

Avery County Economic Development Committee

October 29, 2018

Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on Monday October 29, 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, Tim Phillips, Susan Siirila, Larry Hazen, Melynda Pepple, Carmen Lacey, and Jesse Pope. Visitors: Kate Gavenus, Katherine Tate, Kathy Campbell, Terry Smith and Frances Magruder. Speaker: Dr. Lee King.

Absent: Ken Walter, Trey Oakley and David Pollard.

The meeting began at 5:00 pm and was moderated by Carmen Lacey.

Mr. Pope introduced the guest speaker, Dr. Lee King. Dr. King is the new president of Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk. Dr. King shared some of his background with the group. He is the sixteenth president of Lees-McRae College. He has been affiliated with five small colleges, the most recent being Hampton-Sydney College in Virginia. Dr. King stated that he takes the roll of Lees-McRae College in economic development very seriously. He recognized that Lees-McRae College is one of the largest employers in Avery County. He advised that Lees-McRae College has been somewhat isolated in recent years, and that the college has not been active in economic development, particularly in bringing resources to the table in the county. He indicated that the board of directors at Lees-McRae wishes to see the college become more visible in the area. Dr. King has worked to build, and rebuild, relationships with individuals and agencies in the Banner Elk area, including the Town of Banner Elk. Dr. King stated "It is in my DNA to make community service very important. Small colleges can become a focal point of a community." He gave examples of college programs that could sell an area such as quality of life, cultural education, athletics, drama, etc. He stated that he was eager to partner with the Avery County EDC, community colleges, etc. to help improve the quality of life in the High Country. He stated that he wishes to see us work together with our various skills, talents, etc. to make the quality of life in the local area enviable. Dr. King stated that he and Lees-McRae College will stay in the loop as they grow their programs.

Ms. Lacey advised Dr. King that she is the president at Cannon Memorial Hospital. She noted that Cannon Memorial expects to have approximately 50 additional positions available over the next two years. She stated that they do have a workforce development group. She suggested that the workforce development group may work closely with Lees-McRae College student services to develop a partnership that could move toward filling the upcoming positions. Dr. King agreed that the concept should be investigated. He also noted that he may work with Ms.

Lacey toward an agreement through which mental health/counseling services could be offered to students at Lees-McRae through Cannon Memorial Hospital.

Mr. Pope thanked Dr. King and advised the group that he has been pleased to see Dr. King 'jump in' to community activities such as Kiwanis and Rotary and for showing an interest in the community.

Dr. King stated that he had met earlier in the day with the provost at Lees-McRae College and discussed education initiatives. He noted one topic that they intend to focus on is the middle-school opioid program. Lees-McRae College will help on the educational component of this program.

Dr. King advised the group that another focus on the campus at Lees-McRae College is facilities updates and maintenance. Their goal is to renovate and include new building projects to update out-of-date buildings that have not been properly maintained and replaced over the years. Lees-McRae College will be interviewing architectural firms in the near future to work toward this goal. He stated that they needed to focus on a new business school. Other programs that the college may focus on are the wildlife rehabilitation program, the cycling program, and the recreation management program-which will be in conjunction with the business program.

Mr. Barrier thanked Dr. King for his enthusiasm. He stated that on the matter of the opioid crisis, he has begun round table discussions, involving law enforcement officials, court officials and others. He stated that many feel tired of talking about the issue and are ready to take action on the matter. He stated that a building will be opening soon which can be used for recovery meetings. He stated that Dr. Taylor (Avery Co. Schools Superintendent) is on board.

Dr. King encouraged EDC members to reach out to him to advise him on how Lees-McRae College can be of assistance. The group thanked Dr. King for his visit.

Ms. Lacey asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the September 2018 meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Hazen, seconded by Ms. Pepple and approved unanimously.

Mr. Hazen suggested that we introduce visitors.

Frances Magruder introduced herself to the group, and thanked the group for the opportunity to join in the meeting. She is part of the Grandfather Community Foundation. She stated that the group is currently working toward getting their 501c3 non-profit designation in place. She stated that the foundation is committed to providing tangible assistance to the economy in the area. She noted that the foundation was started in August 2018. Some of their focus areas include food drives (year round), economic development and an employee emergency fund.

Katherine Tate was introduced next. She stated that she and her spouse own and operate Challenge Design Innovations, a construction business located near Vaughn's Blue Ridge Nursery. She is part of an informal women's group, called 'Avery Women's Project.'

Kathy Campbell was introduced next. She is a pastor at Crossnore Presbyterian Church, and part of a small grass roots group she called 'The Women's Gathering.' She noted that her church has been involved in Habitat for Humanity projects. She stated that her group may need more of a network, and may need a broader environment. They meet one time per month. She stated that she is hopeful that the county can provide help to the group. She stated that her group has an interest in micro-industry.

Terry Smith introduced himself to the group. He is the president of the Crossnore Community Development Committee. He stated that he was visiting the EDC meeting to learn, and to seek interconnections.

Mr. Barrier advised the visitors that the goal of the EDC is to grow the Avery County economy one small business at a time, and focus on bringing people together. Ms. Lacey encouraged the visitors to feel free to have input in the meeting.

Ms. Lacey raised the issue of the EDC focus being on small business. She stated that reaching out to small businesses can be challenging, and asked how we could get a listing of small businesses in the area. Mr. Barrier stated that he could secure a list of Avery County businesses from the tax office.

Mr. Hazen asked Ms. Pepple if there were information available through the Chamber of Commerce that we could use to compile a list of employers. Ms. Pepple replied that she would have access only to a list of chamber members. Mr. Barrier stated that he would get a list of Avery County businesses, and that he would email same to EDC members. He also stated that he had been contacted by an individual who seeks to relocate to Avery County. Mr. Barrier was able to supply the individual with information on using the website and provided information on the area.

Mr. Pope asked if we have a definition of a small business. Mr. Hazen responded, and stated that the definition might be 50 employees or less. Discussion followed on defining a small business. Mr. Barrier stated that we should be able to go through the list of businesses and recognize those that might be deemed a small business.

Phillip Barrier Updates and Status Reports:

Mr. Barrier relayed information on the Harvest and Home Festival, which was held in Newland on October 6, 2018. He stated that there were 22 vendors, and approximately 300 visitors to the festival. He stated that the Avery County Museum will coordinate with the festival for next year, and that the Avery County Museum is working toward bringing back the Heritage Festival, which has not been held in recent years. The Heritage Festival is typically held in July. Mr. Barrier stated that the festival had been held in various locations in the county, but that he expects if it is brought back, it will be held on the square near the courthouse, which was the original location for the festival.

Mr. Barrier stated that new EDC members will be voted on next week. Candidates for the open EDC seat are: Mike Reese, Richard Honeycutt, Kate Gavenus, Clayton Harpold and Keith Hoilman.

Mr. Barrier reported on the Western Carolina Managers Meeting, which was held this year at Linville Ridge. Mr. Barrier served as the host. He stated that the meeting went very well.

Mr. Barrier stated that he has had no contact with the Mainstreet Rural Planning Center recently. This group has facilitated listing available commercial property. Mr. Barrier stated that available commercial property in Avery County can be listed on the county website, the state website and the High Country Council of Governments website. Mr. Hazen asked if others who have commercial property for sale in Avery County have agreed to have their property listed in this way. Mr. Barrier stated that there were no other property owners who were interested in participating at this time.

Mr. Barrier reported that the old Lowes Foods property is being 'shopped.' He stated that the cost of re-paving the parking lot was an issue. He stated that there should be an announcement regarding the U.S. Textiles property in Newland in August 2019. He stated that the IRC building in Newland is for sale again. He stated that the Cannon Memorial building in Newland is still for sale.

Mr. Barrier reported that the high speed internet project is going well. He stated that the internet provider has done some sight surveys and that they have contracted with property owners for installation of towers. He stated that the company has also contracted with pole installers, electricians and others that will be necessary for completion of the project. He advised that the company has already been notifying potential customers.

Mr. Barrier reported that the Junior Achievement program has been approved and paid for. He reported that the High Country Council of Governments meeting will be held on November 8, 2018 at 2:30 pm.

Old Business:

Ms. Lacey stated that the Avery County video is complete. Mr. Barrier played the video for the group. He stated that he will take the video to the County Commissioners on Monday for approval. If approved, the video will be added to the website. Mr. Pope noted that the video could be cut down into smaller pieces, clips could be lifted from the video for shorter presentations or uses. Mr. Hazen stated that we could address this at the next meeting.

Mr. Barrier stated that the photograph that he wished to use on county vehicles was too "pixely." Mr. Pope advised that a higher resolution photograph may be required. It was agreed that this would be addressed later.

New Business:

Mr. Lacey addressed the utilization of Blue Ridge Films for future marketing assistance, and asked if we had a price list for the company's services. Ms. Siirila advised that the owner of the company, Brent Ramsey, is her work colleague and that she could help negotiate prices for his film services. It was determined that we could re-visit this in the spring.

Mr. Barrier stated that David Huskins is available to be a guest speaker at a future EDC meeting. Ms. Lacey asked if we could schedule him for the November 2018 meeting. Mr. Barrier advised that we could pursue that.

Ms. Lacey asked Ms. Siirila about working with Rebecca Bloomquist on the matter of seeking grant funding. Ms. Siirila advised that Ms. Bloomquist had offered her services, but that her co-worker Phil Trew may be a better person to ask about grant writing/grant funding. Ms. Siirila will follow up on this. Any grant requests from the EDC will have to be approved by the County Commissioners.

Mr. Barrier reported that a housing grant has been applied for. If funded, seven houses will be re-built for applicants who qualify for assistance from the grant. Recipients of the grant-funded re-builds will be selected based on several criteria such as location, income, children in the home and whether or not the property/building is in a flood plain.

Marketing Sub-Committee Report:

Ms. Lacey reported that she and Ms. Pepple had met with Frank Ruggiero. They have sent him original images. He will work up some ideas for use in the advertisement that the EDC will place in the Chamber of Commerce Visitors Guide. The deadline for this is December 14, 2018.

Mr. Walter and Mr. Barrier have continued to work on having the Avery Journal and Avery Post newspapers cover EDC activity. Mr. Barrier will insure that this happens in November.

Agricultural Sub-Committee Report:

Ms. Lacey asked if the Avery County logo had been put on Christmas tree tags. Mr. Hazen stated that it has, but that we do not know if it has been placed on wine bottle tags at the Linville Falls Winery.

Education Sub-Committee Report:

Ms. Siirila stated that the Junior Achievement program is ready to go at Avery County High School. The program will begin on October 30, 2018.

Outdoor Recreation Sub-Committee Report:

Mr. Pope stated that Grandfather Mountain had agreed to use the field at Grandfather Mountain for soccer games during the fall. He stated that this may not be possible in the spring, as the field would need to remain in good shape before the Highland Games.

Leadership Avery Report:

Mr. Hazen stated that the current session of Leadership Avery was over. He said it was great program, and he recommended that the EDC sponsor someone for attendance each year. The program ran from March to October. Ms. Lacey added that there will be a Leadership Avery alumni group.

Mr. Barrier encouraged those in attendance to visit the pool location and see the progress on the construction of the pool.

The meeting concluded at 6:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila

