

**MINUTES
ESSEX COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
June 1, 2023**

A meeting of the Economic Development Authority of Essex County was held on the 1st day of June 2023, with the following present:

Present:

Lisa Andrews, Chairman
William A. Croxton, Vice-Chairman
Tim Smith – Treasurer
Ronnie Sidney
David Holt
Jamie Segar - Remote

Also present:

Stephen Versen, Business Manager, Regional Talent Solutions & Business Outreach
Beth Sharpe – Tappahannock Main Street
Chuck Huntley – IT Director for Essex County
Tommy Blackwell – Commissioner of Revenue
Ronnie Gill - Remote

Absent:

James Acors

RE: CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Andrews called the meeting to order. A quorum was met.

Guest Speaker – Stephen Versen, Business Manager, Regional Talent Solutions & Business Outreach, Virginia Economic Development Partnership

Mr. Stephen Versen gave a presentation about the Virginia Economic Development Partnership. He is VEDP's liaison to the Essex County EDA. He stated that he had the opportunity to work with Essex before on the Blueridge Lumber Project. VEDP would like to do more around the County with Agriculture and Forestry. We met last week but he wanted to introduce himself and let everyone know what Virginia Economic Development Partnership has to offer and ways they can work together. But mostly, he wanted to hear from everyone as to what is important to the EDA and how VEDP can help.

Mr. Versen stated that this presentation was taken from a much larger presentation, the VEDP Orientation. He stated that VEDP has a quarterly orientation program that has a more comprehensive review of all their programs.

Chairman Andrews stated that she circulated the next training date of June 22, 2023 to all of the board members: 9:00 a.m. for the 101 Orientation and 10:00 a.m. for the more in depth one. She recommends both.

David Holt noted that manufacturing industries are less likely to locate in Essex due to lack of access to railways and interstate highways. Data centers seemed to be a better possibility. Is there any discussion about what types of projects make sense for a rural environment like ours that don't necessarily have to rely on the rails or the superhighways?

Mr. Versen stated that he can get a good answer on data centers. They have a group called Business Investors and a portion of that group is dedicated just to data centers. The electric grid is a big factor in data center location.

Ronnie Gill stated that we are moving full steam ahead on the broadband now that we have received the VATI Grant. We have so many things that are not even known in the agricultural industry such as Montague Farms and Hundley Seed, as well as O'Mally and Tidewater Lumber within the forestry industry.

Old Business

Beth Sharpe - Tappahannock Main Street

- The first third Thursday is June 15, 2023. During the evening they will reveal the new rebranding where they will rebrand from Tappahannock Main Street to Historic Downtown Tappahannock. This is a soft launch of the new website and the mobile app. The hard launch will probably be at the end of July.
- They are also working with a property owner downtown to possibly create a permanent food truck establishment that they are currently calling, "The Corner StrEATry". It would be a permanent food truck location that would allow 2-4 trucks per day in two different shifts with possible indoor and outdoor seating. The short-term goal is to cover expenses; the long term goal would have it be a revenue stream.
- They have also been talking with the Parkers and partnering with them to open the beach up publicly during the summer. The Parkers are interested in the possibility but do not have the capacity to manage it. So, they are looking at possibly having people pay for parking or something to the effect to generate some revenue. They are trying to pitch to them that Main Street manage it for this summer as a trial run.
 - o Bill Croxton stated that sometime in the next year we should hear back for the potential acquisition of that property.
- The Daw theatre has launched phase 1 for the legacy donors. In just one week that are just short of \$100,000 in pledges.

RE: APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Lisa Andrews asked for the approval of the minutes from the April 27, 2023 meeting as modified. David Holt made the motion to approve. Vice Chairman Bill Croxton seconded. Ayes: 6 Nays: 0

RE: TREASURER'S REPORT

Tim Smith stated that the checking account balance was \$16,057.63. There were no checks written for the month. The 12-month CD was \$15,170.81. The \$170.81 was the interest earned is more than what we earned in the previous years. The total fund balance is \$31,228.44. Vice Chairman Croxton made the motion to approve the report. David Holt seconded.

Ayes: 6 Nays: 0

New Business

Chairman Andrews stated that they had been doing some strategic planning and wanted to get some website updates to incorporate our vision and mission statements that were approved last month. The idea is to create a separate website once we have more data and a strategic plan in place so that prospective businesses could get resources from our website. Chuck Huntley was asked about developing our own website using the existing URL or do we need to develop it ourselves or hire someone to do it.

Chuck Huntley stated it depends on what you want to do. Currently on the County website there are a couple of things related to business and EDA. There is this Economic Development Authority page which is linked from the page showing Essex County's boards, commissions, and authorities; lists their members, and information about each group. They also have a business section here that currently has limited content. The county does own an EDA specific domain which is essexeda.org. It is also possible to create an entirely stand-alone website. Essex Co. IT does not have enough resources to do it so the EDA would need to hire someone to do that. If the EDA wanted to put information as a subpage on the county website that would be a lot easier for him to do.

Chairman Andrews stated they would probably have more information on their stand-alone site once they finish the strategic planning process. The fact that the EDA can use the county website to share some information is nice. Listing businesses in the county, demographics, utilities, and government-related information would be useful.

Mr. Huntley stated that another option is for the EDA to create a subsite of the existing site. There would be a cost involved. The editing tools to manage a site would be the same and would have the same security as the county website.

Chairman Andrews stated that she likes the idea of a subsite because most people would do a search for Essex County EDA and would be able to find it.

Mr. Huntley stated it would also make the management of it much easier because you would not have to have another person to keep the site current. Mr. Holt has editing rights to the EDA page anyway.

Mr. Holt stated that the problem with another site is sometimes when you leave a site you are going into the great unknown. A subsite within Essex County creates a feeling of credibility.

Chairman Andrews asked if a couple of EDA members would like to work on this subsite to get information for it?

Mr. Holt, Vice Chairman Croxton, and Mr .Smith volunteered.

Liaison Reports

- Bill Croxton – Chamber of Commerce – Is getting back off the ground. The next meet and greet will be at 528 Restaurant on June 27, 2023. It will be \$15 a head and 5-7pm cash bar. He would encourage anyone to attend. He will send out the invitation.
- Ronnie Gill – Board of Supervisors – Bill Croxton asked if it had been brought up about a new revenue stream based on Air B&B and that sort of thing? Commissioner Blackwell stated that anything over 2% has to be used for tourism. The Board of Supervisors will vote on June 8th so that it will be in effect July 1. We projected a \$50,000 per year initial revenue base on 6%. At least 3% has to go to tourism. The Board of Supervisors has discussed giving that to the EDA to use to promote tourism.
- Bill Croxton – Town Council – He made the presentation about the mural at Perdue. They were very pleased and asked what the next steps were. Perdue is interested but will do it with a 3M Product that that will wrap around. On one side from left to right will be history of steamboats, the middle will be the flag, the right will be a farm scene.
- Tim Smith – Zoning – Stated that the Planning Commission has been working on the comprehensive plan. They have a meeting coming up with the PUD.
- Ronnie Sidney – Tappahannock Main Street – stated that they have rescheduled the Soul on the River for June 10, 2023 3PM.

Vice Chairman Croxton stated he delivered a personal check to Cory Beazly's son Warner. The high school is trying to raise money for an endzone camera. This will be a great thing for those players. He would like to see the EDA give a couple hundred dollars for this.

Chairman Andrews stated that she would be willing to make a personal contribution but do not see that as Economic Development. She feels that the funds should be used to support Economic Development.

Ronnie Sidney stated that he does feel like football in general is an economic driver. It is also a way you can watch the games from home. They are also working on redoing the bleachers and bathrooms to make it so they can host regional games as well which would bring more people into Tappahannock. It is another addition to get the football games out there. That is one of the most attractive things in the fall.

A call for a vote was made and seconded: Ayes: 4 Nays: 0 Absent: 1 Abstain: 1

New Business

Chairman Andrews spoke about a possible intern partnership with RCC. RCC is pursuing internships for their students. Chairman Andrews noted that we may be able to support workforce development for economically disadvantaged persons. This could probably help fund a matching program with the local employers. Chairman Andrews noted that she knew of a potential funding source.

Mr. Holt noted that a smaller employer might be more willing to hire an intern with a matching gift incentive.

Mr. Smith stated that it would be a worth exploring and pursuing the conversation.

Chairman Andrews stated she will speak to the funding source and then with RCC. She asked who would like to be a part of this if we move forward?

Mr. Holt volunteered to participate.

Chairman Andrews stated that the meeting will reconvene in closed session.

RE: NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be Thursday, July 6, 2023 at 9:00AM.

RE: ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made to adjourn and seconded. All Ayes

Secretary, David Holt