

Avery County Economic Development Committee
December 11, 2017
Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on Monday December 11, 2017 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:

Roy Reynolds	Trey Oakley
Phillip Barrier	Larry Hazen
Carmen Lacey	Mark Parlier
Susan Siirila	Tim Phillips
Ken Walter	

The meeting was called to order at 5:02 pm, and was moderated by Ken Walter. A motion was made by Ms. Lacey to approve the minutes of the November 2017 meeting. A second was offered by Mr. Hazen. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Barrier reported on the issue of grants for high speed internet. He stated that he had met recently with representatives of the High Country Council of Governments, and that Avery County is still in the running for a \$200K grant. He stated that HCCOG representative Keith Conover helped answer questions presented regarding the grant. Also, he noted that the grant requirements indicate that the recipient cannot move dirt, nor put up poles. The money would have to be used to add to existing service. He stated that another private grant is still pending. The deadline for said grant was June 30, 2017 and the grant has still not been awarded.

Mr. Phillips stated that he had a conversation with Kent Landholm regarding fiber optic lines that already exist in the area. Mr. Phillips will talk with him again, and believes that there is a possibility to build on to existing lines.

Ms. Lacey asked for updates on the purchase of the IRC building in Newland. Mr. Barrier stated that there were no new updates. Mr. Parlier stated that he had seen workers at the building. Ms. Siirila stated that individuals interested in applying for jobs at the facility had begun to contact the NCWorks Career Center in Newland.

Ms. Lacey asked about news on the Lowes Foods building in Newland. Mr. Barrier stated that there was no news, no changes on the status on the building.

Mr. Barrier stated that the new restaurant at the bottom of Beech Mountain was not open yet. Ms. Siirila stated that she was aware that the individuals who will manage the facility have already interviewed and hired some staff in preparation for opening.

Regarding the renovations at the Times Square building in Elk Park, Mr. Parlier stated that they have moved in a dumpster, and appear to be working on the building.

Mr. Walter stated that there will be an EDC webpage that will link to the County of Avery webpage. Mr. Hazen and Mr. Walter will meet with Dennis Holland (IT manager for County of Avery) to discuss same. Mr. Barrier spoke of the logo and that images that the logo will be superimposed over can be photoshopped, but that the photoshopped images must be high quality. Avery County Parks and Recreation will use the new logo on basketball tee-shirts.

Mr. Walter and Mr. Hazen will meet with Mr. Barrier on Friday December 15, 2017 at 9:00 am to discuss creation of the webpage.

Checks are being processed for the ASU students who contributed to creation of the new Avery County logo.

Mr. Barrier stated that we (EDC) have been asked to become part of the North Carolina Economic Development Committee. He has inquired as to what we will need to do to become members, and what the benefits of belonging to the organization would be. Mr. Barrier will report more on this matter later.

Mr. Walter raised the issue of adding more members to the EDC team. The bylaws were reviewed. The pros of adding more members would be (1) adding younger members (millennials) and (2) adding members who do not work who may have more time than team members who work full time and (3) having more members available in case some members are out. The one con that was noted was that with more ideas coming to the table, it may be harder to reach a consensus on matters. Mr. Walter suggested that we go to the county commissioners and ask for approval to add two more members. A motion on this matter was not raised. Advertisement for the positions would have to occur, the process of narrowing down candidates and then recommendations would have to be completed before bringing the matter to the county commissioners again for approval.

Mr. Walter advised EDC team members to turn in an old business card to Mr. Barrier, and stated that new business cards with the new logo would be forthcoming.

Mr. Walter stated that he has reached out to a representative (Robin) of Junior Achievement in Asheville. He has had trouble reaching her, but will continue to try to do so. Mr. Oakley asked for information on Junior Achievement. Mr. Walter advised that it is basically a training forum

for high school aged students, with a focus on entrepreneurship. He described it as a class, typically held once per week with high school students. Mr. Parlier stated that training through Junior Achievement may marry well with programs currently in place at Avery County High School.

Mr. Hazen indicated that he will do an EDC presentation to Kiwanis on Tuesday December 12, 2017.

Mr. Hazen spoke of a meeting that he and Mr. Walter had with Ken Townsend, former superintendent of Avery County Schools. Mr. Townsend has left the position of superintendent. Mr. Hazen has reached out to instructor Huffer, who was referenced in a recent newspaper article about taking students to tour East Tennessee State University. Mr. Hazen spoke of the benefits of other similar opportunities for students, and spoke of a program called "Possibilities." Mr. Parlier discussed programs currently in use in Avery County Schools, through which students can learn about the differences between four year college degrees versus trade school or community college diploma or certificate programs. He indicated that one of his goals for the spring was to facilitate a job fair type of program, where visiting representatives of colleges, trade schools, etc. could provide information to students regarding the different post-high school training programs that are available.

Mr. Walter addressed the issue of hiring an Economic Development Committee consultant. Mr. Barrier stated that there was no new information on the matter, and stated that he does not think that we are ready to move forward with hiring such an individual at this time. He stated that High Country Impact could be a resource when we are ready to move forward with hiring a consultant. Mr. Barrier reminded the team of Mr. Pierce, who visited the EDC's June 2017 meeting. Mr. Barrier stated that he may contact Mr. Pierce for input on data to be used on the website.

Mr. Hazen spoke for the marketing group. He stated that the group had developed a list of what tabs should appear on the website. He stated that the group has looked at what can be included on the site regarding tourism. He stated that the focus of data on the website should be on economic development, and umbrella other marketing things going on in the county, noting a link between the EDC webpage and the Avery County Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Walter stated that he felt the EDC webpage should be a one stop shop for entrepreneurs.

Mr. Barrier passed out a list of available properties in Avery County. A copy is included as an attachment to this document.

Mr. Lacey raised the question of how these properties could be marketed. Mr. Barrier stated that the list simply shows property in the county that is available, not necessarily property that is for sale.

Mr. Reynolds gave a report on his participation with the Newland Planning Committee. He stated that three new members were in attendance at the December 5, 2017 meeting. He relayed that a moratorium restricting new development in Newland has basically been put into place in an attempt to rejuvenate a planning committee that has been put in place back in 2005. Regarding said committee, the High Country Council of Governments assisted them with putting together a plan that was ultimately set aside. He stated that the moratorium noted above has been rescinded, and that the issue now is whether or not the Town of Newland will try to reconvene a planning committee. Mr. Reynolds stated that the three new board members indicated that such a committee will not be established.

Mr. Reynolds reported that the Sugar Mountain town meeting had been postponed until December 19, 2017.

Mr. Reynolds reported that there is an old bed and breakfast facility located on Old Turnpike Road in Banner Elk that had been foreclosed upon. He noted that the bank that now held the property may be interested in offering a good deal on the property in order to get it sold and off their bad debt list.

Ms. Siirila and Mr. Walter reported to the group on a presentation that was held at the NCWorks Career Center on November 30, 2017. Marilyn Phillips, instructor with Avery County Schools, brought a group of eighth grade students to the Career Center on that date, and presenters included Ms. Siirila, Mr. Walter and John Greene, Business Services Representative with Mayland Community College. The presentation focused on career choices, resume preparation and job interview techniques. Tim Phillips, EDC team member who attended the presentation, added that it was a very informative and well received program.

Mr. Oakley asked about the focus of the youth athletics/recreation group. He inquired as to the goals and priorities of the group. Ms. Lacey indicated that initially the focus was on increased opportunities for sporting events that would lead to economic growth in the area, e.g. a soccer tournament at Grandfather Mountain. Mr. Oakley asked about partnership opportunities, and noted that clarification or distinction was necessary between his job and the focus of the EDC group. Mr. Reynolds concurred that it may be difficult for Mr. Oakley to separate his professional role in his job from his responsibilities to the EDC team. Mr. Phillips indicated that he saw the role of the EDC youth athletics/recreation group as one where a focus on marketing should occur. Mr. Barrier stated that he could help with separating responsibilities if need be. Mr. Oakley stated to the group that the new part of the YMCA facility is now open, and he invited team members to visit the facility. Ms. Lacey stated that it was a good selling point for the community. She noted that she is the chair of the board for the YMCA, and that she may have conflicts similar to those of Mr. Oakley. Mr. Oakley stated that we can work together to bring Avery County Parks & Recreation and other entities together as well.

Mr. Barrier noted that as far as adding new EDC team members, that he expects it will take at least three months, or three meetings of the county commissioners, to accomplish the goal.

Mr. Oakley suggested that the team may wish to investigate Golden Lead grants.

The meeting adjourned at 6:04 pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for January 22, 2018.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila

12/13/2017