

Clarke County Economic Development Advisory Committee
July 21, 2021 Minutes

A meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) held in the Berryville-Clarke County Government Center, Berryville, Virginia, on Wednesday, July 21, 2021, at 1:00 pm.

<i>Board:</i>	Chris Bates, Reid Dodson, Christina Kraybill, John Milleson, Betsy Pritchard, and Lee Sheaffer
<i>Absent:</i>	Christy Dunkle, Bev McKay
<i>Staff:</i>	Chris Boies, Felicia Hart, Tiffany Kemp
<i>Press:</i>	None
<i>Also Present:</i>	None

1. *Call to Order*

At 1:00 pm, Chairman John Milleson called the meeting to order.

2. *Adoption of Agenda*

- Chris Bates requested that a discussion of Double Tollgate Development be added to the agenda.

Chris Bates, seconded by Lee Sheaffer, moved to adopt the agenda as amended. The motion carried by the following vote:

Chris Bates	-	Aye
Reid Dodson	-	Aye
Christy Dunkle	-	Absent
Christina Kraybill	-	Aye
Beverly B. McKay	-	Absent
John Milleson	-	Aye
Betsy Pritchard	-	Aye
Lee Sheaffer	-	Aye

Approved September 22, 2021

Chairman John Milleson introduced Reid Dodson, who filled the unexpired term of Lori Macintosh. Reid Dodson thanked Chairman Milleson for introducing him. He Informed the Committee that he was born and raised in Clarke County. Went to school for the automotive trade and returned to Clarke County with his wife and children six years ago. Owns Persimmon Ridge Farm and is a member of the Clarke County Farmer's Market.

3. Approval of Minutes

Betsy Pritchard, seconded by Christina Kraybill, moved to approve the May 19, 2021, minutes as presented. The motion carried as follows:

Chris Bates	-	Aye
Reid Dodson	-	Aye
Christy Dunkle	-	Absent
Christina Kraybill	-	Aye
Beverly B. McKay	-	Absent
John Milleson	-	Aye
Betsy Pritchard	-	Aye
Lee Sheaffer	-	Aye

4. Fall Business Tour Discussion

- Proposed locations for the Fall Business Tour scheduled for October 20, 2021.
 - Smithfield Farm
 - Audley Farm

By Consensus, the Economic Development Advisory Committee agreed to visit Smithfield Farm and Audley Farm for the October 20, 2021, Fall Business tour.

5. Economic Development and Tourism Update

Goals

1. Convene a group of hospitality owners/operators
 - Group has met once in person. Discussion continues as needed and when appropriate.
 - I have not heard from anyone (good or bad) regarding the new meals tax.

2. Engage stakeholders on the feasibility of a hotel in Berryville (this would include owners/operators in the region).
 - Work in progress – COVID major consideration right now.
 - In another locality, one hotel has decided to hold off on building; in another locality, two are holding off.
 - In talking with other localities, a majority of the hotels are having difficulty hiring front-line staff.
 - Locally, the occupancy rate is holding at about 70% right now.
 - Local hotels are competing against the AirBnBs and short-term rentals.
3. Continue efforts on small business attraction, retention, and expansion (seminars, promotion, assistance). I have also expanded this to include workforce initiatives and expansion.
 - Working regionally regarding the Worlds of Work!, Workforce Initiative, and programs Clarke County schools are currently involved in.
 - We have brought in Virginia Career Works, the Virginia Employment Commission, and other local and state agencies as needed for networking.
 - Wrapped up the latest Economic Gardening program. Have met with participants, and they are very pleased with the results and the end product.
 - Note newest Clarke County unemployment numbers. We had an unemployment rate of 3.9% in March – lower than February's rate of 4%, although some of our Main Street businesses are reducing hours because of the lack of employees applying.
4. Engage in a dialogue with property owners of vacant buildings and the developable land to spur economic activity.
 - Ongoing.
 - I update my list weekly of available properties.
5. Evaluate what is needed to make the Berryville Main Street program viable and successful – report back to Joint Committee on a recommendation.
 - Letter received from Berryville Main Street regarding reorganizing.
 - I attended their recently held public meeting, and they have elected nine new board members. They are now working on developing committees.
6. Formalize website and social media strategies for economic development.
 - Work in progress regarding updates.
 - A new website is in design works will better enable us to post immediately and provide more pertinent information for those who use it.

7. Establish relationships, and provide training for realtors in the area.
 - In regular conversations with Blue Ridge Association of Realtors (BRAR) ED Nancy Silva.
 - Made introductions with ED and Clarke County High School officials as a partnership for teaching students.
 - Made BRAR aware of the new Waterloo water/sewer program and the potential at Double Tollgate.
 - Continue meeting one-on-one with realtors to learn of speedbumps/issues/concerns.

8. Develop and implement an incentive program using the CARES funding
 - Program completed.
 - New funds are available through the American Rescue Plan. We are currently trying to understand how these new funds can be used and when.

Other projects:

Economic Development

- Continue having broadband meetings/updates/phone calls. We are looking at opportunities to use the new American Rescue Plan funds.
- On behalf of the Virginia Health Department, we are coordinating with local businesses to schedule on-site vaccines.
 - This is a no-cost program that allows the Health Department to schedule on-site (at the businesses) vaccines for all their employees. This will help to eliminate manufacturing downtime while at the same time vaccinating more people.
- The Commissioner's Office will be visiting each restaurant/store to educate them on the recently passed meals tax program and will be distributing this information.
 - Working with them, I developed handouts for our restaurants regarding available grant monies from the American Rescue Plan program.
- Met with representatives from our local Department of Social Services to make them aware of several local programs and organizations for partnership opportunities.
 - Made them aware of numerous existing programs their clients may be able to take advantage of. Made several introductions to local organizations/businesses for the DSS Director to speak at to update local elected officials (Town of Berryville) and citizens (civic clubs) as to the

Department of Social Services' current reality. We have now set up quarterly meetings for regular updates.

- Have monthly phone calls with representatives of the Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA). We continue to update them on the current reality of Clarke County and regionally.
- I have met several times with Ali Farahani, the owner of Oakhurst Cabinetry on Cattleman's Lane.
 - I have made several introductions with local businesses and organizations and a couple of State organizations. I am continuing to work with him on needs/opportunities as they arise.
- Continue to utilize Christine Kriz from the Lord Fairfax Small Business Development Center.
 - L'Auberge was announced as the Client of Year.
- Regionally (Winchester, Frederick County, Clarke County), we had a meeting with Draper Aden regarding the EPA Community-Wide Brownfields Coalition Grant.
 - This is a new opportunity grant program Clarke County agreed to participate in. The program will allow us to work with any property owner who needs an environmental site assessment to sell their property. This is especially pertinent for any older farms that may have used any chemicals or pesticides. This is a no-cost program to the property owner or Clarke County. The program has a total value of \$600,000 with no match required.
- Regionally participating in the Startup Shenandoah Valley program. This program works with businesses to identify and address their risks while scaling up.
- Continue to meet regularly with Christy Dunkle for updates/catch-up.
- I continue to meet regularly with Clarke County's Planning and Zoning Directors for updates/catch-ups.
- Have monthly phone calls with representatives of the Virginia Economic Developers Partnership (VEDP). We continue to update them on the current reality of Clarke County and regionally.
 - VEDP is establishing a new division – Office of Education Economics. I have already made introductions with Clarke County High School officials to make them aware of the programs already in place here in Clarke County.
 - Had a conference call with VEDP's representative regarding international sales.
- Work/talk continues on both the Waterloo and the Double Tollgate areas. Clarke County is still awaiting word back from Frederick County regarding our water/sewer request.

Approved September 22, 2021

- Continue hosting weekly meetings with Frederick County and City of Winchester EDAs. Also part of the group is Christine Kriz with Lord Fairfax Small Business Development Center and Cynthia Snyder with the Top of Virginia Chamber.
- Regionally we are part of the Small Business Resiliency Team program as part of the GOVirginia – this is in partnership with Lord Fairfax Small Business Development Center. This program assists small businesses with marketing, financial guidance, the creation of an e-commerce website, and accounting software.

SmartAsset Piece

- Clarke County has been rated 8 out of 10 for 2020.
- Working directly with Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) Committees to develop personalized contact lists. This would give each of the committee members an opportunity to talk directly with businesses to find out how we can be of greater assistance. We have a questionnaire that is a work in progress to initiate conversation and help us understand how we can be of assistance.

Tourism

- Continue to write blogs for state, regional, and local use.
 - Hosted travel writer recently who visited eight businesses and farms around the County and was hosted by Betsy Pritchard, owner of Smithfield Farm Bed and Breakfast.
- Continue conversations with our local farmers/farm markets about needs and opportunities.
- Our partnership in the Shenandoah Valley Spirits Trail continues to show results. Social media and website stats are improving, and we are getting visitors from further away. They are sharing and posting positive comments on our wineries and breweries.
- Expanded blog opportunities listings with the Shenandoah Valley Tourism Partnership (SVTP) and the Shenandoah Valley Travel Association (SVTA).
- Continue to update the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) website regarding Clarke County and our assets/businesses.
- Included in the packet is the Clarke County Census.
 - Noted some of the businesses are not correct as they are in other localities.
 - Contains excellent information.

Betsy Pritchard

- Regarding the occupancy tax, she has not received any information or forms to collect the fees, which began as of July 1. Added that she had received no customer feedback or complaints concerning the tax.
- Asked if there would be any small business grants utilizing the American Rescue Plan funds. Felicia Hart pointed out the Town is looking at doing something like this. The County is looking to allocate those funds towards Broadband. Chris Boies added the governor put a lot of money into the Rebuild Virginia program, and the general assembly has to appropriate those funds at the August 2 special session.
- Asked if Felicia Hart was able to get in touch with the Farm Bureau about pamphlets to give to realtors about moving to a rural farming area? Felicia Hart has been in contact to share information and give them electronic versions.
- Requested Social Media blasts about Clarke County Fair August 8-14.

Reid Dodson

- Asked if Felicia Hart had heard of any of the local areas cancelling its fairs? Felicia Hart responded that she had not heard of anyone cancelling.
 - Christina Kraybill believes the steam show will show what kind of turn out to expect.
 - Felicia Hart added that people are ready to get out.

Christina Kraybill

- People are saying we have the best farmer's market and have had shoppers coming in from afar to visit us.
 - Reid Dodson noted he hears about a large number of people who have moved to Clarke.
- Hopes to have more farms come to the market as time goes on.
 - Reid Dodson hopes to increase the number of new vendors, layout, logistics to accommodate a larger market, adding they are averaging up to 30-35 vendors a week.
 - Felicia Hart asked if the farmer's market had gone after any grants?
 - Reid Dodson was not sure if anything happened. Adding that time is a factor.

Chairman John Milleson

- The Chamber of Commerce has its "Dog Days Mixer" at the Bank of Clarke County scheduled for August 10 at 5:30 pm. This has been happening for the past 25 years and is planning for 125-150 people.

6. Discussions

A. Discussion on Business Contacts for each Member

Highlights from Felicia Hart are as follows:

- Commented this is a continued discussion from past meetings.
- Noted in past discussions, it was decided that the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) would go after the bigger businesses, and the EDAC would go after the smaller businesses.
- The list of questions provided serves as an ice breaker to aid as feedback for Felicia Hart to learn how the County can support them.
- Would appreciate a list of businesses each member wants to take on to have a face-to-face conversation with. Whether each member meets to discuss quarterly or one – to – two times a year, wants each member to develop a relationship with business owners. Felicia Hart will put a sheet together to send out to everyone and ensure there is no duplication.

Reid Dodson

- Will the list of questions be sent to all local businesses? Felicia Hart clarified the list of questions is just for the EDAC members to use as an ice breaker to assist in developing a relationship. Wants to schedule a time to speak with each EDAC member and have a personalized discussion to learn what information was gathered from each business the members talk to. She does not expect the EDAC members to be an expert and to send people with in-depth questions to her for assistance.

Betsy Pritchard

- Asked if there was an update to Battletown Inn. Felicia Hart had none to provide.

Chairman John Milleson

- Believes this will be a good program and added that any time the EDAC goes on a business tour, he always learns something new, good or bad. Felicia Hart added that this serves as a reminder that the County has resources the businesses can use.

B. Double Tollgate Discussion

Chris Bates

- Stated he is noticing more activity with the Virginia Inland Port.
- Front Royal has started on logistics, and the Frederick County Board of Supervisors is actively discussing the facility.

- Believes the best place to put the Inland Port is Clarke County and stated as far as he can tell, all Clarke County has done is reach out to Frederick County about water and sewer. Has not heard any updates on what is going on with that.
- The Virginia Inland Port has a wide variety of developers to work with them. Surprised Clarke County has not gotten one of them heavily involved in helping develop that section.
- Prior to the State releasing the property, Mr. Bates had contacted three developers and discussed what could be done at that corner. For one reason or another, they decided to move on and pursue the other two places, one in Frederick and one in Warren first. Believes substantial development in that corner is completely in line with every Double Tollgate Study that the County has ever done. The timing to get something done there is now. Would like an update on the plans currently in place to get it done and what the EDAC can do to facilitate the development. Stated there are 20 years of missed opportunities at that corner because the County has chosen to do nothing.

Chris Boies provided the following information:

- Noted that numerous discussions on this topic have been held publically in open board sessions. The Board of Supervisors voted a number of months ago to request water and sewer from Frederick County in an open session. That discussion has taken a fair amount of time because Frederick County pushed to their Planning and Zoning Department and said if we are going to do this, it must go through a Comprehensive Plan review, then the Planning Commission and then the Board of Supervisors. Clarke County is at their mercy because they had to give us permission. When the initial discussion was with Frederick Water, they stated they would like to serve us, but the Frederick Board of Supervisors must say it is okay. The request went through the Comprehensive Plan Committee and the Planning Commission and got approval. The request was supposed to go to the Board of Supervisors in July but got pushed back to the August 11 agenda.
- Once the first step is met, then Clarke County has to negotiate with Frederick Water on the actual agreement. The initial discussion has been that they will build a force main to serve the eastern side of Frederick all the way to the Perkins Mill Plant.
- The next stage, if approved at the August 11th meeting, is to get with Frederick Water and discuss the cost. After that, we will have to do a Cost-Benefit Analysis to determine if development will be enough to pay for the amount over X number of years. The Planning Commission will have to be involved in the discussions because it's tight at that intersection.
- As far as a Port Authority, he is not sure of how much political support there will be for a large transportation distribution type facility in that location. In discussions he has had with different people, there does not seem to be a large amount of support for something of that nature.

Approved September 22, 2021

- Chris Bates asked whom Chris Boies had had objection from as he feels it is an ideal spot. Chris Boies responded based on conversations he has had from various citizens.
- Chris Bates asked if Frederick County had declared publically if they are willing to add a specific area to their water and sewer service area because, at one time, they wanted to trade some zoning on the 26-acres across the street? Chris Boies responded the county had submitted the current commercial properties at the intersection and the Camp 7 property and Chris Boies has not heard anything about a discussion on trading zoning on the 26-acres mentioned by Mr. Bates.

Chairman John Milleson

- What is the Camp 7 property?
 - Chris Boies indicated it's complicated, but there are 65 acres that were given from the Department of Corrections to the Virginia Inland Port. The County has been working with the Virginia Inland Port on marketing that property if water and sewer come to fruition. Added there is a small, roughly 13-acre strip recently of land at the corner that was recently sold. Camp 7 is the piece that goes behind that at the 340/522 intersection. A large amount of property was given to the Department of Military Affairs for the Virginia National Guard to create a regional training facility. You could argue if that is a positive Economic Development project to bring people to the area, but the property will always be tax-exempt because the State owns it. VDOT has a small piece of land behind its existing maintenance shed, and there is a remaining piece owned by the Department of Corrections that has the old prison building on it. The County has been in discussion with them as to how to potentially acquire that, but that discussion is very early on. A lot of these discussions have been held up by the question of whether water and sewer are available there or not. Admittedly it has been a frustratingly slow process, but it has been in the works for over a year at this point.

Lee Sheaffer

- Questioned what highway improvements are being made at that intersection.
 - Chris Boies responded that it is another complication because he believes it is rated a C- intersection because of grading and sight distance. VDOT has not been in the conversation yet, but they will have to have some discussion on what has to happen.
 - Chris Bates added that the long-term plan is for the whole highway to become six lanes wide from Warren County all the way into Frederick County.
- Asked how far into Lake Frederick Clarke County goes?

Approved September 22, 2021

- Chris Boies stated the entrance of Lake Frederick is the county line. All development is still in Frederick County.
- Felicia Hart added the "lease" sign is in Clarke County.
- Chris Bates informed the group that the shopping center plans are to the left of the entrance, and multi-story condos are slated for the right.

Christina Kraybill

- Asked how many properties border this tract of land and what types of property are they?
 - Chris Boies explained they are mainly a mix of agricultural, business, residential, with a church and a solar farm. Adding that 7/11 requested water and sewer because they currently have a private drain field with issues; they want to hook up as soon as possible.
 - Previously had a package plant, which is still permitted but not in use.
 - Chris Bates clarified the plant is permitted but at out-of-date standards, and neighbors would not be happy if it started back up.
 - Chris Bates stated that there were previous discussions to convert that building to Social Services and asked if that was under consideration again. Chris Boies's understanding was that it fell apart before it started.
 - Felicia Hart asked if that was regional? Chris Bates said it was originally discussed as being made the home of the drug court. Previous discussions also considered that a good base for the methadone program.
 - Chris Bates added that kids have to leave foster care at 18. Not ready to be in the world, previously spoke about using a part of that facility for that. Believes there is money to support that. Asked if the EDAC or County could move forward on this project because it has been talked about forever with nothing being done.
 - The intersection needs to be developed, and if the right businesses are put there, the County could be protected from tax advances. Asked staff to keep this group up to date on what is going on.

7. *Next Meeting*

September 15, 2021

Chairman John Milleson agreed to Chris Boies' request to update the Committee on new development regarding Broadband.

Approved September 22, 2021

- Board of Supervisors approved a resolution to enter into a study period with All Points Broadband (APB) to look at a potential grant opportunity for universal fiber to the home using a partnership of APB and Rappahannock Electric (RE).
- The first of a three-step process is to allow APB to come in and determine the underserved areas of the County; the grant funding is only available for underserved areas. APB will conduct a survey of Clarke County over the next 30 days to determine the underserved areas. The current mapping is not very accurate. APB will work with RE to get universal Broadband to the County.
- APB and RE will figure out a plan and present to the County the cost of the project, how much grant funding is available, how much they will cover and the remaining budget the County would need to cover.
- The County will know that number by the end of August because the grant deadline is the middle of September. The Board of Supervisors, at the end of August, will decide if they want to continue with the project or not.
- The County has \$2-2.5m of the Federal American Relief Funds set aside for that type of use. We don't know the actual number yet. If the County is given a price that it feels it can cover, the County will then submit a VATI application and find out in December if our project was funded. Construction could then begin and be expected to take two-three years but would be bringing fiber to the home in the unserved areas.
- This does not help the areas that already have an option. Believes this will be a regional project that includes Frederick County, Warren County, maybe Shenandoah County, Rockingham County, Augusta County, and Page County. It's a pretty attractive project for the state to fund because it will take a large chunk of the state and serve them.
- APB has done a similar project in the Northern neck, which included six counties. The state-level representative has said APB has been great to work with.

Lee Scheaffer

- Asked, and Chris Boies confirmed we do not know how much this project will cost yet. Chris Boies added that if it costs too much, we can back out with no ramifications.
- If Clarke County agrees to the project cost, but another of the counties mentioned says no, does that affect Clarke?
 - Chris Boies said Clarke County would still move forward, clarifying APB is doing this type of agreement with individual counties; it looks better from a grant perspective if a whole region was part of it.

Christina Kraybill

- This is an essential utility needed.

Reid Dodson

- Probed if a study was done recently on whether the County was underserved?
 - Chris Boies clarified RE was going to get into the internet service provider business but got spooked by a lawsuit. The County has done a broadband study to show where to put towers for fixed wireless, which we have used to encourage vendors. The study was done in 2018-2019.
- Questioned if Starlink comes into the thought process?
 - Chris Boies said it is part of the conversation and does not hurt us as providing unserved because even people currently hooked up to satellite, the state says they are not really served. The Federal definition is 25 down/3 up.
- Asked if RE's involvement was with their existing utilities.
 - Chris Boies agreed, adding RE would provide the "middle mile" fiber using their trunk lines with APB branching off from there.

Chris Bates

- Questioned what happened to Comcast?
 - Chris Boies stated they worked on a project in White Post and honestly spoke about how terrible they had been to work with, adding they had not been responsive and have been told the area is too spread out and expensive to work on.
 - Felicia Hart added that small communities are getting the run around when told it would cost X amount of dollars, the community agrees, and Comcast never gets back to them.

Betsy Pritchard

- Queried what would happen if there were multiple State and County lines that border a property? Using her property as an example because she cannot be the only one, stating the lines to her property are owned by Potomac Edison and come in from Jefferson County, West Virginia, would she be included? Adding RE rents the lines from Potomac Edison, but they do not maintain them.
 - Chris Boies believes because her service provider is RE, her property should be included in this. The County has stressed universal coverage, as close as it can be, and is trying very hard not to leave anybody out.

8. Adjournment

Being no further business, at 1:59 pm, Chairman John Milleson adjourned the meeting.

Minutes recorded and transcribed by Tiffany R. Kemp, Clerk