

Berryville Clarke County Joint Committee on Economic Development & Tourism
September 24, 2021 Regular Meeting 10:00 am

At a regular meeting of the Berryville Clarke County Joint Committee on Economic Development & Tourism held on Friday, September 24, 2021, at 10:00 am in the Main Meeting Room, Berryville Clarke County Government Center, 101 Chalmers Court, 2nd Floor, Berryville, Virginia.

Members Present: Jay Arnold, Doug Lawrence, David Weiss

Members Absent: Kara Rodriquez

Staff Present: Chris Boies, Christy Dunkle, Felicia Hart, Cathy Kuehner, Brianna Taylor

Others Present: Mary Ivie

Press Present: None

1. Call to Order

At 10:05 am, Jay Arnold called the meeting to order.

2. Adoption of Agenda

David Weiss, seconded by Doug Lawrence, moved to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried by the following vote:

Jay Arnold	-	Aye
Doug Lawrence	-	Aye
Kara Rodriquez	-	Absent
David Weiss	-	Aye

3. Approval of Minutes: July 16, 2021, Regular Meeting

David Weiss, seconded by Doug Lawrence, moved to approve the July 16, 2021 minutes as presented. The motion carried by the following vote:

Jay Arnold	-	Aye
Doug Lawrence	-	Aye
Kara Rodriquez	-	Absent
David Weiss	-	Aye

4. 2021-2022 Goals & Priorities

Jay Arnold and David Weiss questioned if there was a method of who is doing what, or is it all Felicia Hart? Felicia Hart explained that this is what I would like to start working on; if I need assistance, I will go to Chris Boies and also reach out to see where we can get additional resources.

Jay Arnold stated that many are in the works and explained that things could change if need be. Felicia Hart explained that things change all of the time.

Doug Lawrence stated that it has been nice to have Felicia Hart report quarterly to the Board of Supervisors; could you start doing that for Town Council as well? Felicia Hart explained that that would not be an issue; it is an excellent way to help the citizens and business owners know what is happening. Jay Arnold conveyed that this packet has been sent to the Town Council each time so the Council can read through it and see what is happening.

Doug Lawrence, seconded by David Weiss, moved to approve the 2021-2022 Goals & Priorities as presented. The motion carried by the following vote:

Jay Arnold	-	Aye
Doug Lawrence	-	Aye
Kara Rodriguez	-	Absent
David Weiss	-	Aye

5. Economic Development & Tourism Update

Felicia Hart gave the following report:

Goals

- 1) Convene group of hospitality owners/operators
 - I keep in touch with them as needed to understand what their reality is.
- 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.
 - o Talked with a company recently about this – but they come into a locality and look for local financiers and then build.
 - o In talking with other localities, a majority of the hotels are still having difficulty hiring front line staff – for many, it’s almost a self-serve mentality when you check in.
 - o Locally, the occupancy rate is dropping right now because of cancellations.
 - o Some local hotels are competing against the Airbnb’s 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.
 - We have brought in Virginia Career Works, the Virginia Employment Commission and other local and state agencies as needed for networking.
 - Working regionally regarding the Worlds of Work!, Workforce Initiative and programs Clarke County schools are currently involved in.
 - We continue to work with the schools in making introductions for local businesses and the students.
 - See attachment in the packet from Christine Kriz – Lord Fairfax Small Business Development Center.
- 4) Engage in a dialogue with property owners of vacant buildings and the developable land to spur economic activity.
 - Ongoing.
 - I continue to review weekly.
 - Merke property has sold – LVG will be building a warehouse to double the size of their existing space on Station Road.
 - Christy Dunkle explained that they are looking at having three (3) warehouse buildings. Met with them a few weeks ago, anticipate them to submit to Berryville Area Development Authority (BADA) in October; the issue is that they have not met with DEQ yet; they have all of the contacts now. She added that the BADA does not do things conditionally so need everything in place. Further added that they do have a good site plan. Doug Lawrence asked, and Christy Dunkle responded that there is a buffer between commercial property and residential.
 - There was discussion on the lights throughout the Business Park.
 - Spoke with several property owners recently regarding the Brownfield grant.
 - Initially, this was going to be a regional grant with Winchester, Frederick, and Clarke, looking for older properties that may have had some chemical spills, former gas stations, etc. However, the State has changed the rules; it is no longer a coalition grant, now each County has to apply individually. Therefore, Clarke County and Frederick County are dropping out.
 - It was a good opportunity for me; I got to talk to twelve (12) properties owners directly and discuss their needs, and I will look for ways to assist in the future.
 - In talks with some to utilize their front window space for marketing/promotion of Main Street in partnership with Berryville Main Street and the Barns.
 - A new restaurant is coming to Berryville, called Homespun; I have had good conversations with the owner, who is a partner in Smithfield Farm. Hope to be open by the end of October.
 - Working with Battletown Pharmacy, they are closing, so helping them with that process.
- 5) Evaluate what is needed to make the Berryville Main Street (BMS) program viable and successful – report back to Joint Committee on recommendation.

- They have a new president – Michelle Marino with Edward Jones. Very positive meetings.
- Have developed regular joint meetings with Berryville Main Street (BMS), The Barns and Clarke County. Many new programs are in the works including quarterly Meet/Greet meetings for new citizens; regular meetings with local businesses; BMS will be expanding their marketing to include businesses in the County; Business Spotlight enhancement program; welcome bags for new citizens; and we’re working directly with the Ruritans to develop relationships with those organizations/ groups renting the fairgrounds; rack and coupon cards; and Dinner and a Show program at the Barns; a cohesive holiday program with several events tied together; enhanced social media blitz with all three parties; Clarke County will also be working directly with these two outlets to better address quick turnaround needs from VTC and other news outlets wanting information directly on local businesses.
 - Working on brochures for people who have an event at the Ruritan fairground; to give them resources and contact information. For example, this weekend is the Shenandoah Valley Fiber Festival; I have spoken with the person putting that event on and found out that she could have used some help from local businesses, but at the time, she did not know how to make the connection. This piece will help in that aspect; people will be able to contact me, and I will coordinate with Berryville Main Street, Barns of Rose Hill, etc.
- 6) Formalize website and social media strategies for economic development.
 - Work in progress regarding updates.
 - 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 partnership for teaching students.
 - Made BRAR aware of new Waterloo water/sewer program and the potential at Double Tollgate.
 - Continue meeting one-on-one with realtors to learn of speedbumps /issues/ concerns.
 - Continue to offer my assistance for those dealing with properties in Clarke County.
- 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 – update on the VATI grant with a partnership with All Points Broadband.

- Have been pushing the Return to Earn grant program that reimburses companies (up to \$500) for sign-on bonuses. This is a program through the Governor’s office.
- Will be producing a “Welcome” piece for Ruritans to hand out to officials who are renting/leasing fairground space. Handout will provide my contact information and give ideas on ways that we can assist them in getting the word out about their upcoming programs and we can make introductions with local companies they would need services/products from.
- We are still working with the Virginia Health Department; we are coordinating with local businesses to schedule on-site vaccines.
 - o 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 down time while at the same time vaccinating more people.
- I continue to have regular update meetings with representatives from our local Department of Social Services to make them aware of several local programs and organizations for partnership opportunities.
- I continue to make introductions for companies like Casey Trees who has an immediate hiring need. Introductions include Clarke County High School, Top of Virginia Chamber, Christine Kriz at Lord Fairfax Small Business Development Center (LFSBDC), United Way, and numerous local and state agencies.
- Have monthly phone calls with representatives of the Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA). We continue to update them on current realty of Clarke County and regionally.
- Continue to utilize Christine Kriz from the Lord Fairfax Small Business Development Center.
- Regionally (Winchester, Frederick County, Clarke County) we had a meeting with Draper Aden regarding the EPA Community-Wide Brownfields Coalition Grant.
 - o 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 is in need of an environmental site assessment in order to sell their property. This is especially pertinent for any older farms who 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.
- I continue to regularly post upcoming events (training, meetings, etc.) on the Economic Facebook page. I also post about opportunities such as free visits from the Health Department
- Work/talk continues on both the Waterloo and the Double Tollgate areas. Clarke County is still awaiting final vote from Frederick County regarding our water/sewer request.

- 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, creation of an e-commerce website and accounting software.

Tourism

- Continue to write blogs for state, regional and local use – making it seasonal right now.
- Continue conversations with our local farmers/farm markets about needs and opportunities.
- I continue to post regular updates on the Tourism Facebook page highlighting upcoming events, places to visit and things to do.
- Expanded blog opportunities listings with the Shenandoah Valley Tourism Partnership (SVTP) and the Shenandoah Valley Travel Association (SVTA).
- Evaluating additional signage at the fairgrounds to showcase more of what Clarke County/ Berryville have to offer.
 - Have a meeting scheduled for next week with iHeart Radio to discuss potential geofencing/tracking so we can tell when people from out of town are coming into the area and where they are going. When they come into the area, they will receive a notice on their phone welcoming them to Clarke County and have links and information.
 - Look at producing QR Codes of the local map to post throughout the fairgrounds to inform people of the restaurants, lodging, etc.
- Continue to update the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) website regarding Clarke County and our assets/businesses.
- Have talked with Berryville Main Street and the Barns about utilizing some of our blogs.
- We have also been in discussion with them about a potential mural campaign around town.
- Discussion is also happening about a potential LOVEWorks program.

Doug Lawrence questioned if staff could look into how other localities do the sales tax for events when a vendor lives out of town; the products are sold in the County, but the vendor reports them based on where their business is. Chris Boies stated that he believes that legally it is the point of sale, so it is supposed to stay within the County it is sold.

Jay Arnold stated that the Town is looking at the taxing of food trucks; if they get a Town and County license, the tax should be collected appropriately; if they are in the Town, the tax should go to the Town, and if they are in the County than tax should go to the County. Jay Arnold asked if the County gets meals tax for the food vendors at the fairgrounds? Chris Boies stated that the County meals tax does apply to the vendors at the Ruritans;

the County ordinance exempts non-profits, so the Ruritan themselves are exempt. The County ordinance also includes food trucks.

Felicia Hart thanked Jay Arnold for all of his help regarding Berryville Main Street and the Barns of Rose Hill. Jay Arnold stated that he is glad to see the coordination between her, Berryville Main Street, and the Barns of Rose Hill. David Weiss expressed that utilizing all of those groups helps everyone out. Felicia Hart commented that it broadens the audience.

Doug Lawrence asked if staff could make a brochure for antiques included in the welcome package. Felicia Hart stated that Berryville Main Street, Barns of Rose Hill, and herself are working on the different rack cards, planning on doing quarterly meet and greets at the Barns for Town and County businesses and new residents; will help citizens get more information. She added that this would be a learning curve, so they will continue to look for opportunities to expand and add items throughout over time. Doug Lawrence asked, and Felicia Hart responded that to identify new residents, she will use the land deeds and work with Christy Dunkle to get information and get them a welcome bag.

6. Next Meeting

Staff proposed to change the regularly scheduled Friday, November 19, meeting to Thursday, November 18, at 10:00 am

By consensus, the committee agreed to move the regularly scheduled meeting to Thursday, November 18, 2021, at 10:00 am.

Christy Dunkle stated that she had met with the new owner of the Battletown Inn. The owners own Lockes Store; they are looking to finish Battletown Inn with nine (9) rooms and get the restaurant up and running, similar to what it was years ago. Working on getting it all done by the spring.

Adjournment

David Weiss, seconded by Doug Lawrence, moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried by the following vote:

Jay Arnold	-	Aye
Doug Lawrence	-	Aye
Kara Rodriguez	-	Absent
David Weiss	-	Aye

At 10:32 pm, Jay Arnold adjourned the meeting.

Minutes Recorded & Transcribed by Brianna R. Taylor