

Avery County Economic Development Committee

September 28, 2021

Meeting Conducted Online Via ZOOM

Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on September 28, 2021.

Present for the meeting were:

Phillip Barrier (County Manager), Ken Walter, Susan Siirila, Dave Smith, Kate Gavenus, Clayton Harpold, Dennis Aldridge (County Commissioner) Terri Melton, Edward Dean, Angie Berry, and Dennis Holland (Avery County IT Representative).

Member absents: Jerry Moody and Anne Winkleman

Ken Walter called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

(1) Approve and/or amend the August 31, 2021 minutes. Kate Gavenus made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Clayton Harpold seconded the motion. No discussion occurred. The motion was approved unanimously.

(2) Unfinished Business

A. Ken re: video project – Community Center: We shot the Community Center video on Monday, 9/20 as scheduled. The finished video should be ready for approval in 4 – 5 weeks. Reminder - the price quoted to do the Community Center video is applicable to doing both the Hospital & High school videos.

(3) Phillip Barrier updates and other news re: O'Reilly's Auto Parts, Structall, etc. Availability of Avery County Logo decals? Other new business news?

Phillip Barrier stated that he had an encouraging meeting with a possible buyer for the Lowes Shopping Center in Newland. He facilitated a contact between the possible buyer and Allen Cook, Mayland Community College. He will work on a business plan for them. They asked if he could reach out to some of the chains that he has worked with over the past four years; he has done so. One chain has called him back and he is waiting to hear from the prospective new buyer on how much he is considering for rent per square foot. Mr. Barrier reported that he had a meeting two weeks ago with Skyline/Skybest regarding broadband and possibilities of what to do with the ARP (American Rescue Plan) money. They had a map of all the places that interest cards have been collected.

Ken Walter reported that Avery County was asked by Mayland Community College to provide a letter of support for the new boutique hotel. The letter has been written; Ken Walter has signed the letter and it is on the way to Mayland Community College. See copy of letter attached.

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

A. Clayton Harpold to report on Mission Statement progress: Clayton Harpold reiterated that in the August 2021 meeting, he had stated that we have two goals that were set from the beginning to work with. The mission of the Avery County Economic Development Committee is guided by two primary goals sharing equal priority: 1. To insure the success, growth and retention of our current businesses, and 2. To attract new commerce to Avery County.

Mr. Harpold stated that working with the above-noted goals, he developed the following statement:

The mission of the Avery County Economic Development Advisory Committee will be to encourage and support the retention and expansion of existing businesses within the local area, support the local infrastructure projects, work to attract new business opportunities to increase local tax base and improve the quality of life for the residents.

Ken Walter suggested referencing the Board of Commissioner's original charter in some way. He noted that the charter sets the stage for what Mr. Harpold has written. Mr. Harpold indicated that the mission statement could be stated and that if we wish, in the text or on the web, it could be added that the mission came out of those two goals. Phillip Barrier stated that he wished to suggest changing the word "area" to the word "county." Clayton Harpold invited committee members to email him other suggestions for additional thoughts on the mission statement.

B. Kate Gavenus re report on New Business Guide Toolbox Project: Kate Gavenus stated that she has sent out material regarding the Tool Box. Some committee members indicated that they had not received same. Ms. Gavenus will re-send materials to committee members again by email. This is a document prepared by the Town of Beech Mountain used to make some determinations about what kinds of businesses are most appropriate and to make decisions about what kinds of businesses are desired in the Town of Beech Mountain. Within the document are several very good pieces that Ms. Gavenus feels could be utilized as a Toolbox for the county when developed. She stated that the beginning of the document is a mission statement. Then, data regarding demographics, businesses, jobs, etc. Thereafter, a statement will be included about where we want to go.

(5) Avery County Chamber of Commerce – Anne Winkleman

Anne Winkleman was not in attendance. Ken Walter presented to the group.

See section #7 below.

(6) Agricultural sub-Committee Report – Jerry Moody

See attached copy of Mr. Moody's report.

(7) Avery County Chamber of Commerce – Anne Winkleman

Anne Winkleman was not in attendance. Ken Walter presented to the group.

Ken Walter stated that this year, he is supporting the plan to increase the size of our ad in the Avery County Chamber of Commerce Business Guide. The increase would be from a half-page ad to a full-page ad. We were paying \$495.00 for the half page ad. It would be \$875.00 for a full-page ad. Considering that we do not advertise anywhere else, other than the Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Walter believes it would be an important thing to pursue. He stated that Anne Winkleman has suggested that we re-do the ad. In this regard we will use a \$250.00 budget figure estimate. He asked for discussion from the group before a motion was made on the matter. No discussion occurred. Kate Gavenus made a motion to increase the ad to a full-page ad and to appropriate \$250.00 to re-do the ad. Clayton Harpold seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dennis Aldridge and Phillip Barrier will share this information at the next Board of Commissioners meeting. Mr. Aldridge agreed that it can be presented as a proposal from the committee to approve the expenditure.

Ken Walter stated that per Anne Winkleman, the Woolly Worm Festival will be held on October 16th and 17th and is still in need of more volunteers.

There has been some additional activity with Structall. Mayland Community College is working with them and will help with training programs for new employees. There is still an invitation out to Structall to work with Susan Siirila and John Greene to provide assistance based on their years of job placement experience. Their goal is to hire long term employees.

Dennis Aldridge noted that the American Recovery Plan. He stated that we have moved from a "maybe" to an obscure "could be." Phillip Barrier stated that there are more webinars scheduled and more information will be coming soon.

Ken Walter stated that during the August EDC meeting, discussion occurred regarding bringing in a speaker for a workshop on employee retention. He asked committee members for thoughts and ideas and asked if we should plan to delay based on current covid numbers. Phillip Barrier suggested waiting until January or February 2022, and perhaps plan for such a program to be held in the spring. Ken Walter will advise Allen Cook of Mayland Community College of our plan.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 26, 2021. Ken Walter advised team members to think about in person versus online (ZOOM) for the meeting between now and that date.

Ken Walter adjourned the meeting at 5:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila

Agricultural Report for September 28, 2021 EDC Meeting

First let me apologize for not being able to attend today's meeting. Unfortunately, one of my responsibilities is to provide educational opportunities for those individuals who have a private pesticide license to gain continuing education units. The deadline for a private license is September 30 of every year. Even though a private applicator has three years to earn 4 hours of credit, it never fails that many procrastinate. So I always plan a Procrastinator's Club Pesticide meeting to cover all 4 hours on the final Tuesday prior to the 30th of September. So I will be in the middle of teaching those 4 hours when the EDC meets. I sincerely apologize

Kill and Chill

The group has 19 months to come up with a match of 1 million dollars for chill and kill. The county has verbally committed to 500,000 dollars. The group has three other grants in the judging process presently. The chill and kill looks very promising at this point.

Loss of Agricultural land

In Avery County, there has been an estimated 1000 acres of lost farmland in the past 5 years. The Avery County Agricultural Advisory Board which oversees the Farmland Preservation Program. This program to those who may have never heard of it, is a notification program. It basically helps to prevent a land owner in suing a farm after purchasing property next to it. When a land owner looks at GIS, there is an overlay which will identify parcels that are participating in this program. There are two types of programs, the VAD, or Voluntary Agricultural District and EVAD, or Enhance Voluntary Agricultural District. The VAD means that one could enter today and leave the program tomorrow, and the EVAD is a 10 year Termed Conservation Easement, where the development rights have been suspended for ten years.

Another new program that our county ACAAB will be investigating is the establishment of Farming Conservation Easements. These easements will allow for any type of agriculture such as;

Forestry

Christmas trees

Livestock

Ornamentals

Turf

Agri-tourism (wedding venues, corn mazes, etc)

Greenhouse

This list is not exhaustive. We are working with the NCDA&CS in getting our farms through the process. We have a 70 acre tract that we will apply for a farming agricultural conservation easement through the NCDA Farmland Trust Fund. If successful the farmer will receive some compensation for the development property rights and will have that land saved from any sort of development.

Also harvest season is just a month away. Please be patient with the growers if you encounter them on the roads. We harvest approximately 1.5 million trees with an average wholesale price of 38.00 per tree. It is a stressful time trying to harvest that many trees within the month of November.

Pesticide Collection (Household hazardous waste day)

Since 1997 we have been collecting pesticides through the Solid Waste Dept house hold hazardous waste day, and since 2003 through our regional Pesticide Collection and pesticide storage facility located at Heritage Park. Since that time through our cooperative efforts we have collected and destroyed over 47,054 pounds of unwanted pesticides. This year the HHW day collected 1278 pounds and the regional pesticide storage facility collected 3567 pounds. As more and more farmers die and or retire, and non farm families move in to these properties, the interface with old unwanted pesticides continue to exist. We are working hard at keeping these pesticides from being mishandled, or disposed of improperly. Some of the chemicals that were collected this time were products made in the 60's. We had a 200 pound torpedo container of Methyl Bromide, and 8 gallons of Phosphamidon 8 whose LD 50 is reported at 13 mg per kg of body weight (The LD 50 represents how toxic a chemical is. The lower the number the more toxic. There are oral, dermal and inhalation LD50's, for example Temik's oral LD 50 is 1 mg per kg of body weight and Roundup is greater than 5000 mg per kg of body weight , Oral LD 50) Our county facility is able to house unwanted pesticides until the NCDA&CS can stop by and pick them up. All a person has to do is contact our office and tell us what the product is and we can accept it and store properly until disposal.

Respectfully submitted,
Jerry Moody
County Extension Director, Avery



AVERYNC

Avery County Economic Development Committee

Ken Walter, Chairman
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September 27, 2021

Olivia Collier
ARC Program Manager
NC Department of Commerce
Appalachian Regional Commission Program
4346 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-4346
RE: Mayland Community College ARC Grant Application

Dear Ms. Collier,

As the Executive Director of the Economic Development Commission of Avery County, I am excited to see the development of the Blue Ridge Boutique Hotel renovation in Spruce Pine, NC. It will be a driver for increased visits to the area, which translates into increased jobs and revenue for the region. The EDC supports its development and Mayland Community College. I further commit to promote the Blue Ridge Boutique Hotel to others.

The strategic plans for the region include the need for development of tourism destination businesses and tourism support businesses, such as hotels and dining establishments. With quality lodging and dining facilities, visitors will prolong what are too often day trips into multiple day or week-long stays, thus extending the economic impact to the region.

Thank you for your consideration of funding to support the continued renovation of the Blue Ridge Boutique Hotel.

Sincerely,

Ken Walter
Chairman