

Avery County Economic Development Committee
April 26, 2022

Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 p.m. April 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, Phillip Barrier, Susan Siirila , Dave Smith, Kate Gavenus, Edward Dean, Anne Winkleman, Jerry Moody, Terri Melton, and Neil Falvey, Avery Journal Newspaper.

Members absent: Clayton Harpold and Dennis Aldridge.

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

(1) Approve and/or amend the March 22, 2022 minutes: Jerry Moody made a motion to accept the minutes as presented. Terri Melton seconded the motion. No discussion occurred. The motion was approved unanimously.

(2) Unfinished Business

A. Anne Winkleman will have her Avery County Chamber of Commerce "Business & Tourist Guides to pass out: Ms. Winkleman shared copies with all committee members.

B. Ken Walter re: our "Finding, Keeping and Motivating Workers" Workshop report: Ken Walter reported that Susan Siirila has arranged catering from Little Deer Cafe in Linville. The workshop will be held on June 9, 2022 at the Community Center at Heritage Park. Mr. Walter has reserved the space. The number of attendees is limited to 45, but a ZOOM option will be available for those who cannot attend in person. Tonya Snider, the trainer, has agreed to allow the ZOOM presentation to remain available for one week after the workshop for review. Susan Siirila will forward a list of employers we wish to invite, along with a draft invitation letter, to Avery County Administrative Assistant Dawn Carpenter. Anne Winkleman, Avery Chamber of Commerce, will arrange email blasts to promote the workshop. Mr. Falvey will assist with putting a notice in the Avery Journal newspaper and the workshop will be publicized on the EDC and Avery County websites.

C. Kate Gavenus: Tool Box Update: Ms. Gavenus reported that she is working on collecting email addresses to which the survey will be sent in July. The survey is basically ready to send out. The goal is to send the survey to many different groups of people. Ken Walter reminded Ms. Gavenus that funding for processing the survey will be available in July, and that a public meeting on

the funding will need to be held. Ms. Gavenus stated that good, usable data will be available from the housing study for Tool box use as well.

D. Phillip Barrier to report on the final analysis of the Dogwood Trust Survey: Phillip Barrier noted that the housing study is posted on the website, and that via the Dogwood Trust, we will have a secondary survey which will focus just on Avery County. This will make more data available. The Asset Inventory is also in the works. Step one will be for the Avery County Commissioners to submit the matter to Phil Trew, grant writer, of the High Country Council of Governments. Thereafter, there will be a meeting of town representatives, at which information can be submitted about what the various towns need. The Dogwood Trust has appropriated \$250,000.00 for Avery County for this project. The data we will get from this will show what we have, what our needs are and what the projections are for the next 25 years.

E. Phillip Barrier to report on the Occupancy Tax status and county budget progress:

Phillip Barrier reported the occupancy tax bill will be introduced by Warren Daniel (Senate) and Dudley Greene (House of Representatives) in the legislature's short session in May 2022. Discussion occurred regarding redistricting and possible representatives for Avery County following the election.

Additionally, Mr. Barrier and Ms. Gavenus referenced a summit at which the presenter will be Chris Cavanaugh. He will present data on how TDA's are developed and share information on best use of occupancy tax funding.

F. Phillip Barrier to report on the allocation in Avery County of the American Recovery Plan funds:

Phillip Barrier reported that on Thursday, April 28, 2022, Charter Communications will do a presentation at the county's budget workshop regarding broadband. Mr. Barrier reported that their proposal should be approved for the Great Grant. There has been a request for a proposal from Skyline/Skybest also. Again, this is for the efforts to pursue broadband. As for the ARP funding, Mr. Barrier stated that the rules concerning usage of the funding continue to change. He stated that a report on the use of the funding is due, but that clear directives on the usage are not available.

(3) Phillip Barrier and Dave Smith to report on any new information/updates re: the new apartment complex at the old Lowes Strip Mall Property:

Phillip Barrier reported on the planned construction of a 68 unit apartment complex at the old Lowes Foods location. There will be one, two and three bedroom units available. Per the housing study, Avery County needs 208 more available housing units to meet the needs. Mr. Barrier advised that the existing Family Dollar store will stay in its current location, and will be expanded to double the current square footage. There is also an apartment complex that is to be constructed in Banner Elk, near the apple orchard and Banner Elk Elementary School. The name of the complex will be The Orchard Apartments and will be high end rental units. Also in Banner Elk, a new retail/office building is to be

constructed near the Rouser's store location near the Best Western hotel. Additionally, the Dunn's Deli building, on Highway 194 near Lees-McRae College, will be converted to retail and apartment units. Ken Walter recognized and thanked Phillip Barrier and Dave Smith for their work on the old Lowes Foods location project. Mr. Barrier thanked Anne Winkleman for her work on the Avery County Chamber's business guide. Discussion occurred regarding the cover art for the business guide.

(4) Pending Unfinished Business

A. Avery County High School & Cannon Hospital videos to be scheduled in or after July - included in our 2022-2023 budget at \$1,000.00 each for fiscal year 2022-2023. The videos will be completed after the public hearing and budget approval.

B. Avery County ad in the Avery County Chamber of Commerce "Business & Tourist Guide" for 2023 to be increased to a full page ad, per our 2022-2023 budget allocations. The business guide will include a full page ad from our group next year.

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

A. Susan Siirila and Ken Walter re: our "Finding, Keeping and Motivating Workers Workshop": Avery County will cover the cost of lunches for 45 attendees at the workshop. Catering will be done by Little Deer Cafe in Linville, with a simple menu of sandwiches, chips and cookies or brownies, plus beverages.

B. Other:

1. Ken Walter shared information with the group about a gentleman who may participate in future EDC meetings as a de facto member. The gentleman's name is Dan Williams. He lives in Sugar Grove, which is in Watauga County, which would prohibit him from full membership. However, his business office, and business projects, are in Avery County. Mr. Williams submitted a letter of introduction, see attachment. Discussion occurred regarding having Mr. Williams join the EDC team as a de facto member. Phillip Barrier suggested meeting with him, and gathering more information, before making a decision. Ms. Gavenus reminded the group that the meetings are open to the public. He could attend the open meetings as could any other citizen. Ken Walter reminded the group that Angie Berry has resigned from the committee.

He also noted that Susan Siirila and Kate Gavenus are both serving terms which will end in June. Both Ms. Siirila and Ms. Gavenus intend to re-apply for appointment. Discussion occurred regarding recruitment of new committee members. The group agreed that an individual who works in the education field might be a good choice. Ken Walter will discuss possible candidates with Dr. Dan Brigman, superintendent of Avery County Schools

2. Ken Walter asked Phillip Barrier about contacts from various companies reaching out to us regarding grant writing opportunities. Mr. Barrier

advised that we have received such solicitations because we received American Recovery Plan funding. Companies who offer services such as grant writing for a fee have learned of our proposed funding, and are therefore seeking our business. Mr. Barrier stated that Avery County will not utilize such services as we have resources through the High Country Council of Governments and the Dogwood Trust.

(6) Avery County Chamber of Commerce - Anne Winkleman

A. Festival Updates

Anne Winkleman reported that three sites getting many “hits” or visitors to the sites are (1) VisitNC.com, (2) WoollyWorm.com and (3) Averycountync.gov. Visitors to the websites are going to the sites for the Woolly Worm festival, the Fine Arts festival and the Avery County Summer Festival. Ms. Winkleman reported that there have been 4,568 visitors to these sites in the past 30 days. She reported that the Avery County Chamber of Commerce currently has 447 members. The chamber has had 3,273 “likes” on Facebook and 1,321 Instagram visitors.

B. Other

Ms. Winkleman reviewed the benefits shared with new members of the Avery County Chamber of Commerce. Upon review of the list of benefits, changes were required, but the current list is up to date. The chamber is looking at creating and sharing membership benefits for existing chamber members. Ms. Winkleman reported that the Chamber of Commerce and the Avery Journal newspaper will host a debate for candidates for the office of sheriff. The debate will be moderated by Nick Oshner of WBTV, channel 3, in Charlotte. Ms. Winkleman will welcome attendees, and provide pens courtesy of the chamber; the Avery Journal will provide 3 x 5 cards for attendees. Newland Mayor Derek Roberts will introduce the three candidates. Chamber of Commerce staff will facilitate getting cards, or questions, to the candidates. Questions for the candidates can be submitted ahead of time. The debate will be held at Heritage Park on May 4, 2022 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

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

Jerry Moody reported that there are no real updates on the Kill & Chill facility in Watauga County. The representatives are still seeking additional funding for the project.

Mr. Moody shared that a real concern that needs attention is the fact that we are losing farms. He stated that children of farmers in the area are choosing other career options and leaving the Avery County area. The farmers age and if their children do not take over farm operations, they have limited options. The cooperative extension will have a program in June to hopefully help address such issues. The NCDA Farmland Conservancy program is in its first year. This program would help put young people in a position to get into family farming without a major investment. It would be beneficial for young farm entrepreneurs as well as landowners/farmers. Ken Walter stated that apprenticeship programs,

which may help young Avery County residents stay in the area, would be good. Mr. Barrier passed along information regarding tax breaks for farmers who farm their property in less than ideal circumstances (e.g. Wal-Mart moves to property beside farm).

Phillip Barrier reported that Amos and Kasi Nidiffer of Trosley Farms, who won the distinction of being the 2020 small farm of the year, have purchased the Country House restaurant location in Elk Park. They will offer cheese and other products as well as offering boxed food options, which will include fresh foods, for around \$40.00 per week. Also, Betty & Carol's restaurant location has recently been purchased and will re-open as The Blind Squirrel. In the same Elk Park area, a hotel has been purchased by Dean and Tammy Hagie and will be leased as one and two bedroom apartments. Leasing will primarily be done through VRBO. Moe's Boots has purchased Stanley Carpenter's store located between Newland and Crossnore, and will be opening their Avery County store in that location soon. Discussion occurred regarding supply chain issues and how small businesses are being and have been affected by trucking/transportation issues as well as other supply issues since the beginning of the pandemic.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 31, 2022.

Ken Walter adjourned the meeting at 6:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila