

Avery County Economic Development Committee
May 25, 2021
Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on May 25, 2021 at the Avery County Administrative Complex, located at 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC 28657

Present for the meeting were:

Phillip Barrier (County Manager), Ken Walter, Susan Siirila, Dave Smith, Kate Gavenus, Eric Berg, Clayton Harpold, Dennis Aldridge (County Commissioner) Anne Winkelman and Angie Berry

Member absent: Jerry Moody

Ken Walter called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

(1) Approve and/or amend the April 27, 2021 meeting minutes:

Angie Berry moved to accept the minutes as presented. Kate Gavenus seconded the motion. No discussion occurred. The motion was approved unanimously.

(2) Unfinished Business

A. Website Development Project status update – Ken Walter reported that the website development is complete. He thanked all EDC members for their work on the project. Upon visiting the Avery County webpage, if one clicks on the banner at the top (Economic Development) the first thing that comes up is a directive that reads “Please Click Here for the New Economic Development Page.” This takes visitors to the web page to the Avery County Chamber of Commerce website.

B. Mainstreet America - Kate Gavenus

Ms. Gavenus gave no report. Mr. Walter stated that the item would be addressed later in the meeting.

C. Dave Smith: Retail Strategies continuing retail marketing education program. Dave Smith reported that he has not spoken with anyone else regarding the program, but that he still felt it was a viable program that should be pursued. Dennis Aldridge stated that the matter had not been formally presented to the Avery County Commissioners. Ken Walter asked Mr. Aldridge if it would be advisable for him and Dave Smith to make a presentation regarding Retail Strategies at the next commissioners meeting. Mr. Aldridge explained that they could inquire about getting the matter on the agenda, and that doing so would be the proper way to present the matter to the commissioners.

D. Advertising on Ray’s Weather web site.

Discussion occurred regarding the possibility of advertising the Avery County EDC on the Ray’s Weather site. Susan Siirila shared information regarding raising the issue of such possible advertising. Specifically, she stated that she had seen an ad on the Ray’s Weather website which was posted by the Watauga County EDC, and hoped to see the

Avery County EDC investigate similar advertising. Kate Gavenus spoke about the successes she has seen with such advertising on the Ray's Weather site. Ken Walter suggested delaying other discussion on the matter until the New Business portion of the meeting.

(3) Phillip Barrier updates and other news re: Bojangles, O'Reilly Auto Parts, etc. Availability of Avery County Logo decals? Other new business news: Phillip Barrier stated that he has met with the owner of the new Bojangles. They are set to open on June 1, 2021, as scheduled. They have a workforce in place. Mr. Barrier is helping get some items from the high school for their use in decorating. O'Reilly's Auto Parts has footers in place for their building, but the metal building which they ordered is backordered due to Covid. Mr. Barrier has spoken with Chris Gwyn of The Sign Shop. He will have examples of the logo available for us soon. Mr. Barrier reported that Simply Cinfu, a new pastry shop in Linville, has opened. They have had some issues with complying with county and state regulations for food service operations. He stated that is something that the EDC group could help with, and that the Avery County Health Department has supplied Allen Cooke (MCC's Small Business Center Manager) with a list of code requirements for food service businesses. Angie Berry stated that a packet of information may have been helpful and suggested that the EDC group consider putting together such a packet. Mr. Barrier stated that we might be able to develop such a packet of information. Ken Walter noted that if business owners, or potential owners, have gone to Allen Cooke (MCC) they should know from the information he provides what is required. He pointed out that we can help with opening doors and with referring individuals to Allen Cooke.

Discussion occurred regarding the backlog which exists for individuals ordering parts, food products, etc. due to Covid recovery and workforce shortages.

Dave Smith re: Newland strip mall property development status. Mr. Smith reported that there were new individuals involved in the possible sale of the Newland strip mall. He stated that he felt positive about the potential sale of the property.

Discussion occurred regarding other new businesses in the area, including a new retail store near the candle shop on Hwy. 184 in Banner Elk and a new storage facility near Blue Ridge Propane on Hwy. 194 in Newland.

Ken Walter re: Bent Pine Hollow, Chris Zecca and great piece in the April 28th edition of the Avery Journal. Mr. Walter stated that both he and Allen Cooke (MCC) were mentioned in an article appearing in the April 28 edition of the Avery Journal newspaper. The article reviewed Chris Zecca's "glamping" business coming to Banner Elk, NC.

(4) New Business and/or other issues to address:

A. Status of new EDC appointments. Ken Walter stated that he spoke with Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners. She has accepted three applications from potential candidates to serve on the EDC team. The application period is still open. Mr. Walter encouraged meeting attendees to suggest possible candidates who may be interested in serving on the EDC. He stated that only two people would be appointed.

B. Next fiscal year's budget allocation status: Ken Walter asked Dennis Aldridge and Phillip Barrier to relay any available information regarding the budget for EDC for 2021-2022. Mr. Barrier reported that the budget for the EDC would be the same as last year, \$6,000.00.

C. Do we want to/can we continue with our video project-Community Center, Hospital and High School renovations? Ken Walter spoke of the first video that EDC had produced, the pool opening, and stated that it was an overwhelming success. Secondly, a video was produced about the cooperative extension. At the time, the group agreed that we wanted to continue doing videos and wanted to do one when the Community Center was completed and open. We also discussed doing one about the hospital (Cannon Memorial) and one for the high school (Avery County High School) when the renovations are complete. He asked for input about proceeding with producing other videos when these facilities are complete. Ken Walter stated that he has spoken with Brent Ramsey of Blue Ridge Productions, who is willing to help with filming other videos if we give him enough of a time notice, as he is very busy. Phillip Barrier stated that production of other videos would need to be after the next budget is approved, and when grass is growing at the Community Center. He stated that the hospital and high school projects should be completed soon. He stated that we should address them as the renovations on the noted facilities are completed. The videos would be posted on the Avery County website. Discussion occurred regarding possible issues that may arise, such as getting releases from those who may be filmed. Dave Smith asked about the use of still photos on the website. Ken Walter stated that he and Melynda Peple had discussed the matter. The Avery County Chamber of Commerce has a large collection of still photos on file. Following discussion, it was determined that Anne Winkelman will send some still photos to Ken Walter which the team can review and decide about possibly using on the website.

D. Ken Walter re: High Country Realtors Association housing study and Main Street Development Study Grant for Newland. Mr. Walter reported that he has been contacted by the High Country Realtors Association with a proposal. They are looking to do county assessments. He stated that he felt the county was not in a position right now to participate in the county assessment, as the cost would be \$25,000.00. There is another piece to it, however, and that is Mainstreet America. Mr. Walter indicated that in talking with Michael Cooper, who is our contact, the assessment could be done with a grant. The way it would work would be that they would take a look at Newland, basically like a classic Mainstreet America project, looking at what can be done to revitalize, to attract, etc. and the cost would be \$5,000.00. A municipality would have to put up the \$5,000.00 in advance. When the project is complete, High Country Realtors Association presents it, and the \$5,000.00 would be reimbursed within 30 days. The material would be presented to funding sources. Mr. Walter has invited Michael Cooper to come to the next EDC meeting. He has tentatively agreed to do so and give a presentation. It was suggested that occupancy tax funds may be utilized for such a program. Kate Gavenus stated that there were some gray areas, but that generally occupancy tax funds can be used for such things as market research.

E. Status of my request to Phillip Barrier re: requested "going forward" meeting. Ken Walter referenced the handout "Four Ways Cities Can Help Small Businesses." He suggested to Angie Berry that similar materials may be part of a packet that she suggested. He referenced the educational program that the EDC had worked on prior to Covid closures (Retaining Employees Workshop). He suggested that we re-visit offering an educational program for employers in October 2021. He indicated that we may focus

on not only how employers could attract new employees, but also what employers must do to retain good employees. Mr. Walter suggested that over the next month, EDC team members consider the type of educational programs that we might like to facilitate. He suggested that team members also think about what we can do to assist the businesses that are already in operation in Avery County. The team agreed to do so.

(5) Agricultural sub-Committee Report (Jerry Moody).

Mr. Moody was not in attendance, no report provided. Ken Walter shared that the NC Small Family Farm of the Year Award went to an Avery County family.

(6) Education sub-Committee Report (Susan Siirila, Dave Smith & Ken Walter)

No report. The Junior Achievement program will be addressed again later.

(7) Marketing sub-Committee Report (Anne Winkelman)

Anne Winkelman reported that the Chamber of Commerce is looking for food vendors for the Woolly Worm Festival. They are working with the Banner Elk Police Department to try to make entry/exit issues easier for visitors at the Woolly Worm Festival. They are moving ahead with the Fine Arts Festivals in July and August, as well as the golf tournament at Beech Mountain in September. Eric Berg asked about the distribution of emails from the Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Winkelman advised that all chamber members receive emails sent as well as past members. Ms. Winkelman stated that the Photo of the Week program is back and she suggested that EDC members with good photos should submit them. Also, she stated that the business guide will begin showing amenities available at hotels/bed & breakfast businesses, such as which ones are pet friendly, etc. again. She stated that the chamber had hired a salesperson, and that fifteen businesses, who had not previously joined the chamber, are now chamber members. Their new salesperson will continue to reach out to businesses as there are many other businesses in the county that are not chamber members. The chamber After-Hours program is back in session. After-Hours sessions have been held at Mountain Time Linville retail store and at Eagles Nest.

Phillip Barrier re-visited agenda item 4.E. He stated that he wished to give EDC team members “homework.” He stated that he wanted the team to define our goals. He reviewed two previously stated goals as follows: (1) To ensure the success, growth and retention of our current businesses and, (2) To attract new commerce to Avery County. He asked if these goals were still viable and what we wanted our goals to be. He asked if we needed to expand the goals or not. He indicated that once we have addressed our goals that we needed to determine how broad a “paint brush” we wanted to use to “paint” the goals with as we move forward. Mr. Barrier stated that he believed that the narrower the path we stayed on, the more successful we would be. He stated that past EDC groups/efforts had failed, and that he did not wish to see our current group fail. He stated his commitment to the current EDC group, but that goals needed to be clearly defined and achieved. Ken Walter advised that Phillip Barrier’s homework assignments aligned with his—what education programs do we want to consider, and what are we going to do to achieve these steps. Dave Smith stated that one of the things he would like for the team to pursue would be to define the types of businesses that we wish to see in Avery County, or what types of businesses we want to go after. For example, we could use more restaurants and more things for children. He stated that he would like for the team to work together to determine the kinds of businesses we would like to see

in the area. He added that the Retail Strategies program may be helpful in giving us more ideas as to how to pursue the types of businesses we want to pursue. Phillip Barrier stated that the Loaves and Fishes restaurant has been bought and is opening in June under new management as The Tin Trout. Dennis Aldridge noted that Sandees Café is for sale.

Ken Walter will invite Newland town officials to the next EDC meeting. He will attend a meeting at High Country Realtors Association on May 26, 2021 and will have more data available about the above-noted program thereafter.

Ken Walter adjourned the meeting at 6:24 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for June 29, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila