Avery County Economic Development Committee
May 28, 2018
Minutes

The Avery County Economic Development Committee (EDC) met at 5:00 pm on Monday, May 28, 2018 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:

Roy Reynolds, Ken Walter, Susan Siirila, Phillip Barrier, Kate Gavenus (guest), Larry Hazen, Carmen Lacey.

Absent were:

Trey Oakley, Tim Phillips, Melynda Pepple, David Pollard.

The meeting began at 5:00 pm, and was moderated by Chairperson Ken Walter.

Mr. Walter introduced Kate Gavenus, Tourism and Economic Development Coordinator for Beech Mountain. Ms. Gavenus stated that she is currently working on a three year training plan for certifications in International Economic Development & Tourism and Marketing.

Since the EDC meeting fell on Memorial Day, the group observed a moment of silence in memory and honor of members of the US Armed Services.

A motion was made by Ms. Lacey to approve the minutes of the April EDC meeting. A second was offered by Mr. Hazen, and approved unanimously.

Mr. Barrier has received Mark Parlier's letter of resignation from the EDC.

Mr. Walter noted that our EDC group had been in place for one year. The 05/28/18 meeting marked our one year anniversary.
Mr. Barrier stated that he was well pleased with the efforts of the EDC. He noted the brand, logo, billboards etc. as examples of work accomplished over the past year by the EDC. He stated that the County Commissioners were also pleased with the progress of the EDC.

Election of officers:

Chair: Ms. Lacey nominated Ken Walter for an additional one (1) year term. A second was offered by Mr. Hazen. This was approved unanimously.

Vice-Chair: Ms. Lacey nominated Trey Oakley. A second was offered by Mr. Reynolds. The votes were four (4) yea, one (1) nay. Discussion followed regarding Mr. Oakley's participation on the recreation sub-committee, and his stated concerns regarding conflicts with his job as well as his busy schedule.

Secretary: Mr. Hazen nominated Susan Siirila. A second was offered by Ms. Lacey. This was approved unanimously.

Mr. Walter advised that all the above-noted officer positions are good through December 2018. Thereafter, we will move to a schedule that goes along with the calendar year. Therefore, officers will be elected each January.

Mr. Barrier reported that a decision has not been reached yet regarding the high speed internet grant. The two providers involved are Carolina West and LightLeap. This is a $200,000.00 grant--$100,000.00 from Avery County to be matched by the provider for another $100,000.00. The Avery County Chamber of Commerce applied for the grant, as a non-profit organization had to make the grant application. Mr. Barrier stated that the primary issue is 'getting the most bang for the buck' and making the service provision affordable for Avery County families. Ms. Lacey asked if the services from each were comparable. Mr. Hazen asked if we had the money and who decides who will get the contract. He also asked who will make the decision. Mr. Barrier advised that the advisory group that will make the decision is made up of himself, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, Melynda Pepple, a representative of the High Country Council of Governments, a representative of Crossnore School, Gerald McKinney, attorney, and a gentleman from Asheville.
Ms. Lacey asked if there was a time limit for the decision to be made. Mr. Barrier advised that it should be done soon, hopefully by June. He stated that he received an email this past Sunday through which he learned that the group will not meet again, but that members will be asked to vote as a next step.

Mr. Barrier stated that he had met with Tommy Burleson and members of the Newland Planning Committee. They have learned that something new has been proposed for use of the old Cannon Hospital property. There is no word yet from Food City (looking at the old Lowes Foods), and that someone is looking at the old mill property (where US Textiles was located). The Faw family, owners of the property where Lowes Foods was located and the adjoining property that runs to the river, are looking to sell the property, and are using the Webber Company to advertise the property.

Mr. Hazen asked who owns the property at Riverwalk. Mr. Barrier advised that the property is owned by the Town of Newland, the County of Avery and private property owners. Discussion followed regarding the use of Riverwalk for special programs. Mr. Hazen asked who authorizes use of the property for bands. Mr. Barrier replied that the Town of Newland gives rights to use

the property. He also stated that the Newland Planning Committee members have talked with him about becoming aggressive with new programs, and wants to use the Riverwalk area and the baseball field for special programs. Mr. Barrier stated that he agreed and is all for programs that they might wish to move forward with.

Mr. Hazen inquired about a crosswalk at highway 181 near Riverwalk. Mr. Barrier stated that he has talked with state DOT representatives, and that the crosswalk will be painted. Mr. Hazen asked about signs as well. Mr. Barrier stated that is something that we can pursue.

Mr. Barrier stated that he and the county commissioners are working hard on the budget. They will meet again on May 29, 2018, and must present a draft of the budget to the clerk on Friday, June 1, 2018. Mr. Hazen asked if the meetings were open to the public. Mr. Barrier stated that they were, but that guests at the meetings could not speak. He added that there will be a public hearing on the budget on June 18, 2018.

Mr. Walter stated that the resources link on the web page is complete and available.

Mr. Hazen spoke of the King of the Mountain Soccer Tournament. This occurred in Watauga County and hosted over 70 soccer teams from several states. He stated that Avery County needs to pursue similar programs.

Mr. Reynolds gave an update on his research regarding satellite internet service. He has made calls over a three week period. He spoke specifically of HughesNetGen5. This service offers 25 mbps, which would be adequate for streaming; this is the best they can offer. He stated that upon speaking with representatives of the company, he learned that they had no experience or concept of working with counties or organizations, just private individuals. The cost of a dish from this company would be $350.00—this would cover the cost of the dish, modem, router and installation. The monthly service would cost $70.00 to begin, then go to $85.00 per month. Service would require that the recipient had good credit. The service would provide 20 gig unlimited data supply. Mr. Reynolds stated that use of such a service could make the grant money go further. He suggested that grant money could be used for startup costs. Mr. Barrier stated that HughesNet did not come to the table and present options when providers were being reviewed. Mr. Reynolds stated that, again, it was because the company had no experience with working with a county or organization. Ms. Siirila asked if one dish could serve more than one household. Mr. Reynolds replied that it could not. He gave an example of HughesNet serving a facility in Oak Ridge, with the provision to them of 10 dishes. On the matter of serving individual households, Mr. Reynolds stated that it might put the county in a position of collection of fees, signing individual contracts for service, etc. and that perhaps that was more than the county would want to get into. Ms. Lacey stated that it appeared too late for the grant money that is currently pending to be used for such a project, but that in the future, it may be something to consider. Mr. Reynolds stated that for outlying areas, where

there may be one or two households, that it may be cost wise to go the route of a dish, rather than running cable to such an area.

Mr. Barrier stated that he will be in Raleigh on Wednesday May 30, 2018 to meet with state representatives.

Mr. Reynolds discussed the recreation committee and pursuit of such programs as a soccer tournament. He stated that he felt that Mr. Oakley should be involved in same. Mr. Hazen stated that Mr. Oakley had indicated in the past that such participation creates a conflict for him. Ms. Lacey stated that she believed the YMCA and Avery County Parks and Recreation department should work together. Mr. Reynolds stated that the YMCA might expect Mr. Oakley to forward monies from special programs such as soccer tournaments back to them. Mr. Walter stated that in a telephone conversation with Mr. Oakley, he learned that Mr. Oakley's conflict was more with being the chair of the recreation subcommittee. Mr. Hazen stated that programs such as soccer tournaments could create benefits beyond just the teams visiting the area. Mr. Barrier agreed, and stated that we want to get people here. Mr. Reynolds stated that tourism generated from such programs can only be sustained if we would host such a program every year.
Ms. Gavenus stated that tourism is the goal, and that the goal for special programs, such as tournaments, at first should be to break even moneywise. She stated that a concern for such events would be accommodations—where are people going to stay? She noted that when people search for accommodations through Expedia or Booking.com, they are directed to rooms in Boone. She and Mr. Barrier indicated that incentives, points, etc. shown on a booking link or page might be a way to remedy this, and encourage people to stay in Avery County. Ms. Gavenus indicated that to add on VRBO data related to accommodations in Newland or Crossnore, for example, might be the thing to do—this needs to be part of the process if we pursue a special program like a tournament.

Mr. Walter pointed out that the number of rooms available in Avery County is small. Ms. Gavenus agreed and noted that there is little in the way of hotels in the area. She stated that most all hotels are "Mom & Pop" type of hotels, except for the Best Western in Banner Elk. Discussion related to an occupancy tax followed. Ms. Gavenus stated that AirB&B collects tax and remits it to the county; VRBO does not. She stated that an occupancy tax which would exclude Beech Mountain and Sugar Mountain areas could net 6% tax revenue. Mr. Barrier stated that he did not expect that an occupancy tax would pass or be approved.

Mr. Hazen gave a report on our first year accomplishments and the marketing report. See attachment to minutes for Mr. Hazen's prepared report.

He stated that as of May 2018, the EDC had made several recommendations to the commissioners as follows:
(1) Safety crossing on highway 181.
(2) Advertising photos. The next advertising photos are awaiting approval. Mr. Hazen stated that he wants a new billboard photo in place by July 1, and as soon as possible thereafter for publication in magazines. Mr. Barrier stated that we should be able to get a fall photo in Our State magazine, and plan a summer photo for this time next year. (The new budget will not be in place until July 1, 2018, so as far as money, we must wait to see how much will be available). Mr. Hazen stated that as soon as we get money, we can go ahead and spend what is necessary for advertising, namely we would need $1,000.00 to put photos into the video. Mr. Barrier stated that he would check to see how much money was left in our EDC account to spend. Mr. Hazen stated that he wishes to see the video completed and on the county website and the Avery Chamber of Commerce website. Mr. Walter stated that we should have enough money to proceed, and that he feels it is critical to complete this task. Mr. Barrier reiterated that he would find out about the remaining account balance on May 29, 2018 and let us know, as well as getting information about logo protection. Mr. Walter confirmed with Mr. Barrier that he would get the necessary information and forward same to Mr. Hazen on or about May 29, 2018. Mr. Hazen confirmed that we would need approximately $1000.00 for the services of Cole Finch (ASU) to proceed with image placement with the logo.
(3) Recommended management of the Avery County website. Mr. Hazen asked if we could look into getting someone to maintain the Avery County website. Mr. Barrier stated that he has talked with Dennis Holland, and that it would be a matter he would continue to pursue.
(4) Notification of meetings. Mr. Hazen stated that he wants to get more people visiting and participating in EDC meetings. Mr. Walter stated that a link will be added to the webpage showing when meetings are and links to allow viewers to download the meeting agendas.
(5) Simplification of expenditures.

Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Hazen met with the Sugar Mountain TDA, manager Jim Fitzgibbons recently. One of the ideas they discussed was co-op advertising.
Mr. Hazen stated again his hope to see an anchor on 'the Newland' side of the county (Banner Elk being referred to as the anchor on the other side of the county). He stated that a family fun night would be a good activity to look at and he has presented the idea to the Rotary Club. He suggested that we go in with Rotary as partners and sponsor a party night or movie night for families in the area. He has learned that Crossnore School has an amphitheater which could be used for movies. Mr. Hazen stated that we could have a big "to do" for $500.00 or $600.00, and that if the group feels that this is something worth pursuing, that he could do so, but that he would need help. He suggested that food trucks, games, etc. could go along with showing movies and that a cost split with EDC and Rotary could be worth looking at. Mr. Barrier stated that Crossnore Baptist Church has a screen for projection that may be usable.

Mr. Barrier stated that the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games will be coming up soon. Melynda Pepple/Avery County Chamber of Commerce will have a booth at the games, and we may need to focus on advertising at the booth. Also, EDC team members may need to look at volunteering at the booth as well. Mr. Barrier stated that we also need to be represented at the Avery County Fair in the fall.

Mr. Hazen stated that through his participation in Leadership Avery, he was part of a day-long excursion to non-profit agencies in the area. Namely, the Leadership Avery group visited Yellow Mountain Enterprises, RAM (Resort Area Ministries) and other non-profits.
During his visit to Yellow Mountain Enterprises, Mr. Hazen met David Tate, director. He learned from Tate that YME processes t-shirts. This could be a potential source for hats, t-shirts, etc. with the Avery County logo. He noted that it would be a double benefits, as we might get items we need, plus giving our business to an organization like YME. Mr. Hazen stated that he is of the belief that if we got hats, t-shirts, etc. that it could be a money maker once we get into it. Mr. Walter added that hats, t-shirts and possibly other items with the logo could be sold at various retail stores in the county.

Mr. Hazen reminded the group of the upcoming seminar on the opioid epidemic is coming soon, and will be held at the Best Western in Banner Elk.

Mr. Hazen indicated that we need to move forward with getting the Avery County logo trademarked, and at that point we could move forward with getting business cards, and that same would need to be in place before looking at ordering t-shirts, hats or anything with the logo.

Mr. Walter and Ms. Siirila shared information with the group about a recent program they presented to students from Avery County Middle School. The program was held at the NCWorks Career Center in Newland. Both Mr. Walter and Ms. Siirila, along with Business Services representative John Greene, gave a presentation to the students related to career choices, training choices and interview techniques. A copy of an article published by the Avery Journal newspaper about the event is attached to the minutes.

Ms. Gavenus shared that her agency has grant funding available for anyone interested in applying for money for marketing or expenditures related to bringing people to the area. She stated that there is an open grant cycle each year and that individuals or agencies can submit grant proposals in March for review/awards in April. The EDC group may be able to submit a grant proposal through this program.

Mr. Barrier spoke of the Town Planning Board and their request to bring a special program/vendors, etc. to the ball field, and that he hopes to see this happen. He stated that visitors to that area should be covered under the county's liability insurance.

The next EDC meeting will be on June 25, 2018. The guest speaker will be Allen Cook, Small Business representative at Mayland Community College.

Mr. Hazen made a motion for adjournment, a second was offered by Mr. Reynolds. The meeting adjourned at 6:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Siirila

Marketing Committee Report

May, 2018

1. 6 recommendations and withdrawal of one
    a. Bylaw re: meeting notifications
    b. Bylaw re: Notify press
    c. Simplify expenditure approvals and public hearings
    d. Regular Maintenance of "Latest News" and "Latest Events"
    e. Selected next photo for advertising and submitted for approval
    f. Safety Crossing and signs for Riverwalk
    g. Withdrew recommendation for a Facebook page.
2. Selected Next Photo for advertising campaign
3. Selected 26 photos for video rework – approval needed ?
4. Meeting with Sugar Mountain TDA with Roy
5. Meeting with Rotary and Crossnore Home re: Movie Night. Do we want to partner ?
6. Leadership Avery Non-Profits –T-shirts by Yellow Mountain ? Need $ in budget for merchandise

Discussion Points

1. Status of LOGO trademark
2. Status of logo on county vehicles
3. Status of business cards
4. Opiod Seminar

Walter shares with students at NCWorks

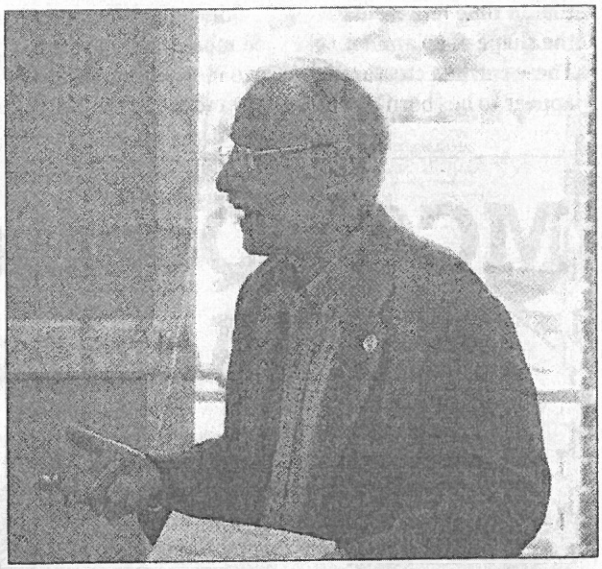

PHOTO BY CARL BLANKENSHIP

Avery Economic Development Committee Chairman Ken Walter speaking to members of the eighth-grade class from Avery Middle School about skills and career choices on Tuesday, May 22, in the Newland NCWorks Career Center. The presentation was a collaboration between the center and the Avery County Economic Development Committee.