

Avery County Economic Development Committee  
October 25, 2022

Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 p.m. October 25, 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, Edward Dean, Dave Smith, Terri Melton, and Phillip Barrier, County Manager. Guests were Robin Morgan, Avery County Chamber of Commerce and Lily Kincaid, Avery Journal Newspaper

Members absent: Kate Gavenus, Clayton Harpold, Anne Winkleman, Avery County Chamber of Commerce and Dennis Aldridge, Avery County Commissioner

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

1. Approve and/or amend the September 27, 2022 minutes

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

2. Unfinished Business

A. Kate Gavenus: Report on New Business Guide Toolbox project and survey budget status

In Ms. Gavenus' absence, County Manager Phillip Barrier reported on the project. He stated that Survey Monkey's price has increased by \$7.00 per month, which brings our total cost for a year to \$468.00. Mr. Barrier may need to report back to the county commissioners and request a higher funding amount for the use of Survey Monkey. Mr. Barrier asked about the survey that will be presented to the public. Ken Walter reported that survey questions were prepared in the early spring. Ms. Gavenus sent around an initial survey, soliciting input for the structure of the survey. Mr. Walter stated that he believed Ms. Gavenus was ready to move forward with completed questions for the survey, so we are ready to move ahead with a survey once funding is approved for the use of Survey Monkey.

B. Phillip Barrier to report on efforts to recruit a potential future workshop presenter

Mr. Barrier stated that he has spoken with a representative from the School of Government. She had advised Mr. Barrier that she did not want to waste any resources as she had no real information or solutions to address concerns related to lack of available employees. She told Mr. Barrier that "getting creative" was the best advice available at this time. She said it would be best to wait and see how things go employment-wise and perhaps evaluate doing a workshop at a later time.

C. Phillip Barrier to report on the Great Grant, CAV Grant and American Recovery Plan funds going forward to provide broadband coverage: Mr. Barrier reported that the paperwork

on the Great Grant will be done in December. The CAV grant will follow that. Mr. Barrier described the mechanism by which independent companies bid on the CAV grant disbursement. He added that steps are being taken to change the process so that counties will have more input on what companies place bids for the grant funding. Regarding the American Recovery Plan funding, Avery County must have the money committed in two years, and it must be spent in four years unless regulations are changed. Mr. Barrier reported that Avery County may be one of the first ten North Carolina counties to receive the CAV grant.

D. Phillip Barrier to report on any new information/updates re: the new apartment complex at the old Lowes Strip Mall property. Other new business news:

Mr. Barrier reported that Avery County has been aggressive about going after the federal income tax breaks for Workforce Development. Unfortunately, we did not receive it this year. We will try again, but at this time it is unclear where that leaves the Lowes/strip mall property. The property was purchased by a company that planned to put in an apartment complex. Dogwood Trust gave a grant for the property and will not be taking the grant back. There are 20 years of income tax breaks for the company for that particular site to build workforce housing. The state gets a percentage from the federal government and the state divides it. There were seventy-one projects selected, but this was not one of them. Government cannot spend money with a for-profit company on housing. The tier status of a county has no bearing on this.

E. Phillip Barrier to provide any updated status information on the EV Charging Stations grant application: Mr. Barrier stated that the grant for an electric car charging station has been submitted, and we should be hearing from that soon.

### 3. Pending Unfinished Business

A. Avery County High School & Cannon Hospital videos: Ken Walter reported that unfortunately Brent Ramsey of Blue Ridge Film Productions was unable to get drone footage during peak leaf season for the Avery County High School and Cannon Memorial Hospital videos. Last week, Ken Walter attended a meeting with Stephanie Greer, President at Cannon Memorial Hospital. They have a thirteen minute video that she thinks would address what we are looking at. She advised that we could have it, and do what we want with the video, with her final approval needed. Mr. Walter has asked Brent Ramsey to review the video and see if it could be edited down to what we need which is ninety seconds or less. If he can do so, we will proceed with that plan. Otherwise, we are looking at the later part of November to December before the video project can move forward. Ellis Ayers reported that there is a video production class at Avery County High School. He will investigate whether this class could help with creation of a usable video. Mr. Ayers will review the two existing videos on the website and report back.

B. Occupancy Tax: The occupancy tax bill will be presented again in the short session of the NC General Assembly.

4. New Business and/or other issues to address

A. Review and critique Apprenticeships Workshop

Ken Walter stated that he felt the workshop was fantastic. He noted that Charlie Milling and Ellis Ayers' presentations were good since they explained both state and local efforts toward building internship opportunities. The Avery Journal Newspaper will publish, in the Avery County News Notes, a piece that shows how individuals can view the video of the workshop.

B. Ken Walter to report on the recent efforts re: the development of affordable market rate apartment housing in Newland and doing so with the potential for some affordable residential housing as well: Mr. Walter stated that Dan Williams still feels that he has an interested developer for 13 acres in Newland (Mike Lacey property) that may be available but getting the party here has been a problem. The developer has property in Florida, which has contributed to scheduling issues due to the recent hurricane in Florida.

C. Preparation for the 2023 Chamber of Commerce "Business & Tourist Guide" This edition to be increased from a half page to a full page ad per our 2022 – 2023 budget allocation. Mr. Walter will take the existing ad and work on adding more copy to it. He asked the group for copy ideas. The Chamber of Commerce has the original photograph. Robin Morgan will investigate 'stretching' the photograph. The funding for the project is already in the budget. Mr. Barrier suggested putting it in the agenda consent items for consideration by the county commissioners before the ad is placed. Mr. Walter stated that he wished to see the group agree on the ad at the November meeting. This will give him time to take it to the first commissioners' meeting in December.

D. Question to Dennis Aldridge and Phillip Barrier: Ken Walter noted that it has been quite a while since we have interacted with the Board of Commissioners. Is this something we should pursue? Mr. Aldridge did not attend the meeting. Therefore, Mr. Barrier addressed the question. He stated that he believed that the Board of Commissioners was pleased with the service that the Avery County EDC is providing to the citizens. He added that he is proud of the committee and felt the Board of Commissioners concurred.

E. Dave Smith re: any new Avery County commercial real estate news:

Dave Smith reported that he and Terri Melton are working on several projects, but that it is a slow process. During discussion, Phillip Barrier pointed out that there is a \$29 million dollar house for sale in Avery County – the biggest real estate listing in the state's history. Also, Mr. Barrier discussed a new coffee shop in Newland near the campground (old Newland Knitting Mill property). There will be an internet café inside the shop, and it should be fully opened soon. Discussion also included VRBO and Air B&B short term rentals and both the governmental and community restrictions related to short term rentals.

5. Avery County Chamber of Commerce

A. Woolly Worm and other festival reports: Robin Morgan reported that there were over 20,000 people at this year's Woolly Worm festival, which is a record-breaking number of visitors. Last year, there were 17,000 total and this year there were 13,000 on Saturday alone. Vendors sold out of food on Saturday, craft vendors sold out of products and some vendors reported that it was the best check-in/check-out they remember. The Chamber of Commerce is seeing more visitors since they relocated to a larger office space in the Tynecastle shopping center. Ms. Morgan reported that the Chamber dinner is coming soon; it will be held on Tuesday, November 15. There will be a smaller silent auction and a live auction this year.

6. Agricultural sub-Committee Report – Jerry Moody

Mr. Moody reported that the Community Center hosted The Haunted Trail on October 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. The movie "Hocus Pocus" was shown, but Mr. Moody stated that it was not as popular as the trail. There were 361 visitors at The Haunted Trail. The trail program ran from 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Parking worked out well and refreshments were sold, so Mr. Moody felt that it was a success.

7. Education sub-Committee Report – Ellis Ayers

A. Further comments on the Apprenticeship Workshop – Ellis Ayers stated again that he was pleased with the workshop. He has a follow up scheduled with workshop speaker Charlie Milling and the Bowmans of Structall. They will meet on November 22, 2022 to see what they can put together, and other businesses have reached out to him as well. Mr. Ayers reported that they are in the process of setting up a career center at Avery County High School near the front office. This will provide space for students to explore career materials and also businesses who may want to talk with students will have space to do so. Mock interviews were conducted recently. Ken Walter, John Greene, Ellis Ayers and Dr. Brigman participated in interviewing Health Sciences students, and it was a good experience. The Business Advisory Council is having some good discussions and moving in a positive direction.

8. Marketing sub-Committee – Ken Walter

No report.

There will not be a meeting in December due to holiday scheduling.

Ken Walter adjourned the meeting at 6:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila