

Avery County Economic Development Committee
January 22, 2018
Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on January 22, 2018 at the Avery County Commissioner Board Room at the Avery County Administrative Complex, located at 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC 28657.

Present for the meeting were:

Phillip Barrier	Susan Siirila
Roy Reynolds	Mark Parlier
Carmen Lacey	Larry Hazen
Ken Walter	

Absent:

Trey Oakley
Tim Phillips
Blake Vance

The meeting was called to order at 5:04 pm and was moderated by Ken Walter. A motion was made to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2017 meeting by Roy Reynolds; Carmen Lacey seconded & the motion was approved unanimously.

Updates & Status Reports, High Speed Internet Grants:

Mr. Barrier reported that he had met with representatives of the NC Department of Commerce in Spruce Pine, NC. He stated that we should get the high speed internet grant that the Chamber of Commerce had applied for. We do not know when. The grant would be for \$200,000.00. Lightleap (an internet service provider) has installed towers, and always have representatives at the meetings regarding the grant, as does Skyline/Skybest. Mr. Barrier reminded the group that per the criteria set forth in the grant that no dirt can be moved for the installation of high speed internet service provision. Mr. Barrier stated that the other grant has still not been awarded, and that he checks with Skyline/Skybest about the status periodically. He noted that the grant for Linville Falls is still pending but that he believes it will not benefit anyone outside a specific development area. He stated that the \$200,000.00 grant money will be stretched as far as it can go. Mr. Walter asked how far, county-wise, \$200,000.00 will go as far as providing high speed internet access. Mr. Barrier stated that it will not go far—a drop in the bucket. Mr. Hazen asked what percentage of the county has high speed internet. Mr.

Barrier stated that the Land Harbor area in Linville, and most of the Banner Elk area has high speed internet availability. Ms. Lacey added that many areas still have dial-up internet. Mr. Barrier stated that he estimates that over half of Avery County still does not have high speed internet. Mr. Hazen asked if the \$200,000.00 will reduce that amount to 40% or 30% of the county being without high speed internet. Mr. Barrier stated that it would not. Ms. Lacey added that if the 1.5 million dollar grant comes through, that it would make a greater difference.

New Business Development News:

Mr. Walter stated that he is aware that there are rumors about the Lowes grocery store property. One rumor is that Lidl (grocery store chain) has secured the property. Mr. Barrier stated that another prospective buyer is looking at the old Cannon Memorial Hospital building in Banner Elk. He added that Tommy Burlison is looking for grant money to demolish the building, and that asbestos removal from the building would be an issue.

Mr. Barrier stated that the IRC building in Newland is still as it has been since the property was purchased, and that the new owners are not ready to make an announcement about business starting. Mr. Parlier asked if the building was in the town limits. Mr. Barrier stated that it was not.

It was noted that a new restaurant, Bodegas, was now open in Banner Elk. The owners of Bodegas also own the Times Square in Elk Park.

Status of EDC Page Link to County Website:

Mr. Barrier showed the group the link for the EDC from the Avery County homepage. He stated that it is still a work in progress. A link was added recently to take visitors to the site to the Avery County Chamber of Commerce website. There have been many additions to the 'visitors' tab on the Avery County homepage. Mr. Walter will investigate adding a tab at the top of the Avery County homepage to link EDC at the top. Mr. Barrier stated that money is available for utilizing a web developer. He also noted that Dennis Holland (county IT person) can help with adding a drop-down box. Mr. Walter noted that we also want to show information on the page about latest events and information from monthly meetings.

Mr. Hazen stated that if we add a link for an attraction, that we should advise them in order to get credit for it.

Mr. Parlier stated that reciprocation would be good, noting that attractions could put a link on their pages to refer visitors to their site(s) to the Avery County homepage.

Mr. Hazen, speaking of the heading “latest news” on the Avery County homepage, noted that Artisanal restaurant in Banner Elk has recently been designated as one of the best in the United States. He pointed out that such news on local businesses should be highlighted.

EDC Application Forms:

Mr. Barrier made available to team members paper application forms for those candidates who may wish to apply for the two additional spots approved for the EDC.

Mr. Walter asked if, upon receipt of the application forms that come in, if the EDC team will be given the opportunity to review same and give input to the county commissioners. Mr. Barrier stated that the EDC group would have the chance to review applications; however, the decisions on the appointees will be up to the commissioners.

Old Business:

Mr. Barrier made available copies of a publication “2018 Economic Guide.” He stated that he will report more later on about our group becoming part of the statewide EDC group.

Mr. Barrier stated that new business cards for EDC team members will be coming soon.

Mr. Barrier stated that he has not completed any other work on the list of available commercial property. Mr. Walter advised him that he would help place phone calls if necessary as the list is updated. There will eventually be a list of available properties on the EDC webpage.

New Business:

Mr. Walter raised the question of EDC supporting a high school Junior Achievement program. Mr. Parlier stated that he felt it was reasonable, but that he did not think we could do anything at this point in the year. He stated that it would need to be determined what curriculum it would be part of, what teacher would oversee, etc. He stated that it may be possible to start next year. Mr. Walter stated that the cost is \$150.00 per program. Mr. Parlier stated that he is working on getting Skills USA in place at Avery County High School. Mr. Walter asked for an informal poll regarding spending \$150.00. Ms. Lacey noted that we will be in a new fiscal year by that time, and that the EDC would have more experience by that time. She stated that it may be better to start the program in August. Mr. Walter stated that Junior Achievement provides material, but depends upon the sponsor to educate. Ms. Siirila stated that she wishes to see a link between Junior Achievement and periodic programs offered by her employer, NCWorks Career Center.

Mr. Hazen requested that he be sponsored by the EDC for participation in Leadership Avery, a program stated by the Avery County Chamber of Commerce. It is for citizens of Avery County. Ms. Lacey indicated that she had been through the program, and that she learned things about Avery County that she did not know. She suggested that Mr. Barrier participate in the program as a representative of county government. Mr. Oakley has also been through the program. The primary benefit of the program is networking, or making connections. Mr. Hazen stated that he wanted to participate in order to have a representative from the EDC in the program. Mr. Reynolds made a motion to appropriate \$300.00 from EDC budget to be used to cover the cost of Mr. Hazen's participation in Leadership Avery. The motion was seconded by Mr. Parlier and was approved unanimously.

Mr. Walter reminded the group that our first EDC meeting was in May 2017. He suggested that May 2018 be our organizational meeting, at which we can elect officers. He stated that it may be possible to install new members at that time. In discussing the selection process for new EDC members, Mr. Barrier reminded the group that communications with him, or with Tim Phillips, should be by telephone, rather than email as email records are public records.

Marketing Sub-Committee Report:

Ms. Lacey advised that the next sub-committee meeting will be on 02/14/18.

Mr. Walter and Mr. Hazen met with Jerry Moody, Avery County Extension Service. Mr. Hazen stated that he was impressed with Mr. Moody, noting his knowledge and vision. They learned that fund raising efforts to support projects by the extension service will be focused on the gated communities in the area. Mr. Hazen stated that he knows Mike Fields of Chapel Hill, NC. Mr. Fields is a part-time resident at Linville Ridge, who is active in providing advice for the community.

Mr. Parlier stated that he hopes to tie Avery High School's culinary program with Caldwell Community College, Watauga Campus. Students in the program would gain college credits that would carry over to the community college after high school graduation. Mr. Walter stated that Mr. Moody had pointed out that all commercial kitchens in the area are too far for Avery County residents to drive to in order to develop products, recipes, etc.

Mr. Barrier stated that "latest happenings" like breaking ground for the new State Employees Credit Union building could not be put on the Avery County homepage, but that it could be put on the EDC drop-down box (under the EDC tab).

Mr. Hazen will speak to the Young Professionals group, part of Kiwanis. He has also spoken with Melynda Pepples (Avery County Chamber of Commerce) recently. She is out following surgery, but he will speak with her again regarding community outreach.

Mr. Barrier shared a copy of text written by Mr. Hazen about Avery County. He suggested that team members review same and submit suggestions for changes, if any.

Report on Newland Planning Committee, Sugar Mtn. TDA:

Mr. Reynolds attended the Sugar Mountain TDA meeting, and will attend another meeting this coming Thursday.

He stated that the Newland Planning Committee met on 01/13/18, and that they decided to proceed with a planning committee. Mr. Reynolds is a member of the Long Range Planning Committee along with Greg Seiz and Joletta Wise.

Mr. Hazen asked Mr. Reynolds if the Sugar Mountain TDA is aware of the EDC and what we are doing as far as possibly adding them to the Avery County homepage. Mr. Reynolds advised that time for comments is limited during the meetings.

Youth/Athletic Sub-Committee Report:

No report.

Lodging/Food Sub-Committee Report:

No report.

Mr. Walter stated that the EDC group will return to regular meetings on the fourth Monday of each month.

Mr. Barrier passed out a handout regarding wages in North Carolina.

Mr. Hazen made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Mr. Reynolds and approved unanimously.

The meeting ended at 6:00 pm.

The next EDC meeting is scheduled for February 26, 2018.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila
02/02/18

