

Avery County Economic Development Committee

June 26, 2017

Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on Monday, June 26, 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:

Phillip Barrier

Susan Siirila

Kenneth Walter

Carmen Lacey

Larry Hazen

Roy Reynolds

Mark Parlier

Trey Oakley

Tim Phillips

The meeting convened at 5:07 pm and was moderated by Roy Reynolds.

A motion was made by Mr. Oakley to approve the minutes of the last meeting, with no changes or amendments. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walter. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Mr. Reynolds discussed the concept of sub-groups. He stated that following a discussion with Mr. Barrier, he felt that it was the best way to divide the work tasks which the EDC needs to complete. He stated that all contributions are welcome and that no EDC team member would be eliminated or excluded from a work group.

Working from an agenda he presented to the team members via email on June 9, 2017, Mr. Reynolds noted that the first sub-group would be assigned that task of addressing **Placemaking/Branding/Logo/Slogan.**

Team members assigned to this sub-group are: Larry Hazen, Carmen Lacey and Kenneth Walter.

Mr. Hazen noted that all sub-group members should be working under the same heading (placemaking/slogan etc.) grouped together as one task. Ms. Lacey reminded the group that all decisions must be referred back to the Avery County Commissioners for approval. All efforts will be noted on the Avery County website (a link on the Avery County website) to link back to another page.

Mr. Walter indicated that Linville Land Harbor has engaged gentleman who works as a webpage promoter/developer who may be able to offer suggestions or assistance to the group. Mr. Hazen shared that care must be taken not to utilize a web developer who may lean toward, or

favor, one part of the county over another. This, too, referred to the umbrella concept for bringing agency information together in one place.

Mr. Barrier stated that the County of Avery does employ I.T. workers who can be responsible for website maintenance.

Regarding the issue of a Farmers Market, Mr. Reynolds reminded the group that in our May 30, 2017 meeting we discussed having Jerry Moody, agricultural extension agent, address the EDC on the topic. It was determined, however, that due to the time of year, and based on previous attempts at having two separate farmers markets in the county, that the issue thereof may need to wait and be addressed later. Ms. Lacey noted that since it is almost July, that the time frame would be short for pursuing another farmers market in the county. Mr. Barrier suggested that the matter may need to wait until the completion of the new agricultural building. He stated that there will be a test kitchen at the new building and that the kitchen may be utilized by entrepreneurs wishing to produce and market products at the outset of their business. Ms. Lacey noted the example of Avery Farms who utilize an out of county processing plant for their juices, jam, jelly and that perhaps that could be a point to be addressed in the future. Mr. Reynolds suggested that the farmers market concept be looked at again.

On the issue of youth athletics/recreational complex, it was determined that **Mr. Oakley should lead a sub-group, with Mark Parlier and Roy Reynolds as sub-group members.** Mr. Reynolds suggested partnering with food/lodging providers in Watauga County, as discussed at the last meeting, with the goal of bringing teams/tournaments to Avery County. Mr. Phillips submitted that he has previously been aware of many athletic teams who wished to come to Avery County for sporting events. He noted that all Avery County has gotten in the past from visiting teams for sporting events is a nominal fee for the use of the fields. Mr. Oakley asked for input on what the goals for the future are. Mr. Barrier indicated that our dream is to have a recreation facility with a new pool, but that same will take time. Mr. Parlier noted the issue of taxability of government owned property. Mr. Barrier noted that movement in this area needs to happen slowly, and Ms. Lacey agreed, citing the need for 'baby steps' as we move forward in this area. Mr. Walter suggested food trucks as food purveyors at sporting events. Mr. Parlier suggested possible links for sporting events/tournaments with local lodging businesses. He noted that he has inquired about discounts at Mountain Glen Golf, and learned that nothing exists (e.g. a discount on greens fees for those staying at a local hotel). He offered examples from a recent trip to Pigeon Forge and suggested coordination with lodging and attractions (Grandfather Mountain, golf courses, ski areas), and the same with food service providers in the area.

Lodging and food services issues were discussed. **Sub-group members appointed to this task were Susan Siirila, Mark Parlier and Roy Reynolds.** Mr. Reynolds noted that it would be necessary to show numbers for accountability on this task, and that ties would need to exist with the efforts of the sub-group assigned to youth/athletics. Mr. Barrier noted that some restrictions exist, such as the Town of Banner Elk prohibiting chain restaurants, and that

buildings in the Town of Banner Elk must be three stories or less. Mr. Barrier discussed the fact that locations in the area are being 'shopped' by retailers or service providers, but noted that he was not at liberty to share specifics.

Mr. Parlier stated that he had talked with Joel Whitley with the Town of Elk Park regarding 200 acres of road-front property that is for sale in the Elk Park area. He stated that this could possibly be utilized for a visitor's center. He noted that Hwy 19 is main thoroughfare for truckers coming from Tennessee into North Carolina. He stated that the possibility of a rest stop, such as T.A. or Flying J, should be investigated. Mr. Parlier noted that he has contacted T.A. via email and will do so again for data sharing regarding the feasibility of such a business in the Elk Park area. Mr. Parlier noted that we should look at property that is available for sale. He stated that a possibility would be for the county to own a property, and lease same to the state. Mr. Walter noted that a rest area, such as T.A., would be good for everyone, not just for truckers.

Ms. Lacey stated that she has participated as a board member for the Avery County Chamber of Commerce. Regarding a welcome center or a visitor's center, she noted that staffing would be a challenge, and that the ideas had been reviewed in the past, but never got off the ground. She noted that such a center would have to be staffed seven days per week, and that could be prohibitive.

Regarding the issue of high speed internet, discussion indicated that internet availability in the county is not truly a matter for the EDC. It was noted, however, that it is an issue that may impact data distribution. Mr. Barrier stated that there are currently two grants pending that could help with high speed internet availability. Mr. Walter requested maps of the area where high speed internet is available in the area. It was noted that for such information, D.C. Smith, a member of the board of Skyline, may be a good resource.

Mr. Reynolds stated that the image of the EDC needs to be addressed. He noted that the issue stems from past perceptions of former EDC groups, and that a stigma regarding same should be noted. It was stated that media, such as the Avery Journal and Avery Post newspapers, may be an outlet for good publicity. Mr. Barrier indicated a possible trust issue regarding the EDC. It was decided that it may be best to wait before going public with media coverage until we have more solid information to share.

Mr. Barrier shared information regarding agencies or businesses (i.e. Waterfront Group) looking to locate businesses in the area. Specific locations noted were the Sunrise Shopping Center in Banner Elk, and the former Lowes Food Store and IRC manufacturing facilities in Newland.

Mr. Barrier shared an example of branding from Rowan County.

Discussion occurred regarding the Profile Trail and the possibility of same being a selling point for the area.

Mr. Reynolds suggested that sub-groups meet at two week intervals, between monthly EDC meetings.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Siirila

06/27/17