Avery County is currently working toward developing a housing coalition, which will include agencies such as Oasis, Hospitality House and other help agencies.

Mr. Clark left the meeting at 5:20 p.m.

Ken Walter reported on Run Amok Meadery. He stated that Christy Hememway has located another property for her business in Boone.

Ken Walter stated that he had given a presentation on economic development and the progress of the EDC at a recent Rotary Club luncheon and had very positive feedback. A visitor at the luncheon had stated to Mr. Walter that it was the first 'breath of fresh air' regarding economic development she has heard since she moved to Avery County many years ago.

The recently filmed video of the Agricultural Extension building, and fairgrounds, was not shown. Susan Siirila asked about securing waivers from those in the video. Phillip Barrier stated that there was only one person in the video, so it was acceptable.

Phillip Barrier stated that the advertisement that the EDC placed in last year's Chamber of Commerce guide, showing a waterfall, needed to be changed. Specifically, the photograph needs to be changed, but the wording in the ad can remain the same. Ken Walter suggested reaching out to Sally Woodring Photography for still photographs that we might be able to use. Melynda Pepple offered suggestions for photographs as well, stating that the Chamber of Commerce is in possession of many photographs that we might be able to choose from. She suggested working with Tamara Greenway who can assist with photographs and design work on a new ad. Ms. Gavenus agreed that Ms. Greenway would be a good resource. Ms. Pepple agreed to work toward getting three or four photographs that we may choose from, as well as reaching out to Tamara Greenway. Ken Walter will reach out to Sallie Woodring Photography to work toward securing some photographs to choose from. He noted that the deadline for placing an ad in the Chamber of Commerce guide is November 5, 2019.

Clayton Harpold made a motion to place a ½ page advertisement in the Chamber of Commerce guide with wording as shown, and a photograph to be selected within the month of October. Kate Gavenus seconded; the motion was approved unanimously.

Eric Berg agreed to oversee an outdoor recreation subcommittee. Discussion occurred with EDC members who had served since the current EDC group began volunteering in 2017. Those members reviewed with Mr. Berg that we had an outdoor recreation committee that disbanded and reviewed with him some of the focus areas of the previous subcommittee.

Mr. Berg agreed to participate in workshops that might be helpful. Discussion followed regarding some of the outdoor recreational activities that are popular, and possible areas of interest for residents and visitors.

Phillip Barrier stated that he had received a telephone call from a group that is interested in doing a bike race in the area. He helped connect them with the NC State Highway Patrol, the Avery County Sheriff's Department and the Department of Transportation for information on gravel roads in the area that might be suitable for the race. Mr. Barrier stated that the group has selected an area in the Edgemont community for the race which is scheduled for May or June 2020.

5. Unfinished Business

Ken Walter stated that November 1, 2019 is the date for Debbie McLean, Branch Manager, at the Avery County Morrison Public Library to pencil in our group for the proposed Lunch and Learn Workshop in March 2020. He relayed that Ms. McLean had indicated that the only group who could 'bump' our group would be the County of Avery. Mr. Aldridge stated that the room at the library that we wish to reserve can be used as a polling place, and that a special election would be the only thing that might create a scheduling problem. Forty people can be

accommodated in the room that we are reserving with the existing tables and chairs. More people may be accommodated as spectators.

Ken Walter stated that he has spoken with Jesse Pope of Grandfather Mountain. Mr. Pope will be available for participation. If he is not, he will send a staff member to fill in for him. Kate Gavenus stated that she has spoken with Pat Mitchell of the NC Department of Commerce. Ms. Mitchell has agreed to participate. Melynda Pepple has reached out to Fallon Boland of Grandfather Golf and Country Club; Ms. Pepple is waiting to hear back from her. Ken Walter stated that David Pollard had agreed to participate. Mr. Pollard will represent the agricultural community. Clayton Harpold stated that he has been unable to reach Josh Smith to learn if he will be available for participation.

Susan Siirila stated that she has contacted Old Hampton Store regarding catering. Lunches will be served box lunch style instead of buffet style. Mr. Barrier stated that he would check on money to cover hospitality costs and stated that such monies may come from the incentive fund. Susan Siirila offered to reach out to employers in the area to invite individuals to attend the workshop.

Following discussion from committee members, it was determined that the best date to plan for the workshop would be March 19, 2020, with March 26, 2020 as a back-up date if the event has to be rescheduled due to weather. The time for the event will be 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Phillip Barrier relayed information regarding two recent hires for Avery County EMS. He noted that often job applicants look only at the rate of pay and fail to consider benefits in their compensation packages.

Phillip Barrier stated that Mayland Community College will host a Career Fair on November 8, 2019. He and Ashley Ingwersen will attend and represent Avery County.

Ken Walter asked Clayton Harpold to chair the next meeting, in October, as he will be out of town.

Ken Walter advised that he, Dave Smith and Susan Siirila will begin the next session of Junior Achievement at Avery County High School on October 15, 2019.

Eric Berg asked if the EDC group had a mission statement or if there was an elevator speech written down. Ken Walter advised Mr. Berg that he could visit the website and review the information about what the group does. Mr. Berg suggested that something more readily available and concise be prepared and made available. Mr. Walter offered to send him the notes he had used for his presentation to Kiwanis and Rotary, so that he could pick out data for use in a more concise statement.

Adjournment

Eric Berg made a motion to adjourn at 6:20 p.m., Clayton Harpold seconded; the motion carried unanimously.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 28, 2019

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila

