

Avery County Economic Development Committee
July 26, 2022

Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 p.m. July 26, 2022. The meeting was held at the Avery County Administrative Building, located at 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC 28657

Present for the meeting were: Ken Walter, Susan Siirila, Jerry Moody, Ellis Ayers, Kate Gavenus, Edward Dean, Guests Dan Williams, Kuester Real Estate, Dr. John Boyd, Mayland Community College and Lily Kincaid, Avery Journal Newspaper

Members absent: Clayton Harpold, Terri Melton, Dave Smith, Anne Winkleman and Dennis Aldridge, Avery County Commissioner

Phillip Barrier, Avery County Manager, participated in the meeting via conference call. Committee members agreed to changing the agenda to allow Phillip Barrier to give his report out of the order shown on the agenda since he was participating by telephone.

Ken Walter called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

1. Approve and/or amend the June 28, 2022 minutes

Jerry Moody made a motion to accept the minutes as presented. Kate Gavenus seconded the motion. No discussion occurred. The motion was approved unanimously.

2. Unfinished Business

A. Phillip Barrier Reports: Presenter for next workshop, occupancy tax status, American Recovery Plan funding, Broadband internet, etc.

Mr. Barrier reported that Avery County has received a Great Grant on behalf of Spectrum. As soon as the paperwork is signed, Avery County will pursue a grant called the CAV grant. The commissioners participated in a meeting with the NC Department of Information and Technology. Mr. Barrier stated that the representatives of that agency talked favorably about Avery County securing funding from the CAV grant. This would be approximately \$3,000,000.00 that the county had pledged to go with Skyline/Skybest, which could increase or even double the money. The two grants together will make a great difference in broadband coverage for Avery County. Ken Walter asked if American Recovery Funds could go along with the grant money. Mr. Barrier advised that if that were the case, Avery County would forward the money to the NC Department of Information and Technology, which would then pay Skyline/Skybest.

Mr. Barrier reported that a meeting was held earlier in the month with representatives of the Dogwood Trust. The issue discussed was the housing inventory. There were not

representatives there from two of the townships in Avery County. Mr. Barrier stated that data will still need to be collected for the housing inventory.

Mr. Barrier reported that the Occupancy Tax bill died in the NC Senate. It will be re-introduced in November, in the long session of the NC General Assembly. He stated that there may be some edits needed on the bill, which will be addressed and hopefully help in getting the bill on the occupancy tax passed.

B. Kate Gavenus to report on New Business Guide Toolbox project and survey

Ms. Gavenus reported that we should be able to proceed with the toolbox project. She will work with Mr. Barrier later. Ken Walter advised her that we will need a proposed budget, as our guidelines require that the board of commissioners must be notified before a funding expenditure, and that it must be approved. Ms. Gavenus stated that this is part of what she and Mr. Barrier will discuss.

3. Pending Unfinished Business

A. Avery County High School & Cannon Hospital videos to be scheduled in or after July – included in our 2022-2023 budget

Mr. Barrier stated that the Avery County budget has been approved. He stated that he believed that we did not need to have a public hearing at this time, so that the EDC would be free to begin work on the next video project, for the hospital and the high school.

Ken Walter noted that a second agenda change would be implemented to allow Susan Siirila to proceed with one item of new business before Mr. Barrier's report via conference call ended.

Susan Siirila reported that she had spoken with Karen Lippert and Scott Moser who had purchased land at Cow Camp Road in Newland with the plan of opening a sawmill. They own and operate a sawmill in Florida and wish to start a similar business in North Carolina. The sawmill will be small-scale and geared mostly toward tree growers and homeowners in the area. She stated that Ms. Lippert and Mr. Moser were open to any assistance available from the EDC as they move toward opening their business.

Ellis Ayers asked Phillip Barrier about an event at Mayland Community College scheduled for July 27, 2022. This is a High-Country Council of Governments presentation regarding a digital inclusion plan kickoff. Mr. Ayers asked if it was related to any of the broadband projects that Mr. Barrier had just spoken about. Mr. Barrier stated that it was unrelated, but that the timing could not be better. Ken Walter stated that there was another meeting scheduled for August in Lenoir that will be similar. Phillip Barrier noted that the meeting at Mayland on July 27 would be to develop a plan to get seven counties 95% broadband coverage by working together.

Ken Walter asked Phillip Barrier about progress on getting a speaker for the next workshop. He reported that he as sent an email asking for a phone call from the person

who may serve as a presenter. The individual is an instructor at the NC School of Government.

4. New Business and/or other issues to address:

A. Ellis Ayers: Apprenticeships

Mr. Ayers reported that approximately one year ago, a business advisory group was formed. Charlie Milling from Apprenticeship North Carolina came in to give an overview of the apprenticeship program. Mr. Ayers stated that we do not have many apprenticeship programs in our area, and that apprenticeships are not a career pathway that has been capitalized on in the past. He stated that apprenticeships can be a pipeline to not only training, but also getting resources for training. It could be a different way to engage employers that are struggling for employees. He shared a handout with the group and gave an overview of a conference he attended in Winston-Salem during the past week. Apprenticeship North Carolina gave multiple presentations at the conference. Mr. Ayers shared that if apprenticeships are in any of the following fields: computer/mathematical, architecture and engineering, education, healthcare technicians, healthcare support, protective service, food prep and service, office and administrative support, construction and extraction, installation maintenance and repairs, production and transportation the apprenticeship participants can qualify for funding at the state level. Apprenticeships, therefore, can generate funding, create career pathways and address staffing needs as well. Mr. Ayers noted specifically that we need to work on ways to educate our community about apprenticeship programs. He and Ken Walter have talked about ways to educate employers about apprenticeship programs. The idea of a workshop was discussed. Such a workshop might be like the workshop EDC held in June 2022. Discussion occurred about the possibility of such a workshop including a date and location. Mr. Ayers indicated that having such an event at the Community Center might be better than having it at one of the schools, as it might help participants understand that apprenticeship programs are not just for school-aged children. There is not an age cut-off for apprenticeship programs. Jerry Moody checked for possible dates that the Community Center would be available. October 10, 11, 12 or 13 were the best dates selected. The group agreed to move ahead with planning for a workshop on apprenticeship programs at that time. Mr. Moody will focus on inviting tree growers to the event. Susan Siirila will reach out to Katheryn Castellones, director of apprenticeship programs, as a possible speaker. Jerry Moody made a motion to proceed with the workshop. Kate Gavenus seconded the motion. No additional discussion occurred. The motion was approved unanimously.

B. Anne Winkleman & Ken Walter re: John Mitchell's River Birch Nordic Sauna business and efforts to assist with site location. Ken Walter reported that following a series of failed attempts to get assistance or information about the possibility of locating his business in the Sugar Mountain area, Mr. Mitchell opted to locate his business in Watauga County at the Mast Farm Inn.

C. Dan Williams & Ken Walter re: development of affordable/market rate housing

Ken Walter reported that there is a 16-acre parcel of land for sale in the town of Newland, which has municipal water and sewer. Mike Lacey and another partner own the land. Ken reported that he and Dan Williams met with Mr. Lacey approximately two weeks ago about the property. He stated that Mr. Lacey seemed receptive to the concept of seeing market-price housing, an apartment structure, or possible single-family homes on the property. Mr. Williams added that possible investors that have reached out to him seem interested in the project as well.

5. Agricultural sub-Committee Report – Jerry Moody

A. News and/or updated information on the kill & chill project

Mr. Moody reported that they received another grant and that they have raised 2.5 million dollars so far. They hope to get construction underway soon. They have one final grant for \$500,000.00 in the balance. If they get that grant, the county should take steps toward moving the project forward.

6. Education sub-committee Report – Ellis Ayers

Mr. Ayers reported that Avery County Schools will open on August 15, 2022.

7. Future discussions and/or action topics:

Ken Walter shared an idea from Clayton Harpold related to e-cars and electric charging stations. Specifically, that Avery County may need to begin looking at making charging stations available at various locations throughout the area. Discussion occurred regarding the availability of charging ports available to e-car owners. Kate Gavenus stated that Beech Mountain has paid parking areas available where e-cars can charge. Phillip Barrier noted that grant applications are already underway to address the issue.

Ken Walter adjourned the meeting at 5:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila