

The Economic Alliance
Board Meeting
September 22, 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
Alan Fisher, Central County #2 Rep., CEO Mid Valley Hosp
Rachelle Haven, Nespelem/Grand Coulee #2, GCD Chamber

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
Amanda Jackson-Mott, Arts Comm. Rep., MAA
Anna Dalbey, Secretary, South County #2, Coldwell Banker

Absent Board Members:

Maria Lassila, Treasurer, Omak Mirage Theater
Lanie Johns, Ok Co. Rep., Clerk of the Brd of Co. Commissioners
Sally Ranzau, Mayor of Winthrop, Methow Valley #1
Jon Culp, Mayor of Okanogan, City Representative #2
Ted Piccolo, Nespelem/Coulee Dam Rep. #1, NNDF
Mayra Pamatz, Community Finance Rep., Umpqua Bank

Stacy Luckensmeyer, At-Large Representative #2, WVC
Michael Porter, At Large #1, Omak School Superintendent
John St. Pierre, Colville Planning, CCT Rep
Jonnie Crossland, CTFC Representative
Kristi O'Neill, Central County #1 Rep., WorkSource
Lionel Marcell, At Large

Guests/Staff:

Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Ex. Director, Econ. Alliance
Carolyn Davis, Admin Assistant, Econ. Alliance
Jennifer Howard, Econ Dev Specialist, Econ. Alliance
Karen Frisbee, Oroville Chamber
Julie Tate-Libby, Twisp Works

Sheila Corsen, Okanogan PUD
Mikayla Marion, SubCulture
Rachel McClure, Senator Newhouse Office
Mike Mauk, Brewster Chamber

Chairman Chris Branch called the meeting to order.

Addition or Changes to Agenda: Added Board member position and Nominating Committee to the agenda.

Consent Agenda: Kurt Danison made a motion to approve consent agenda (minutes 8/25/21). George Brady seconded. Motion passed.

Reports

Executive Director Report -- Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the office move took place after the last Board meeting, and we are still working on getting the office put "together". She is hoping to have an open house towards the end of October, which will introduce the new location as well as the new tech center. She has ordered a large table and chairs for the conference room and have received the chairs and she has put them together, but the table hasn't arrived yet. Also ordered equipment (computers, camera, etc.) for the new tech center.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the Department of Commerce (DOC) has a new grant program for Border Community businesses that will launch Oct. 4. It is to help certain small businesses hurt due to the U.S.-Canada border closure. The border has been closed to most travelers since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The grant originally was going to be for businesses within 20 miles of the Canadian border, but Roni Holder-Diefenbach has been working the DOC to get that changed, since a lot of businesses further than the 20 miles have been impacted by the closing of the border. These targeted grants are aimed at providing support to customer-facing businesses that generate significant revenue from Canadian visitors or businesses that require access to the US-Canadian border crossings. Grants to eligible businesses will be up to \$50,000. Award amounts will vary and will consider previous Working Washington awards received from DOC or affiliated partners. Julia Turlinchamp with the DOC will be putting together a "Fact Sheet" about this grant program and the Economic Alliance will be sending out to all the local Chambers, Cities, as well as the businesses that received Working Washington grants.

Financials – Current Balance Sheet and Income Statements were distributed to the Board prior to today’s meeting. We did finally receive SBDC funds for the first and second quarter 2021. Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the grants from USDA for the Business Tech Center and the Broadband Action Team are reimbursable grants, and she has submitted the first billing for each of these grants and should receive funds by the end of the month.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach also reported that the Economic Alliance’s credit card limit is \$6,500. She has ordered a large amount of stuff (equipment, supplies, etc.) for the office and the Tech Center, so there has been a problem with the limit, but we are working around it.

We should have our signed contract with the DOC for the next biennium (July 2021 to June 2023) soon and our financials are looking pretty good right now.

Business Education -- Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that nothing was planned right now but will be offering classes soon either individually or in groups. We have been checking with other organizations to see how they are handling in-person classes. What are the protocols that need to be followed? We might be able to do some classes virtually, but we need to get a camera that tracks people as they talk.

Infrastructure Committee -- Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the prioritization process took place last month and the county commissioners approved by resolution the list as presented by the Infrastructure Committee. These applications and the commissioner’s resolution were forwarded to the NCW Economic Development District to be prioritized on the three-county level.

Abandon/Vacant Building Sub-Committee – The committee met on July 22 and discussed what can be done about some of the vacant/abandon buildings/houses in our county. There were questions regarding the Downtown/Main Street programs and whether this would fit our communities. Don Linnertz shared that they had investigated this as an option but felt that it would require the creation of a new nonprofit organization with a full-time staff to facilitate this program and the grant was only for \$40,000. At one time, the Economic Alliance did posted signs in the vacant store fronts with information about contacting the Economic Alliance if they were interested in starting a new business at this location. They also discussed what they should focus on and what they can do as a committee. The Economic Alliance is currently working on identifying the vacant buildings in the county and getting their lease/sale prices for our website. The committee can also look at local codes including nuisance, condemnation, health and safety, and enforcement. They hope to continue to facilitate discussion about this problem. They will be meeting again on October 28 at 11:00 via Zoom and if you want to be included, please let Roni Holder-Diefenbach know.

Discussion

Broadband Grant: The Broadband Committee will meet again on Monday, September 27 from 2 – 3. They are looking at grants that are available for infrastructure needs that the county or the Okanogan County PUD could apply. They would have to apply since they would own the infrastructure. They have also been discussing how a city/town could offer broadband along with other utilities. The city of Brewster is interested in doing this. Don Linnertz reported that the Methow Valley Broadband Action Group is looking to consolidate with the Okanogan County/Colville Tribes Broadband Action Team. It will make it easier for those that attend both groups. Chris Branch suggested that it would be beneficial to have these meetings scheduled on days when the county commissioners were not in session.

SBRTC Grant: Jennifer Howard, Economic Development Specialist for the Economic Alliance, reported that she is schedule for the Open Line radio talk show on October 8th. She will be speaking about the Tech Center. She has also been working on marketing materials for the Tech Center and getting social media accounts set up, such as Twitter, Facebook, etc., and looking for content for this. She thought it would be a great idea to

highlight some of the local businesses through social media. She has also been contacting other organizations to see how they are handling in person classes, what is the protocol to follow. She has also been taking online courses and looking at setting up some classes and getting on the calendars to speak at local chambers to discuss the Tech Center.

Loomis Fire Station: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the Loomis Fire Station only had one respondent to the RFQ. They did an interview with this company and were comfortable with selecting them to do the feasibility study for a new fire station in Loomis. The county is the applicant for this grant through USDA because Loomis is an unincorporated community. She presented to the county commissioners on September 7 that the Loomis Fire Station Committee wanted to select Cortner Architects to do the study. The commissioners agreed and are now in the process of putting together a contract. Roni Holder-Diefenbach has been helping the Loomis Fire Station facilitate this process and helped write the grant to USDA. She will also be assisting with the survey. They are looking for a basic fire hall, not an elaborate construction which they can't afford.

Brewster/Oroville Downtown Strategies: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she is working with Alice Brown at the NCW EDD. The NCW EDD is funding the study for these communities' downtown areas and what is needed. The EDD received funding to assist these communities with new retail strategies. They will be meeting in each area on October 25 - 29. It was felt that each of these communities would need to have the community buy-in for this to be successful. Chris Branch spoke about the prior things that were done when he was planner with the city of Oroville. There have been some great drawings, plans, etc. that were done and maybe they could be revisited or reviewed by this group. Karen Frisbee said she had a copy of the 1993 study that was done and she has been reviewing it.

Board Members & Nominating Committee: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she spoke with Sally Ranzau, Board member for the Winthrop #1 position. She said she was too busy to continue in her role as a Board member and has officially resigned. Don Linnertz will be retiring in his position at Twisp Works but wants to retain his Methow Valley #2 position representative on the Board. He also suggested Julie Tate-Libby as a replacement in the Methow Valley #1 position. Julie Tate-Libby spoke briefly about her position at Twisp Works. She is the Director of Programing at Twisp Works, and she also runs the Methow Valley Investment Network which connects investors with local business owners.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach has also spoken with Ted Piccolo, Nespelem/Coulee Dam Rep. #1, who has also resigned his position as Board member. Roni Holder-Diefenbach will reach out to Grand Coulee Dam area chamber to see if they have any recommendations to fill this position.

A nominating committee will be appointed at October's Board meeting to select officers and to fill vacant positions on the Board.

Other Business: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she will be attending the IEDC Conference in Nashville from October 2 – 6. The EDD is paying the conference fee and for lodging. The Economic Alliance will be paying for airfare and meals. Alice Brown and Booklyn Holton from the NCW EDD will also be attending.

Lael Duncan stated that she is looking for some people who are interested in food handling and construction at Okanogan County Community Action Council.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach thanked Don Linnertz for his work with Twisp Works and the partnership that has developed because of him.

Chris Branch spoke about the county possibly purchasing the old Forest Service building in Okanogan which would then house the district court. They might use some ARPA funds for this purchase and remodel.

Meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 27, 2021, via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,
Carolyn Davis, Administrative Assistant



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

- **New office space**-We continue to move in, and order items needed for the SBRTC. We have ordered window signage for the outside of the building as we do not want to damage the exterior part of the building.
- **Open House**-We are planning a open house for our new location and to celebrate the opening of our new Small Business Resource and Tech Center at the end of October. We want to make sure we have all the equipment, building signage etc. in place before we have it. We are also hoping that the COVID cases will have declined at that time.
- **USDA Grants**-
 - **Small Business Resource and Tech Center**-Billed out our first reimbursement for the grant in the amount of \$6,303.71 for personnel and equipment purchased for the center.
 - **Broadband Study**-Billed out for our first reimbursement in the amount of \$4,000.00 which is our monthly contracted amount to our consultant ACRS.
 - **Loomis Fire Station**-We interviewed the only applicant who responded to the RFQ for this project. The committee decided to move forward and select the consultant. I presented the choice to the county commissioners on the 7th of September and the commissioners approved the choice.
- **Broadband**- We will have our next BAT meeting on Monday September 27th from 2-3. We will be discussing including the Methow Valley BAT in our Okanogan County and CCT BAT.

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- Okanogan County has 2 communities, Brewster and Oroville who are participating in this project is funded through the USDA. This project was funded through the statewide competitive process. Discussions/Work begins the last week in October 2021.

Okanogan County/CCT Broadband Action Team:

We will continue to meet monthly and are scheduling presentations from the different industries directly impacted by COVID-19 and how lack of broadband access has affected their business and industry.

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