

Avery County Economic Development Committee

November 26, 2018

Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on Monday, November 26, 2018 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, Clayton Harpold, Kate Gavenus, Jesse Pope, Carmen Lacey, Ken Walter, Susan Siirila and Melynda Pepple.

Visitors: Randy Phedro, Kurt Colcraft, Carl Blankenship (reporter) and guest speaker David Huskins.

The meeting began at 5:02 pm and was moderated by chairperson Ken Walter.

Mr. Walter welcomed new EDC board member Clayton Harpold, and introduced guest speaker David Huskins.

At Mr. Huskins request, EDC board members introduced themselves and briefly shared information about their backgrounds.

Mr. Huskins gave a statement about his background, and stated that he had many ideas related to the promotion of Avery County. He was a member of the first EDC group in Avery County. He was also part of the Avery County Planning Committee, which was not directly linked to the EDC, but did feed into recruiting for the county. He stated that he had worked closely with the NC Department of Commerce and advocated for the placement of the Owens-Brigham plant, which operated in Pineola during the late 80's and early 90's. He stated that he was also involved in the placement of the Addco plant near Linville.

Mr. Huskins stated that he lives in McDowell County, near the Avery County line, with his wife Betty. He also has a home in Macon County.

Mr. Huskins owns and operates Ridgetop Associates, which is a consulting firm. He stated that he does lobbying work for both government and private sector individuals and agencies.

He stated that in looking at Avery County, in terms of economic development, that one should look at bordering counties, which all have vibrant and active economic development programs. He noted that surrounding counties have full time economic development directors and that some have budgets of over \$200,000.00 per year.

Mr. Huskins noted that he worked as a teacher and coach at Swain County High School, and that he worked for Mayland Community College during its early years.

Mr. Huskins stated that in terms of economic development, we are the 'hold in the doughnut.' He noted that we may need a consultant to depend on to build an economic development plan. He stated that all plans are working plans, and that all take different shapes. He relayed information on some of the

projects that he is working on at present. He stated that for the past three years, he has worked with the State Association of Councils of Governments. There are 16 councils of governments across the state (ours is High Country Council of Governments.) He noted that he observed that there was no consistency in how plans were put together for various councils of governments. He worked toward putting together a statewide plan through which the councils of governments across the state could use for planning purposes. He shared information regarding a conference related to this matter: NC Tomorrow.

Mr. Huskins indicated that there are four (4) pillars to economic planning as follows:

(1) competitive advantages (2) infrastructure (3) creation of healthy, vibrant communities, and (4) developing and attracting talented and innovative people.

He noted that it was important to look at how we take the four (4) pillars and develop a comprehensive plan. He stated that he would be available and willing to work with the Avery County EDC. He noted that he would be able to help the EDC with the development of a vision statement, and a mission statement. He passed out a handout about his agency, Ridgetop Associates. See copy attached.

Mr. Walter gave the background of the current EDC group. He advised that our current group has been in place for about a year and a half, and that our budget has been increased from \$10,000.00 to \$15,000.00 per year.

Mr. Huskins thanked the group for the invitation to speak, and left the meeting at 5:50 pm.

Mr. Walter asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the October 2018 meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Ms. Lacey, and seconded by Mr. Pope. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Walter gave a review of the Junior Achievement program, which both he and Ms. Siirila participated in with students at Avery County High School. Mr. Walter presented Ms. Siirila with a certificate of appreciation for her involvement with the program. Mr. Walter and Mr. Barrier will share with the county commissioners information regarding the success of the program.

Ms. Lacey and Ms. Pepple met with Frank Ruggerio, marketing representative for Grandfather Mountain. Mr. Ruggerio will assist with completion of the advertisement to be included in the Chamber of Commerce Business Guide. Ms. Pepple reviewed the coverage area of the publication. A half-page advertisement is planned. Ms. Pepple stated that the deadline for submission of advertisements for the publication is December 14, 2018.

Mr. Walter asked if Mountain Electric Co-op will participate in applying for a broadband grant. Mr. Barrier advised that Avery County is not a Tier 1 county, so we are not eligible to apply for the grant. Mr. Barrier stated that he does intend to meet with representatives of Charter Communications to try to expand service to the lower end of the county.

Following discussion, the next meeting has been scheduled for January 14, 2019.

Ms. Pepple offered a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Ms. Lacey and approved. The meeting adjourned at 6:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila

