

The Economic Alliance
Board Meeting
October 27, 2021
Zoom Meeting

Attending Board Members:

Chris Branch, Chairman, Okanogan County Commissioners
Lael Duncan, 1st Vice Chairman, No County #1, OCCAC
Kurt Danison, 2nd Vice Chairman, City Rep. #1, City Planner
Maria Lassila, Treasurer, Omak Mirage Theater
Anna Dalbey, Secretary, South County #2, Keller Williams Realty
Stacy Luckensmeyer, At-Large Representative #2, WVC
Kristi O'Neill, Central County #1 Rep., WorkSource
William Marchand, Colville Planning, CCT Rep

George Brady, Pt Chair, So Co Rep #2, Cascade Bio. Sply
Don Linnertz, MV #2, Twisp Works & Winthrop Chamber
Aaron Kester, No. County #2, Tonasket Natural Food Co-op
Alan Fisher, Central County #2 Rep., CEO Mid Valley Hosp
Michael Porter, At Large #1, Omak School Superintendent
Rachelle Haven, Nespelem/Grand Coulee #2, GCD Chamber
Jon Culp, Mayor of Okanogan, City Representative #2

Absent Board Members:

Amanda Jackson-Mott, Arts Comm. Rep., MAA
Lanie Johns, Ok Co. Rep., Clerk of the Brd of Co. Commissioners
Vacant, Methow Valley #1

Ted Piccolo, Nespelem/Coulee Dam Rep. #1, NNDF
Mayra Pamatz, Community Finance Rep., Umpqua Bank
Lionel Marcell, At-Large #3, Red Rooster Restaurant

Guests/Staff:

Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Ex. Director, Econ. Alliance
Carolyn Davis, Admin Assistant, Econ. Alliance
Jennifer Howard, Econ Dev Specialist, Econ. Alliance
Erika Borg, Washington Assoc. of Businesses
Meg Barton, Mid Valley Hospital
Adam Amundson, Assoc. Planner, CCT

Rachel McClure, Senator Newhouse Office
Brian Anderson, WSU Extension
Julia Havens, Dept. of Commerce
Ann Davidson, Pateros
Beth Strohane, Small Business Owner

Chairman Chris Branch called the meeting to order. Addition or Changes to Agenda: No changes.

Consent Agenda: Anna Dalby made a motion to approve consent agenda (minutes 9/22/2021). Maria Lassila seconded. Motion passed.

Guest Speaker

Erika Borg and Brian Anderson spoke about the Washington Rural Online-Remote Work Certification. People can now attend a short course to obtain a Remote Work Certificate. Washington State University Extension has partnered with Utah State University Extension to offer the Remote Worker Certificate to Washington residents to prepare them to take advantage of remote work opportunities. Also sponsored by Washington Association of Businesses, Microsoft and GWATA. Remote work opportunities have increased 173% since 2005. They launched this program in Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties. This fall they want to offer it in Okanogan, Grant, and Adams Counties. The next classes will start November 4 and run through December 4. In 2022 there will be a January 4 through January 28 class. The cost is \$299, but they are looking for scholarship sponsors. Remote work (also known as telework) is a work arrangement that does not require employees to work from a central location, allowing a worker to complete their assigned duties from home or other self-selected locations, which means that there are employment opportunities regardless of where you live. The nine modules of this 4-week course will help build skills that make an effective remote worker, whether as an employee, entrepreneur, or freelancer.

Participation in the course requires:

1. A reliable broadband internet connection
Your download speed should be at least 10 Mbps (If your speed is below that you will need to find a publicly available network.)
Computer, web camera, and microphone.
2. Basic computer proficiency, including the ability to: Send an email and download or upload files from your desktop

Do basic tasks in a word processing and spreadsheet program (Microsoft Word, Google Docs).

Brian Anderson can be reached at brian.anderson2@wsu.edu for additional information.

Anna Dalby asked if there was assistance to help with Zoom or other things related to starting this class. Don Linnertz stated that 40% of the jobs in the Methow Valley are service jobs and this wouldn't benefit them. Lael Duncan stated that we need to look at what we are paying people. Chris Branch stated that we are changing the way we do business and need to look at the salary structure and make workers accountable for work at home. George Brandy asked if they have any figures from Utah on the success rate of students. They have had over 1000 participants in the classes and 40% of those have gotten jobs.

Reports

Executive Director Report – (see attachment #1) Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she recently attended the IEDC Conference in Nashville. The conference fee and lodging were paid for by the NCW Economic Development District. She was able to attend several sessions and then heard about the other sessions from Alyce Brown and Brooklyn Holton with the EDD. The highlight of the trip was the Washington Delegate reception. She was able to meet with Department of Commerce's Director Brown and invited her to attend our open house, which she accepted. The open house is scheduled for November 1. Okanogan's Mayor Culp will also say a few words along with current Chairman Chris Branch. We will have cupcakes, water, coffee and be able to look through the new facility. Ribbon cutting will take place at 10:15.

The nomination committee is now taking nominations for vacant positions and/or terms that expire in 2021. We also will need to have nominations for officers.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach discussed holding a Board Retreat in February. We haven't had one in a couple of years, and we need to review the Economic Development Strategy and make sure it is still relevant or if things have changed. We need to resend the document to the Board for review. It was suggested that we have a retreat the 23rd of February. This will be for 3 or 4 hours.

Financials – Current Balance Sheet and Income Statements were distributed to the Board prior to today's meeting. We have submitted the 3rd Qt. billing to the SBDC but haven't received payment yet. Also plan to submit invoices for the two USDA grants. We are still working on getting reserve funds build up to cover a full year of expenses.

Business Education -- Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported we are working in partnership with the NCW Tech Alliance and can use our Tech Center to do classes. She also asked what type of training opportunities are job seekers and employers looking for?

Infrastructure Committee -- Roni Holder-Diefenbach stated that the committee will be meeting in January and will review and make changes to the application, then in May or June will have a new prioritization process to present to the Board for approval.

Abandoned/Vacant Building Sub-Committee – The committee will meet again tomorrow via Zoom and will again discuss what can be done about some of the vacant/abandoned buildings/houses in our county. Maria Lassila asked to be sent an invite.

Motions

Roni Holder-Diefenbach spoke about the Small Business Outreach Contracts with the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries. She applied for funds to provide outreach and education-oriented services to help small businesses and non-profits understand their L&I related requirements. This grant request is for

\$65,000 if awarded. She asked the Board for approval, if awarded. Maria Lassila made a motion to approve the grant if awarded. Don Linnertz seconded. Motion passed.

Vacant Board Position – Julie Tate-Libby was suggested to fill the Methow Valley #1 position. Maria Lassila made a motion to seat Julie Tate-Libby to the vacant Methow Valley #1 position for the remainder of the term. Anna Dalby seconded. Motion passed.

Discussion

Broadband Grant: The Broadband Committee has several grants available to further the work of having broadband in most of Okanogan County. The PUD is submitting the grant requests, as they will be the owners of the infrastructure. “Fiber to the Premises” will be very expensive in some of our rural areas. There is also a problem in Okanogan County of the terrain, geography, and costs associated with getting fiber to the premise. The PUD will try to work with the area that get the most hookups. It was asked if StarLink was a viable option.

Washington State Broadband Office has a Digital Navigator Program and funds need to be spent by June 2022. These would be \$500k grants and would hire digital navigators. The NCW Tech Alliance is applying, and the Economic Alliance might be able to contract with them and get some dollars from this grant.

Beth Strohane, a small business owner who recently moved to the area, stated that she has space available that a business could use if they want to access Broadband.

SBRTC Grant: Jennifer Howard reported that we now have most of the “pieces” for the Small Business Resource and Tech Center. There are five workshops that are ready to go and are she is getting a few people interested. She suggested that everyone “Like” the Economic Alliance on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. to keep up to date and to please interact with these posts.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach has also been looking into having an AmeriCorp volunteer work with Jennifer Howard. He would be Spanish speaking.

Loomis Fire Station: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the Loomis Fire Station will be meeting with the consultant on November 8th. He will get a tour of the area and it is hoped to have this contract wrapped up by March, 2022.

Brewster/Oroville Downtown Strategies: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she attended the Oroville Downtown Strategies session yesterday and will be attending the one for Brewster today.

December Meeting: Roni Holder-Diefenbach asked if the Board preferred to meet in person in December or have another Zoom meeting or even a hybrid meeting (part in person and part via Zoom) Lael Duncan made a motion to do December’s meeting via Zoom. Maria Lassila seconded. Motion passed.

Contract Update: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that we have new reporting software for our Department of Commerce ADO contract. It is hoped that the new software will give the legislature a better picture of the work done by ADOs.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for December 1, 2021, via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Davis, Administrative Assistant



ECONOMIC ALLIANCE
Executive Directors Report

October 2021

Here are a few of the highlights from the month of October:

- ***New office space***-This month our new signs went up, we got our computers set up and many of the items need for the SBRTC. We also replaced the vinyl in the main bathroom. We should have all of our items in and up by the end of November.
- ***Open House***-Our Open house is schedule for November 1st at 10 am. Lisa Brown the director of the WA State Dept. of Commerce will be in attendance and will say a few words. We will have cupcakes, coffee and water to serve to keep it simple due to covid and will practice the covid protocols.
- ***USDA Grants***-
 - *Small Business Resource and Tech Center*-We will be completing the next billing for reimbursement at the end of October.
 - *Broadband Study*-We will be completing our next billing for reimbursement at the end of October.
 - *Loomis Fire Station*-We will have our first meeting with the Loomis Fire District on November 9th and tour the community before the meeting.
- ***Broadband***- We will have our next BAT meeting on Monday October 28th from 2-3. We will be discussing including the Methow Valley BAT, Grants that we applied for in the last month.
- ***Grant Applications***: Applied to L&I RFP in the amount of \$65kto help market their programs and services to our local businesses. We also are apart of a WA State Broadband Office Digital Navigator application. If awarded NCW Tech Alliance will subcontract with the Economic Alliance in the amount of \$50k to offer digital navigation services to our county and tribe.

LOCAL/REGIONAL:

EA Website Update-The website is finally up and going. We continue to make additions, this month we are adding the BAT meeting information and presentation information to the site. We will also be working on adding a page for the Small Business Resource and Tech Center.

Downtown Academy- Attended the first meeting in Oroville yesterday and today in Brewster. The EA is sharing resources and listening to the input from community members.

Okanogan County/CCT Broadband Action Team:

We will meet on October 28th as we moved our meetings to Thursdays to accommodate the County, and the Tribe.

Abandoned Building Subcommittee-the next meeting will be on October 28th at 11 am via zoom. If you are interested in participating, please let me know.

External Board of Directors: Currently I am representing the Economic Alliance on the following boards:

NCW Economic Development District

NCW Career Connect Leadership Team

NCW Workforce Development Council

Family Health Centers Board

CFNCW Helping Hands Grant Committee

Washington Economic Development Association