

The Economic Alliance
Board Retreat
February 23, 2022
Zoom Meeting

Attending Board Members:

Kurt Danison, 1st Vice Chairman, City Rep. #1, City Planner
Anna Dalbey, 2nd Vice Chair, So. County #2, Keller Williams Realty
Maria Lassila, Treasurer, Omak Mirage Theater
George Brady, Secretary, So Co Rep #2, Cascade Bio. Sply
Rachelle Haven, Nespelem/Grand Coulee #2, GCD Chamber
Chris Branch, Past Chairman, Okanogan County Commissioners

Kristi O'Neill, Central County #1 Rep., FYRE
Don Linnertz, MV #2, Twisp Chamber
Jon Culp, Mayor of Okanogan, City Rep #2
Amanda Jackson-Mott, Arts Community Rep., MAA
Julie Tate-Libby, Methow Valley #1, Twisp Works

Absent Board Members:

Lael Duncan, Chairman, No. County #1, OCCAC
Alan Fisher, Central County #2 Rep., CEO Mid Valley Hosp
Lionel Marcell, At-Large #3, Red Rooster Restaurant
Lanie Johns, Ok Co. Rep., Ck of the Brd Co. Commissioners
Stacy Stacey Luckensmeyer, At-Large Rep. #2, WVC
Vacant, Representative from Finance

William Marchand, Colville Planning, CCT Rep
Aaron Kester, No. Co #2, Tonasket Nat,l Food Co-op
Beth Strohane, At-Large #4
Michael Porter, At-Large #1, Omak School Super.
Vacant, Colville Tribal Federal Corp Representative
Vacant, Nespelem/Coulee Dam #1 Representative

Guests/Staff:

Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Ex. Director, Econ. Alliance
Carolyn Davis, Econ. Alliance
Jennifer Howard, Econ Dev Specialist, Econ. Alliance

Rachelle McClure
Brett Riley, WVC, VP of Administrative Services

1st Vice Chairman Kurt Danison called the meeting to order. Addition or Changes to Agenda: No changes.

Conflict of Interest: Kurt Danison asked if there were any conflicts of interest on any of the items on the agenda. There were none.

Consent Agenda: Don Linnertz made a motion to approve consent agenda (minutes 1/26/22) with changes to the minutes of adding Amanda Jackson-Mott as attending. George Brady seconded. Motion passed.

Still waiting for final decision and how ARPA funds can be used and how to access infrastructure funds to get out in rural areas and help renovate vacant buildings. Kurt Danison stated that cities might be afraid of all the paperwork involved and most cities are looking for help with programs where they might have to raise rates, such as water/sewer. Anna Dalbey asked if ARPA funds can be used for the Retail Strategies to help build rural communities or if funds can be put into the general fund.

The Board Retreat is scheduled for February 23, 9 a.m. to Noon and Roni Holder-Diefenbach asked if the Board felt if this meeting should be a hybrid or just through Zoom. It was the consensus to do a Zoom meeting.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach will send out the Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest form via Adobe Sign and asked Board member to sign and send back. These forms need to be done annually.

Motions: Roni Holder-Diefenbach discussed the office re-organization and some of the service changes by the Economic Alliance. She had requested time allocations from staff, and it brought to the forefront some changes that she felt needed to be done. She re-aligned job descriptions and the current “administrative assistant” will now be “administrative/clerical” and go to part-time (28 hrs week with no benefits) and all payroll, accounts payable, and accounts receivable will be done by hiring a bookkeeper, which will hopefully track our grants more efficiently, this will be effective July 1, 2022. Jennifer’s position as Economic Development Specialist will be moved to full-time permanent, and she added outreach to businesses and chambers as part of the job

description. This will have full benefits. This will be effective March 1, 2022. Current SBDC advisor, Lew Blakeney will be considered Senior Advisor and his wages will be \$28,989.85 for his part-time position. Contract amount for the SBDC program will be \$36,000. Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she has applied for additional grants and if received, all work on these will be part-time temporary positions. Chris Branch made a motion to approve the office reorganization as presented by Roni Holder-Diefenbach. Anna Dalbey seconded. Motion passed.

2022 Budget: A WSMA Grant was awarded for \$25,000 and contracts with the county and the PUD have been approved for 2022. The SBDC lead office wants to move Lew Blakeney to a “Senior Advisor” position and his contracted services would be \$28,989.85 now. Income for the SBDC would be \$36,000.

The Broadband grant goes through June 2022 and has \$28,000 left. The SBRTC grant ends in June also.

New Grant Applications include USDA – RDBG funds would be for Covid Response continued services and providing support and USDA Broadband – would provide support for the Broadband efforts in Okanogan County. She has also applied for a portion of ARPA funds from the county for funding for businesses that had to shut down due to Covid. This would also provide Retail Strategies to all communities for one year and funding assistance for the SBRTC for two years.

Some of our increased expenses are for rent and utilities, as well as for equipment/software/hardware. The software is for the JobEQ which would provide data on workforce and other economic indicators. Mr. Riley stated that Wenatchee Valley College has the Economic Indicators, and this provides data. He was not sure of the cost, but Roni Holder-Diefenbach will check it out.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach stated that there might be additional changes to the budget when she hears back from some of the grant applications and if awarded, we would need to do a budget amendment.

George Brandy made a motion to approve the 2022 budget as presented. Chris Branch seconded. Motion passed.

Scope Alignment: Roni Holder-Diefenbach spoke about the current commitments taken on by the Economic Alliance. Okanogan County contract has changed over the years and now meets quarterly with the county commissioners, as well as submitting a monthly report and billing. We provide them with our annual workplan and administration for the Public Facilities Fund and prioritization of projects.

The Economic Alliance is the ADO (Associate Development Organization) for Okanogan County. We now report on a new reporting system and the goals are set for business retention/expansion, business recruitment, business startups, export assistance, and training. We also must develop a marketing plan on how to provide services. This is a two-year contract.

The SBDC is a contract with the lead Small Business Development Center office. Contract deliverables include 48 jobs created/retained; 7 business startups; total number of businesses/or proposed business advised 48; 450 hours of Lew Blakeney’s time (contract/prep work/travel) and 50 hours of research time.

PUD contract is for \$6,000 and has been the same for a long time. Roni Holder-Diefenbach has spoken with current manager and this amount could change for next year. Our agreement states that we keep the district informed of potential new or added load by commercial or industrial customers or residential developments. The Economic Alliance will also continue to facilitate the Broadband Action Team (BAT) and give updates to the PUD.

Small Business Resource & Technology Center (SBRTC), this program ends as of end of June 2022. If funded by ARAP Fund from the county, we will continue the center and provide Spanish speaking staff and classes as well as other classes and purchase additional equipment. Tracking the number of businesses/people served will give us some additional information on the success of this program. With all the Covid restrictions it has been hard over the past year to get this program going. Workshops/classed have not been attended as we had hoped. We might change the time of the workshops to evening and will continue to work with our local chambers and bring in industry experts, i.e., attorneys, accountants, etc. to provide classes for businesses.

Covid Recovery will be a 3-to-5-year plan. Anna Dalbey asked is the Economic Alliance could provide grant writing services for nonprofits and chambers. Roni Holder-Diefenbach stated that each application is different, so it is difficult to provide a blanket training program for all grants. She suggested that applications be submitted to the Prioritization Process.

Mission Statement: Ron Holder-Diefenbach spoke about the current Mission Statement for the Economic Alliance – “To facilitate partnerships with private, government, and tribal entities that will create an environment to nurture, support, and recruit businesses and industry in Okanogan County”. She asked if there should be any changes to this statement. It is hard to explain what economic development activities include. It was stated that we don’t have sustainable or inclusive in this statement, but it was the consensus that we keep it simple. No changes were made.

Comprehensive Economic Development Recovery Strategy: Roni Holder-Diefenbach spoke about the SWOT analysis that was done by Eric Hoove.

Strengths – Infrastructure -- the trail system, railroad, capacity is underutilized. Economy – Creative Arts;

Weaknesses -- Housing – not many rentals, new homes are overpriced, lack of affordable housing for workers; Education – K-12 & college not aligned with workforce needs; Mining, forest products, etc. not coming back at a scale as before. Housing a major problem; no nightlife; need more small-scale boutiques and agri-businesses.

The Economic Alliance can support businesses but can’t tell the communities what to be or what is going to be successful.

Threats – Lack of growth, aging population

This document (the Comprehensive Economic Development Recovery Strategy) is a revolving document and can and will be changed as time goes by.

Priorities for the Economic Alliance – Technical assistance forum being held in March is a priority for the Economic Alliance this year. The Downtown Ambassadors Program – focus group at high schools or recent graduates, what are their dreams for their hometown area? Send any comments on this economic development strategy to Roni Holder-Diefenbach.

Upcoming meetings: Roni Holder-Diefenbach will be attending a Workforce Development Council Conference in Washington D.C. on April 1 – 15.

Next meeting is scheduled for March 23, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Davis

