

**Economic Development Authority
Of
Lancaster County, Virginia
Minutes – January 21, 2021**

The Lancaster County Economic Development Authority meeting was held in the Board/Commission Meeting Room of the Lancaster County Administrative Building and through the Zoom platform on Thursday, January 21, 2021.

Roy Carter, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

Members Attending: Vice Chair Dr. Charlotte Silverman, Jeff Szyperski, Bruce Sanders, Taryn Brice Rowland and Michael Laws.

Others Present: Don Gill, County Administrator, Glenn Rowe, Information Technology Director, Jeff Beekhoo, Steven Brice, Dr. Gary Silverman and Mark McKercher. Jerry Davis and Lisa Hull from the Northern Neck Planning District Commission and Lynn Knight and Miles Friedman of Grella Partnership joined the meeting via Zoom.

Mr. Carter stated that EDA member, Lewis Conway, had recently passed away and recognized his service to both the EDA and the Board of Supervisors.

EDA Grant Request – Aetocomm, Inc.

Jeff Beekhoo, the CEO of Broadband Telecom Systems, LLC (BTS), stated that his company has been working with the Lancaster County Broadband Authority to help bring broadband services to county residents. He stated that part of his contributions has included helping to develop the grant application to submit to the Rural Utilities Service ReConnect Grant Program.

Mr. Beekhoo stated that he has plans to open the office for Aetocomm, Inc., a broadband internet service provider, in Kilmarnock. He stated that the funds that he hopes to receive from the EDA would help with the initial setup and outfitting of that office. He stated that he plans on having four cubicles there for residents without broadband service to use for their needs. He stated that he also plans to provide voice over IP services and cloud storage for local businesses, as well as internet services for residents. He stated that he will hire three full-time employees in the coming months.

Mr. Carter asked who would be Mr. Beekhoo's competitors.

Mr. Beekhoo replied that his current competitor would be Signawave. He stated that he would not be competing with Atlantic Broadband because he would be providing a service that they do not.

Mr. Carter asked about estimated customer costs.

Mr. Beekhoo replied that the costs would be competitive to other providers.

Mr. Carter asked if Mr. Beekhoo has been able to get other grants.

Mr. Beekhoo replied that once his office is set up, he plans to seek out other grants.

Mrs. Rowland asked if Mr. Beekhoo's company would be using its own spectrum.

Mr. Beekhoo replied yes.

Mr. Beekhoo explained some of the technical aspects of his service. He stated that there will be tiers of service available for customers.

EDA Grant Request – Greenvale Marina, LLC

Steven Brice, the owner of Greenvale Marina, LLC, stated that he wanted to let everyone know that his daughter, Taryn Brice-Rowland, is a member of the EDA.

Mr. Brice stated that he and his wife bought the property in 2015 and they continue to invest in the business every year, without taking a paycheck. He stated that the purpose of the grant application was to replace the fuel dispenser that is located on the marina's dock. He stated that the fuel dispenser has become unreliable. He stated that he would like to replace it before the next boating season. He stated that they have slip rentals and want to continue to sell fuel for not only their renters, but also for the general public. He stated that the replacement cost is \$26,000. He stated that their marina was on Greenvale Creek, which has the only public boat ramp in the upper end of the County.

Dr. Silverman stated that there were not a lot places to get fuel in that area and she was glad that Greenvale Marina was there.

Mr. Sanders stated that fuel service on the water is expensive to maintain and that is why there are so few places to get fuel. He stated that it is a much needed service.

Mr. Laws asked what advantage would it be to purchasing new equipment as opposed to rebuilding what they already have.

Mr. Brice replied that they had rebuilt the dispenser a couple of times already. He stated that, at this time, there are breakdowns and the system is not reliable. He stated that, ideally, they need to go with the new technology.

Northern Neck Planning District Commission Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Annual Report 2020

Mr. Carter stated that Jerry Davis and Lisa Hull from the Northern Neck Planning District Commission would be joining the meeting via Zoom.

Mr. Davis stated that the Northern Neck Planning District Commission was one of twenty-one planning districts in the state of Virginia. He stated that their purpose was to encourage and promote regional cooperation among its localities. He stated that their localities are the four counties of the Northern Neck. He stated that the Northern Neck Planning District was one of ten planning districts that was designated as an economic development district by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration.

Mr. Davis stated that one of their responsibilities, as an economic development district, is to maintain a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). He stated that they have done this since 2000. He stated that they continue to review and update that document. He stated that, in July 2020, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration awarded a \$365,000 CARES Act Recovery Assistance grant to the Northern Neck Planning District Commission to update economic development plans and fortify programs to assist communities in responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

Mr. Davis stated that the Northern Neck Planning District Commission has entered into an agreement with Grella Partnership Strategies to assist in developing a new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and Workforce Training Feasibility and Site Selection Study.

Dr. Silverman asked Mr. Davis if he was going to go through the CEDS annual report for 2020 that was provided to the EDA members and discuss some of the accomplishments.

Mr. Davis replied that he had provided the report, but had not planned on addressing it. He stated that he thought it would be more beneficial to use this opportunity to introduce the EDA to two of the representatives from the Grella Partnership. He stated that Miles Friedman and Lynn Knight were joining the meeting via conference call and could give the EDA an update on the work they were doing.

Lynn Knight stated that she was the project manager for the CEDS update and she had done quite a few of these. She stated that what she could see so far is that the area did have some wonderful opportunities. She stated that her company's job is to take a look at the economic statistics and consider opinions of existing businesses and government officials, as well as people who are stakeholders in economic development. She stated that, with the help of the Northern Neck Planning District Commission, they have created a stakeholders list and businesses that represent the top employers in the four counties. She stated that they noticed right away that the Northern Neck has a diverse economy, which is quite unique for a collective community of this size. She stated that, obviously tourism is a big factor, as well as fishing, but there is quite a bit of manufacturing going on as well.

Ms. Knight stated that they have a team of four people working on the CEDS update and are conducting one-on-one phone interviews and have reached out to many people across the four counties. She stated that they are also doing an on-line survey for another way to get feedback. She stated that this survey is posted on the Northern Neck Planning District Commission's website. She stated that, once all of the information is collected, they will make some assessments. She stated that they were looking for common themes, promising ideas and things that the business community feels could make a difference in helping to retain and grow businesses.

Dr. Silverman referred to the 2018 CEDS report and asked Ms. Knight if they were going to be using that report going forward or if they were starting from scratch.

Ms. Knight replied that they would not be starting from scratch. She stated that one of the things that her team did was to read all of the plans that were in the archive and not just the CEDS, but also such documents as the Comprehensive Plans. She stated that they want to build on what's been done before. She stated that they recognized that COVID-19 has changed things dramatically, but they are seeing some of the same themes going forward and one of those is the lack of a skilled workforce. She stated that there were not enough skilled people in the workforce and also not enough training. She stated that a lot of people who are moving into the area are older and retired. She stated that recruiting working age people into this community is going to be tricky. She stated that there were infrastructure issues and obviously, broadband issues as well.

Dr. Silverman asked if there was a priority when addressing these issues.

Ms. Knight replied that one of the ways they would prioritize the issues was to ask how often that particular topic comes up. She stated that they also look at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. She stated that was done in the last CEDS and they were going deeper with this update. She stated that, obviously, they must address things that are threats and they want to address things that are opportunities and that is a way to help sift through priorities.

Mr. Sanders stated that he had been contacted by Ms. Knight's team and he wanted to highlight the waterfront infrastructure in Lancaster County. He stated that there was tremendous pressure on the working waterfront in the County from residential development. He stated that what was happening is that the waterfront infrastructure was crumbling and the cost to rebuild it is so expensive. He stated that when the time comes for a working waterfront property owner to decide to rebuild or just sell, it is a very tough decision to make. He stated that, eventually, every working waterfront property owner will face this decision. He stated that, in the CEDS document, there is discussion about marine hubs and discussion about taxation in the localities. He stated that, currently, Lancaster County has no boat tax and every year, as part of the budget process, it comes up for review. He stated that he did not feel that the surrounding counties appreciate the impact that having no boat tax can make on working waterfronts. He stated that it would be great to get this entire area to be a no boat tax area like Lancaster County.

Ms. Knight stated that she thought Mr. Sanders made a very important point and it reminded her of something that she had neglected to say when discussing priorities. She stated that her firm

will also recommend a grading system to rank projects. She stated that the grading system will assign points for different things, such as job creation, strengthening the overall economy and resiliency. She stated that this information will be presented as well.

Miles Friedman referred to the workforce project and stated that for many years it has been assumed that if jobs were attracted, the workers would be attracted. He stated that has reversed in the last five to ten years. He stated that the idea of demand driven workforce training is now beginning to infuse into every economic development program in the country. He stated that the workforce study is going to find out if the skilled workforce is there or if the workforce can be grown to include the skills that the businesses in the area need. He stated that this area has a great resource in Rappahannock Community College, but the question is if what they are offering matches what local employers need. He stated that, in working with Dr. Kennedy, the President of Rappahannock Community College, they have found that there is a strong commitment there to meet the needs of the existing and potentially future employers in the region. He stated that the study will be for the Northern Neck as well as the Middle Peninsula.

Mr. Friedman stated that most of the employers that his team has spoken with so far seem pretty optimistic about the opportunities to grow their businesses and the economy. He stated that the subject of the workforce has come up in every conversation that he has had. He stated that they are going to look at increasing communication and the number of workers in the region and finetuning skills training, so the employers will get what they need.

Dr. Silverman referred to the pandemic and stated that so many people are working remotely now and an area such as this might be able to get skilled workers from afar. She asked Mr. Friedman if that was being taken into consideration when conducting the workforce study.

Mr. Friedman replied absolutely. He stated that the pandemic has influenced the workforce by having people wanting to move out of urban areas, especially if they can work remotely. He stated that it has also opened up opportunities for people who already live in rural areas to work for companies that they may not have had an opportunity to in the past until remote work has become more commonplace.

Dr. Silverman asked if workforce housing was being considered in the study.

Mr. Friedman replied that they were looking at workforce housing and it is an issue in many communities. He stated that they will make recommendations on that as well.

Mr. Carter suggested that Mr. Friedman and his team consider the age of the area's population when studying the workforce issue.

Mr. Friedman stated that it was an issue that they were going to be looking at because the baby boomer generation can offer some help, but younger people at the beginning of or in the middle of their careers would be important for the workforce. He stated that, clearly, the age issue is a factor.

Dr. Silverman referred to the 2018 CEDS report which mentions flexspace building and asked how it could work for the development of the workforce.

Mr. Davis replied that one of the strategies for the current CEDS and the CEDS going forward is that they need to address the limited number of finished sites and buildings for business in the Northern Neck that would attract new business.

Mrs. Rowland stated that, as she reviewed the current CEDS report, she did not see Lancaster County represented quite as extensively as the other counties. She asked what the mechanism for collaboration was going to be between the counties and if it was being addressed with the CEDS update.

Mr. Davis replied that, from their standpoint as a planning district, they do everything they can do to make sure that all of the localities in the Northern Neck are participating and receiving benefits of the efforts of the planning district as well as the other entities related to it, such as the Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Regional Partnership. He stated that Mrs. Rowland's point was well taken and they will certainly continue to seek input and participation of all of the counties.

October 15, 2020 and December 8, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mrs. Rowland made a motion to approve the October 15, 2020 and the December 8, 2020 meeting minutes. Mr. Carter seconded the motion. **VOTE: 6-0.**

Adoption of Revised By-Laws

Mr. Carter made a motion to adopt the revised By-Laws for the EDA. Dr. Silverman seconded the motion. **VOTE: 6-0.**

Financial Report

Mr. Gill stated that the available balance for EDA grants in the checking account was \$28,164.11. He stated that there were a couple of outstanding checks and he would check with Paul Sciacchitano concerning the Visions Lead River Counties check for \$5,000 because he was not sure if they were having that program this year due to the pandemic. He stated that there were sufficient funds available if the EDA decided to grant both requests today.

Mr. Gill referred to the second page of the financial report and stated that the certificate of deposit's balance was \$62,598.91. He stated that, at the special December meeting, the EDA voted to earmark \$60,000 of the certificate of deposit for matching grant funds for the U.S. EDA CARES Act Grant, if it is approved.

Mr. Gill stated that, at the bottom of the second page, is the current revenue stream from all of the administrative fees collected throughout the year on prior bond issuances. He stated that the current total for that is \$27,198.

Mr. Szyperski made a motion to accept the financial report. Dr. Silverman seconded the motion.
VOTE: 6-0.

Update on the Federal EDA Grant with the \$60,000 Local EDA Match

Mr. Szyperski stated that, at the last meeting, he had heard that they would find out about the success of the grant later in the first quarter. He stated that they have since been told that they would not hear anything until mid-January and as of today, they still have not heard from the Economic Development Administration.

Mr. Szyperski stated that the Business Relations Advisory Committee has not developed a detailed plan as of yet, pending a decision from the EDA as to the success of our grant. He stated that, once they start development of a plan, they would welcome Lancaster EDA input.

EDA Grant Requests Voting

Mr. Carter stated that the first request was from Jeff Beekhoo with Aetocomm, Inc., which was a start-up business that would provide broadband internet service. He stated that he liked Mr. Beekhoo's idea of providing some cubicles for residents to use broadband service at his office. He stated that they know how important having broadband service is and two former members of the Lancaster County Broadband Authority are in support of the request.

Mr. Szyperski stated that he thought the request was consistent with the EDA's mission.

Dr. Silverman stated that the request was in line with the EDA's strategic goals.

Dr. Silverman made a motion to grant the request from Aetocomm, Inc. for \$10,000. Mrs. Rowland seconded the motion. **VOTE: 6-0.**

Mr. Carter stated that the second request was from Greenvale Marina, LLC, which was an existing business that rents boat slips and sells fuel for boats.

Mrs. Rowland stated that she would recuse herself from both the discussion and the vote concerning Greenvale Marina, LLC.

Mr. Carter asked Mr. Sanders to comment on the request since he was in the boating industry.

Mr. Sanders stated that fuel service on the water is critical and it is a dwindling resource. He stated that, if it is difficult for people to get fuel for their boats, they are less likely to use them. He stated that, in his opinion, it was critical infrastructure and can be expensive to maintain. He stated that it was a needed service in the area.

Mr. Carter stated that he knew that this request was much needed, but did wonder about opening the door for other small businesses that may need to replace old equipment, vehicles, etc. He

stated that he did understand that all of the slip renters there depended on the fuel as well as many other boat owners in that area.

Mr. Sanders stated that there were very few places left on the local waters to get fuel.

Dr. Silverman stated that she thought this request was important for helping to contribute to the marine aspect of the area.

Mr. Laws stated that he was in favor of the request.

Mr. Sanders made a motion to approve the grant request from Greenvale Marina, LLC for \$10,000. Dr. Silverman seconded the motion. **VOTE: 5-0-1 (Mrs. Rowland abstained.)**

Election of 2021 EDA Officers

Mr. Szyperski made a motion to nominate Roy Carter to continue in his role as Chairman. Mr. Sanders seconded the motion. **VOTE: 6-0.**

Mr. Szyperski made a motion nominate Dr. Charlotte Silverman to continue in her role as Vice-Chair. Mr. Carter seconded the motion. **VOTE: 6-0.**

Mr. Szyperski made a motion to nominate Don Gill to continue in his role as Treasurer. Mr. Carter seconded the motion. **VOTE: 6-0.**

Mr. Szyperski made a motion to nominate Crystal Whay to continue in her role as Secretary. Mr. Carter seconded the motion. **VOTE: 6-0.**

Adjournment

Mr. Carter made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Silverman seconded the motion. **VOTE: 6-0.**

Action Items

- Continue to monitor the Federal EDA Grant status.
- Check on outstanding EDA checks.
- The next regular EDA meeting will be Thursday, April 15, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

