

Avery County Economic Development Committee

March 25, 2019

Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on Monday, March 25, 2019 at the Avery County Commissioners Board Room at the Avery County Administrative Complex, located at 175 Linville Street, Newland NC 28657.

Present for the meeting were:

Visitors: Eric Berg, Dave Smith, John Greene & Ted Ollis

Members present: Phillip Barrier, Ken Walter, Susan Siirila, Clayton Harpold, Dennis Aldridge, Melynda Pepple, Kate Gavenus and Carmen Lacey. Jesse Pope joined via telephone.

Members Absent: David Pollard.

The meeting began at 5:01 pm and was moderated by chairperson Ken Walter.

A motion was made by Melynda Pepple to approve the minutes of the February 25, 2019 meeting. A second was offered by Clayton Harpold and approved unanimously.

Visitors John Greene and Ted Ollis, both of Mayland Community College, introduced themselves and gave background information about their roles and the programs they operate. Mr. Greene serves as the Business Services Representative for MCC and is also the chairperson of the Avery County Board of Education. His programs involve primarily OJT (On-The-Job Training) and his role is to work with businesses in Avery and surrounding counties for successful placement of individuals in work/training positions. Mr. Ollis is the Director of Industrial Training and Development at MCC. He explained that his primary role is to help provide no-cost employee training for employers, including training on machinery and equipment that is used in manufacturing plants. Both Mr. Greene and Mr. Ollis encouraged members and visitors at the meeting to reach out to them if they, or others they may know, could benefit from the services they provide.

Mr. Walter asked if an apprenticeship program existed that could help with costs for manufacturing companies that were willing to hire high school students. Mr. Greene replied that there is a youth component in the WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) program, serving youth from ages 16-24. The program can help with wages and related expenses such as workers comp for young workers hired by employers. Mr. Greene also defined "Dislocated Worker" and advised that if one meets the criteria to be deemed a dislocated worker, that there are services through the WIOA program that can assist with training and placement.

The services offered by both Mr. Greene and Mr. Ollis could be considered talking points by the EDC, as the group reaches out to potential employers looking to set up their business in Avery County. Mr. Ollis explained a program called ApprenticeshipsNC. He stated that he is just beginning to work with this program, and that it can help with informal apprenticeships.

Ms. Lacey asked about technical vocations versus professional occupations. Mr. Ollis advised that apprenticeship programs could be applied to either technical or professional occupations. He gave the examples of HVAC and plumbing as technical occupations where apprenticeship programs could be helpful.

Ms. Lacey stated that Cannon Memorial Hospital is getting ready to expand their workforce by approximately 50 positions. She stated that there will be a need for social workers, Certified Nurse Assistants, Registered Nurses, environmental workers, plant operations and food service workers. She suggested that working with Mr. Ollis on apprentice/training programs may be helpful, and that they have already reached out to MCC and other training facilities in the surrounding area in their recruitment efforts. Mr. Ollis stated that all medical recruitment at MCC goes through Kim Ledford, but that he would be available to assist as needed.

Mr. Greene stated that WIOA could step in and help with training, work experience programs, job shadowing, etc. He stated that he would like to work with Ms. Lacey and Cannon Memorial in meeting such needs. He added that the OJT program could pay 50%-75% of wages to a worker in the program, and added that that would be a savings for the employer. Ms. Lacey stated that a job fair might be a good way to recruit.

Mr. Ollis stated that he has worked to set up a one-day program through MCC with CTE instructors from local high schools. The program allows students to visit the Yancey campus of MCC to learn about various professions, see manufacturing equipment, etc.

Mr. Pope stated that he believed Grandfather Mountain could benefit from programs described by Mr. Greene and Mr. Ollis. He stated that Grandfather Mountain faces challenges in filling their open positions, and that they would welcome interns, etc. to train for their full-time openings. He listed the open positions currently available at Grandfather Mountain. Mr. Pope stated that it is his goal to fill the open positions at Grandfather Mountain with Avery County residents.

Mr. Greene stated that we are at a time when there are more jobs than people. He stated that it is typically a good problem to have, unless you are an employer. He stated that the situation exists because of the nature of the economy, and that he understands the needs of employers. He added that the OJT program requires that participants work full time, earn at least \$10.00 per hour and that there is an expectation of employment with the employer that they are placed with when their training time ends. He stated that a participant must be enrolled in the WIOA program before work begins.

Mr. Barrier stated that the county has openings in the communications department that may be filled by WIOA participants.

Mr. Aldridge stated that Mr. Greene was a member of a past EDC group, and that he has a good understanding of the needs and goals of the current EDC group, and of Avery County.

Mr. Berg, a retired entrepreneur and previous owner of a large electronics manufacturing plant was a visitor, he gave the group information on his background and why he wished to participate in the EDC meeting. He stated that his goal was to help Avery County in any way that he could.

The group welcomed guest speaker Jerry Moody of the Avery County Cooperative Extension office. Mr. Moody shared his background with the group, and described the new phase one building/grounds of the Avery County Extension office. He stated that the new building is located on 48 acres near Heritage Park, behind Ingles food store. He further stated that the location and facility are good, but might grow to be better with some additional offerings. One example he gave was the possible expansion of trout farming, educational rooms and summer programs. He also stated that one of their goals is to have a certified commercial kitchen, which would help entrepreneurs who wished to develop/prepare food products for sale. He also stated that he has been in talks with the NC Forest Service about trails and related programs.

Mr. Aldridge encouraged group members to visit the Avery County Cooperative Extension facility, adding that one would be amazed at how much they have available and what they are doing.

Mr. Moody addressed the Christmas tree industry in the area, and the byproducts of agriculture in the county. He stated that they were looking at developing a livestock area as well.

Mr. Moody explained his desire to see phase two completed in the near future, but currently he has no funding available to do so and expressed that he would welcome any and all help in this regard. Mr. Walter asked Mr. Moody if he had considered securing funding through grants. Mr. Moody stated that they had applied for a grant, and were turned down with no explanation. He stated that he is working with landscapers and with individuals in the gated communities, and that they may pursue other grants in the future. Mr. Moody invited the group to visit the Cooperative Extension facility and stated that he was always open to ideas or suggestions from the group.

Mr. Walter read an email from Mike Reece to the group. He was chosen as a new member of the EDC, but declined the position because of his new work responsibilities. Mr. Barrier and Mr. Aldridge advised that we could move through the application process again to add another member to the EDC.

Mr. Walter referenced the Avery County High School culinary arts program. He stated that we need to remain committed to helping this project. Mr. Barrier asked about the dinner to be

presented by the culinary arts students. Mr. Walter advised that the dinner would happen in June. Discussion followed regarding earmarking money for a scholarship, or whether money should be used for equipment, etc. Mr. Barrier pointed out that marketing money had already been approved. Mr. Walter agreed to reach out to Lesley Platek, of Grandfather Mountain, and ask for additional information on how monies we may approve should be best used. Ms. Lacey stated that it may be advisable to see if the students in the program could partner with a local chef to gain experience. She stated that it could be an incentive for the students, as well as being a way for them to make connections. Mr. Pope agreed, and stated that such a partnership could parallel with the programs described by Mr. Greene. This may help toward job placement for a youth worker. Mr. Harpold asked Mr. Ollis if apprenticeships could include food service jobs. Ms. Siirila stated that workers often must be over the age of 18 for employment in food service areas at local resorts. Mr. Harpold amended his question to Mr. Ollis and asked if a youth worker were 18 or older, and interested in food service, if there are apprenticeship programs that they may take advantage of. Mr. Ollis advised that yes, apprenticeships for this type of work may be good.

Mr. Walter referenced the upcoming meeting of the Avery County Board of Commissioners, and the prepared list of ideas and suggestions that the EDC will present to the Board of Commissioners. Ms. Lacey stated that the document we present should be concise. She suggested that it consist of three to five bullet points, and that we should let the Board of Commissioners prioritize the items. She stated that the members of the Board of Commissioners may not want a lengthy document. Mr. Walter noted that our current document has four bullet points. Mr. Aldridge stated that he felt it was concise enough. Ms. Lacey stated that we have available supporting information about each bullet point item, and give them the 'meat' they need to then discuss the items and give us feedback and direction. Mr. Walter suggested we go ahead and present the current document rather than wait until the next meeting of the Board of Commissioners. Ms. Lacey stated that if Mr. Walter will be at the next Board of Commissioners meeting, that he could give explanations of the items on the document as needed. Mr. Aldridge pointed out that decisions will not be made at the Commissioners' meeting. Mr. Walter stated that he understood, and simply wanted to provide the information, so that the Commissioners could work on giving us feedback and direction.

Mr. Barrier, Ms. Pepple, Mr. Walter and Ms. Gavenus attended a workshop in Marion, NC: Essentials of Economic Development. Mr. Barrier shared information about another upcoming workshop scheduled for April 18, 2019 (see attachment). Ms. Pepple stated that there was another upcoming workshop in Boone.

Mr. Barrier stated that Spectrum has engineers currently working on broadband expansion in Avery County. He noted that Skyline/Skybest has had representatives in Raleigh presenting to the House of Representatives. Avery County is a Tier 2 county, and most financial assistance goes to Tier 1 counties. He stated that hopefully the House of Representatives members will learn that Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties need assistance with broadband. He added that Representative Josh Dobson has supported HB431, which will give authority to local governments to build and install broadband infrastructure to lease to individuals.

Mr. Barrier and Mr. Ollis spoke of Bill Slagle, Regional Economic Development Manager. Mr. Ollis noted that he is a local person, who is committed to helping people in our area. Mr. Barrier agreed, and noted that he is open to helping post material on our website regarding available properties. Mr. Aldridge referenced the Capital Gains program with helps with reinvestment. Mr. Slagle partnered with the High Country Council of Governments on this. Mr. Aldridge added that Lightleap is starting to take advantage of the program.

Mr. Walter noted that he and Mr. Barrier, along with Mr. Smith, have been working with developers with a goal of bringing an anchor retail store to the old Lowes Foods location. He thanked Mr. Smith for his input.

Mr. Berg spoke of 5G (internet) coming soon, and that said service has speeds of up to 100 megabits. This is new technology which runs from cell towers-no cable. He stated that it may be worth waiting to see what becomes of new technology before investments in cable are made.

The next EDC Meeting will be held on Monday, April 29, 2019 and tentatively may be our combined EDC/BOC planning meeting.

It was agreed that the May EDC Meeting will be rescheduled from Monday , May 27th. Memorial Day, to Monday, May 20, 2019 at 5:00 pm.

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Lacey, seconded by Ms. Pepple and approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila

Opportunity Zones and New Markets Tax Credits in Plain English

Presented by:
Parker Poe, Attorneys & Counselors at Law
McDowell Economic Development Association
McDowell Chamber of Commerce
Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina

AGENDA

- Welcome – Chuck Abernathy, Executive Director MEDA and Steve Bush, Director, McDowell Chamber
- EDPNC – Bill Slagle, Regional Industry Manager Northwest
- Workshop #1 Opportunity Zones Review and Discussion – Tyler Smith, Parker Poe
- Workshop #2 New Market Tax Credits Review and Discussion – Scott Manning, Parker Poe

Date: Thursday, April 18th

Time: 10:00AM - 12:00PM

Join us for the most current update for these two topics and how they can benefit local economic development in your area. The workshops are free, and reservations will be accepted on a first come basis. If space fills for the morning session, an afternoon session will be offered from 1:00pm - 3:00pm.

Location:

Universal Advanced
Manufacturing Building
634 College Drive
Marion, NC 28752

To register or for more information:

Register Now to Join Us!

Ashley Boone or Chuck Abernathy
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**EDC Meeting February 25, 2019 – Economic Development Questions, Ideas & Suggestions
for the Avery County Board of Commissioner as Submitted by EDC Members**

1. What are the top 2 or 3 measures of success that you have for the EDC? When you think about these measures, is there data to show the current state so the EDC can demonstrate improvement?
2. When thinking about a 3-5 year plan for EDC, what do you envision?
3. High Speed Internet for the county- at least most of it.
4. At least 2 major manufactures back in the county.
5. Old Lowes complex filled.
6. Old TRW Building filled- not sure if that is the correct name- corner where you turn in the High School.
7. Sidewalk system in Newland and create the small town effect in Newland since it is our county seat.
8. Is there interest to develop opportunities for service industry/entrepreneurship that allows for individuals to develop their crafts and services?
9. Is there coordination between the High Country Workforce Development Board and the possibilities of economic development in Avery County?
10. Does Avery County look at linkages with Mayland Community College Small Business Center and the MAY coalition for opportunities for opportunities that entrepreneurs need?
11. Do the BoC's accept the limited probability of attracting medium to large manufacturing or commercial companies?
12. Should the focus be on southern Avery County? If "Yes" should Newland be the anchor?
13. If Newland is the anchor should the focus be on: History/heritage = Avery County Museum, Agri-tourism = Co-op Extension & fairgrounds?
14. BoC opinion on having an Arts/Crafts & Market as a Newland destination anchor?
15. BoC opinion on opening/facilitating Newland to attract a brew pub?
16. What level of financial commitment and support – short & long term, can the EDC expect to insure we can successfully achieve our economic development goals?
17. If new business and or business growth tax deferments are not permitted what "grant" options are available?
18. Is the county willing to advertise to inform/attract local entrepreneurs – re. EDC goal opportunities?

Your Avery County EDC recently reflected back on our accomplishments - since our inception in May 2017 and we now feel it imperative that we work with the Board of Commissioners to generate a strategic plan or goal(s) to go forward. To this end we developed a list of 18 questions, ideas and suggestions [attached under separate cover]. While our overall goal is economic development for all of Avery County we felt that the southern part of the county was most in need and Newland as our county seat was therefore deserving of any initiative. The long term goal is the presentation of Avery County as the ideal location & business environment where an entrepreneur would want to locate a business, reside and raise a family. We met on January 28th. and February 25th. to review this list and additional ideas and have agreed on four (4) such economic development concepts.

1. The development of an Arts, Craft & Agricultural Products Market as an anchor for this economic development effort. Such a facility appropriately marketed would serve to present all of Avery County accordingly.
2. Avery County High School Culinary Program support, re. Ms. Lesley Platek's presentation to the EDC at our February 25th. meeting.
3. Support the Avery County High School remodeling building project.
4. Pitch to gated community members our Avery County business opportunities and county needs, in the hope of enlisting their interest and/or support.

In spite of our countries efforts to re-shore our lost manufacturing, the prospects for Avery County being a participant in this process by attracting new and/or expanding manufacturing or a large commercial operation are not realistic expectations. Thus the need to be bold, proactive, not risk adverse and with the understanding that we need to take the initiative, it will not come knocking at our door.

Bear in mind that while we make these recommendations, we exist to serve the Board of Commissioners, thus the need to meet and mutually agree on a goal(s), implementation plan, Board of Commissioners support commitment, timeline and measurement of success/failure.

That said we respectively present these to you for your consideration.