

Avery County Economic Development Committee
November 30, 2021

Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on November 30, 2021.

Present for the meeting were:

Phillip Barrier (County Manager), Susan Siirila, Dave Smith, Kate Gavenus, Clayton Harpold, Edward Dean, Anne Winkleman, Dennis Aldridge (Avery County Commissioner) and guests Robin Morgan, Herb Isaacs and Neil Falvey, Avery Journal Newspaper.

Members absent: Ken Walter, Angie Berry, Terri Melton and Jerry Moody.

Clayton Harpold called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

(1) Approve and/or amend the October 26, 2021 minutes. Kate Gavenus made a motion to accept the minutes as presented. Dave Smith seconded the motion. No discussion occurred. The motion was approved unanimously.

(2) Unfinished Business

A. Phillip Barrier: Community Center video.

Phillip Barrier played the video featuring the Community Center.

B. Avery County Chamber of Commerce "Business & Tourist Guide" update: Anne Winkleman – Ms. Winkleman shared information on the proposed ad for the Chamber's business guide. Discussion occurred regarding correction of colors in the ad. Specifically, blue vs. green coloring in the proposed ad. Following discussion, the team agreed that the featured green color was the version that should be included in the business guide. Phillip Barrier asked about copyrights on the photograph that will be used in the ad. Ms. Winkleman stated that the photograph is not copyrighted.

C. Clayton Harpold: Mission Statement update: Mr. Harpold stated that he had sent the team the latest iteration of the EDC Mission Statement. Phillip Barrier will have Attorney Michelle Poore review the statement and report to Anne Winkleman her suggested approval or changes. The group agreed that the content of the mission statement is good.

D. Kate Gavenus' report on New Business Guide Tool Box project: Ms. Gavenus indicated that she and Phillip Barrier had met and discussed what tools are available and usable. See attachment entitled Tools to Support New or Expanding Businesses. Ms. Gavenus reviewed the handout. She stated that the Tool Box should be looked at as a work in progress. Each year, the matrix can be reviewed and prepped for continued use. Anne Winkleman asked if Avery

County has standards on architecture, style, etc. of buildings. Mr. Barrier stated that the county does not, but that some towns (Newland, Banner Elk and Elk Park) do. Information and feedback on the Tool Box will need to be available to take to the planning board. It was suggested that Dennis Holland set up a Survey Monkey survey so that EDC members could submit feedback on the Tool Box components.

E. Clayton Harpold for Ken Walter – Ken Walter has reported that the Four County Housing Needs Assessment project is underway-approximately at the halfway point, with the report hopefully ready to present by the end of January.

F. Occupancy Tax Status: Phillip Barrier stated that the issue of an Occupancy Tax for Avery County will be presented in the short session of the NC General Assembly in January 2022. He added that a company has offered its services to help implement the usage of tax monies received once it is in place.

G. Clayton Harpold for Ken Walter – No news to report on Structall or Bent Pine projects. Phillip Barrier noted that the family who owns/manages Structall has moved to Avery County. Bill Slagle, Economic Development Partnership of NC manager, will assist Structall with an application for a refurbish grant for the building (old IRC building in Newland).

(3) Phillip Barrier Updates: Phillip Barrier reported that O'Reilly's Auto Parts has begun interviewing and hiring employees for their store which will open soon. There is no news to report on the Avery County Logo decals. Mr. Barrier reported that the county budget has been passed. Legislation that dictates how we need to spend our American Rescue Plan (ARP) regarding broadband should be coming out soon. Mr. Barrier stated that he had received an email about the grant opportunities for the companies to go after extra money for the county. No one knows the rules, or how to apply for the grants. High Country Council of Governments had a meeting recently at which they approved a plan to hire two people to implement the grant application processes.

Mr. Barrier reported that the Workforce Housing Study for Avery, Watauga, Ashe and Alleghany Counties is currently going on. We received a grant from the Dogwood Trust. He met with representatives of the Dogwood Trust (which serves a 17-county area) and shared that he learned that the Western NC average home price is \$385,000.00. The median cost is \$489,000.00. Transylvania and Avery Counties are in the \$900,000.00 mark. He noted that is the above-noted data does not prove that we need workforce housing, nothing does. Based on our median income, a one bedroom, one bath house would need to rent for \$777.00 per month to meet the definition of workforce housing. A two-bedroom, one bath house would need a \$144,000.00 price tag to meet the definition. He has a meeting scheduled next week with town managers and Dogwood Trust representatives to ensure that we get from the feasibility study what we feel that the grant needs to do for us.

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

A. Ken extended an invitation to Victoria & Jon Bowman – Structall, to be guest speakers at our January meeting, which has been accepted. For their presentation topics he suggested – informing us about their company, products to be produced here in Newland, problems we may be to help with, any short or long term plans they would want to share with us and any other information they feel would be of interest.

B. Ken has learned that Carmen Lacey, Cannon Hospital President, will be retiring at the end of the year and as the new Appalachian Regional Behavioral Health Hospital at Cannon Hospital has been completed, he has requested the Board of Commissioners approve going ahead with the video shoot in December before her retirement. Ken has discussed with Brent Ramsey at Blue Ridge Film Productions and they are working on coming up with a mid-December date convenient for all.

Note: Phillip has advised we will need to abort due to insufficient funds. Phillip Barrier reminded the group that no spending can occur without a public hearing.

C. Ken has been a stakeholder participant in the Newland Assessment, which is now complete and awaiting the final report. After the organizational meeting on October 26th - which took place at the Newland Town Hall, the stakeholders we were asked to invite individuals to the first open meeting - which took place on November 10th at the new Community Center. Ken thought Edward Dean as the owner of Premier Pharmacy would be a great addition to this team and he agreed accordingly. Ken also invited Victoria Bowman who wanted to attend, but unfortunately, she could not make the meeting. Newland Mayor Jaynes invited all the downtown business owners to attend as well. Hilary Greenberg the revitalization grant facilitator has finished her role and it will now be up to the Town of Newland to decide on how they wish to go forward or not. Derek Roberts has been elected at the new Mayor of Newland. He will take office the first week in December.

(5) Avery County Chamber of Commerce – Anne Winkleman

Ms. Winkleman reported that the chamber dinner was a great success.

(6) Agricultural sub-Committee Report (Jerry Moody):

Phillip Barrier reported that the Kill & Chill project was awarded money in the state budget.

(7) Marketing sub-Committee Report

No Report

(8) Education sub-Committee Report

A. Ken as our EDC Chairperson was asked to join the new Avery County School System “Business Advisory Council” and has accepted. He attended their first meeting as did Phillip Barrier. Note: Clayton to request Phillip give a report accordingly. Phillip Barrier summed up Avery County Schools as being awesome. He suggested that

individuals should go to Avery County Schools website to read about all that is going on. They are looking for opportunities for students to shadow. There are grants out there that can help with travel, some expenses, etc. to shadow workers.

B. "Finding, Keeping, and Motivating Workers Workshop" to be presented by Professor Tonya Snider – re: offer from Allen Cook. Per Phillip Barrier's recommendation during our September meeting, it was agreed to postpone this workshop until early next spring due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Reminder: our only obligation to host will be to provide a venue – Avery County Community Center and lunch and we will also offer as Zoom webinar for those who cannot attend in person. Note: Allen Cook OK'd re. 09-29 e-mail. The group decided to make a decision on a date for the workshop at the January 2022 meeting. Team members are looking to a date in March or April 2022 for the workshop. The workshop will be held at the Community Center.

Dennis Aldridge reported that he had learned at a recent High Country Council of Governments meeting, that the NC Department of Commerce has proposed a reduction in the number of Workforce Development Groups. There are 23 now. They propose to reduce it to 8, the same number of prosperity zones designated by the NC Department of Commerce.

Mr. Barrier played the correct version of the Community Center video.

There will be no EDC meeting in December. The next meeting will be held on January 25, 2022.

Clayton Harpold adjourned the meeting at 6:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan P. Siirila

Attachment: Tools to Support New or Expanding Businesses