

Avery County Economic Development Committee
May 30, 2017
Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee met at 5:00 pm on Tuesday, May 30, 2017 at the Avery County Commissioners Board Room located at the Avery County Administrative Complex, located at 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC 28657.

Present for the meeting were:

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

The meeting convened at 5:00 pm and was primarily moderated by Blake Vance.

The first order of business was to elect officers. The uncontested assignments are as follows:

- (1) Chair: Roy Reynolds
- (2) Vice-Chair: Kenneth Walter
- (3) Secretary: Susan Siirila

Mr. Vance advised the group that both he and Mr. Phillips, both of whom currently serve as Avery County Commissioners, were there as ex-officio, non-voting members. Additionally, it was noted that Mr. Barrier, interim county manager, was there also as an ex-officio member.

Mr. Vance suggested that the Economic Development Committee (herein after noted as the EDC) meet once per month, and that more frequent meetings could occur with a 48 hour notice being given. The committee chair may call a special meeting if warranted. It was determined that the EDC would meet on the last Monday of each month at 5:00 pm at the Avery County Commissioners Board Room.

Discussion followed regarding the terms of members. Per the current bylaws, the typical term for an EDC board member shall be three (3) years; one (1) year for officers. Mr. Vance contacted Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk to the Board, by telephone for clarification of term limits. Ms. Turbyfill will relay additional information regarding terms of service for members/officers of the EDC at a later date. See attachment: copy of bylaws section 3 regarding EDC membership terms of service.

Mr. Vance advised the committee that there is a current budget of \$10,000.00 in place for the EDC to use. He noted that this amount is changeable at the discretion of the Avery County Commissioners.

Mr. Vance indicated that a primary group goal for the EDC is to cast a vision for economic growth in Avery County. He noted that perhaps bringing in a consultant or others with backgrounds in economic development and related undertakings may be considered.

Mr. Vance set forth the action point of "Placemaking." Examples thereof are television ads for "Pure Michigan" or "North Carolina—Nothing Compares." Such advertising basically brands a location, which he indicated is generally a preliminary step in economic development. Mr. Vance suggested that for the EDC's consideration, questions such as: "Where is Avery County now? Where will Avery County be in ten years, or twenty years? How can we brand Avery County?" should be considered. As a branding example, Mr. Vance shared with the committee an example of a branding logo developed by Mitchell County, NC. The cost of such branding was discussed. One of the goals of the EDC should be to work toward branding Avery County for where we hope to be in the future.

Mr. Hazen inquired as to the EDC's role related to other agencies, such as the Chamber of Commerce. He noted that if we are to "umbrella" other existing agencies, that perhaps a review of websites of said agencies would be good. Additionally, he proposed possible links so that data from various agencies' websites could be uploaded to the Avery County webpage.

Mr. Parlier noted that he wished to see a goal of the EDC to cover all of Avery County, not only a few areas. He suggested that an all-inclusive view of Avery County to be of primary concern, and agreed that "umbrella" was a positive way to look at it. Mr. Vance stated that it may be difficult, but not impossible to bring all areas of the county together equally. Mr. Barrier noted on the matter that unification first should be of utmost concern, noting that "Everyone is Avery County. Period."

Mr. Hazen inquired as to how the High Country Council of Governments factored in? Mr. Vance advised that grants/grant writing was a function overseen by HCCG, and noted that writers such as Phil True were involved in grant money allocation. Example: grant funding for high speed internet.

Mr. Vance discussed the lack of manufacturing facilities in the area, and noted reasons why it was unlikely that heavy manufacturing may return to the Avery County Area, e.g. lack of easy rail transport, air transport, and costs involved with road transport of incoming/outgoing products and materials.

Discussion followed regarding the availability of training for specific trades via the local community college.

Mr. Vance suggested that a possible speaker for the EDC would be Jerry Moody, Agricultural Extension Director. It was proposed that he be invited to speak to the committee regarding the production of organic crops. Examples of farmers markets in other parts of the state were given. Additionally, it was noted that the farmers market in Banner Elk vs. the farmers market in Newland had varying success, with the market in Banner Elk typically having a better outcome than the one in Newland.

Upon Mr. Vance's suggestion that the committee "throw out ideas" for initial areas of attention for the EDC to focus on, four primary issues came forth:

(1) Expansion of recreational facilities, specifically athletic fields/facilities which could be used for tournaments by athletic teams from neighboring areas. Discussion followed regarding the amount of revenue which could be generated. Mr. Oakley shared data regarding revenue from sporting events which he had been involved with.

(2) Availability of lodging/food service facilities. Discussion from the group set forth ideas regarding the numbers of visitors to Avery County who visit local tourist destinations (i.e. Grandfather Mountain) but who eat and lodge in Watauga County, thus giving the revenue therefrom to a neighboring county.

(3) Business incubation. Discussion followed regarding previous attempts for a business incubator in Avery County, and the limited success that followed.

(4) Branding. Mr. Vance shared a video presentation prepared by Macon County, NC, as an example which the Avery County EDC may want to follow for a similar presentation.

Mr. Parlier raised the concern of available housing in the Avery County area, noting the dichotomy of housing in the area. Avery County typically currently has available low end and high end housing, with limited housing availability for middle class individuals, or typical families who may wish to relocate to Avery County.

Mr. Hazen suggested that we secure information from other agencies in order to determine what is already being done, and what needs to be done in the way of service provision.

Mr. Walter revisited the issue of high speed internet. Mr. Vance indicated that change will rely greatly on grant funding, and that Avery County has reached out to Country Cable in Burnsville, NC for information. Discussion followed on the benefits of high speed internet in future marketing endeavors.

Discussion reverted to expansion of recreational facilities, touting the Avery County area's cooler climate as a selling point for athletic tournaments, etc. Ms. Siirila offered a potential county marketing slogan: "A cool place to play." Mr. Hazen expanded on the idea and offered "A cool place to live, work and play."

Mr. Parlier raised the idea of working in coordination with Mountain Electric for information on how to sell the area, e.g. how much can Mountain Electric power, how many outages, etc. This data could be used as a marketing incentive for potential new employers/agencies. Mr. Phillips added information based upon his service as a worker for Mountain Electric.

Mr. Walter revisited the idea of a business incubator. He provided information regarding successes he has witnessed from business incubation related to a pharmaceutical company in New York that he observed move into an incubator setting upon downsizing. Mr. Vance shared information about prior attempts made toward a successful business incubator in Avery County and the limited success resulting therefrom.

Regarding branding ideas, Ms. Lacey will email Ms. Siirila branding ideas.

Mr. Hazen will secure a list of possible participants that we need to secure data from (umbrella).

Mr. Reynolds will communicate with Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk to the Board, regarding scheduling speakers when necessary or appropriate.

Mr. Reynolds suggested the formation of sub-committees. He offered an example of visitors' services through sharing what he had observed from the City of Charleston. Specifically, traffic solutions for moving visitors through the Charleston area, use of trolleys, park and ride to attractions, visitors' center, etc. The committee agreed that a possible model of the same may work well in Avery County.

The next meeting has been scheduled for Monday, June 26, 2017 at 5:00 pm.

Mr. Vance adjourned the meeting at approximately 6:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Siirila
05/31/17

