

The Economic Alliance
Board Meeting
February 25, 2026
Via Zoom

Attending Board Members:

Maria Lassila, 1st Chairman, Tourism Rep. Omak Chamber	Beth Strohane, Applied Bldg Infor, At-Large #4
Anthony Popelier, 1st Vice Chair Reman & Reload, North Co. #2	Steve Quick, Central #2 Okanogan School Super
Kurt Danison, Secretary, City Rep. #1, City Planner	Jord Wilson, South County #1, City of Pateros
Sarah Jo Lightner, Methow Arts, 2 nd Vice Chair., Arts Comm Rep	Lisa Bauer, City Rep., City of Okanogan
Anna Dalbey, Past Chairman, So. Co. #2, Keller Williams Realty	Rocklyn Culp, Town of Winthrop, Planner
Andy Bertapalle, At-Large #1, Chief Admin Mid Valley Hosp.	Patrick Law, Methow Valley #1, Twisp Works

Absent Board Members:

Nick Timm, County Commissioners Rep., Rep. #1, Treasurer	Cindy Simpson, Finance Rep, WA Federal Bank
Crystal Gage, Confluence Health, Central Co. Area #1	William Marchand, CCT Planning
Monica Garza Acevedo, WorkSource, At-Large #3	Jordan Ruiz, NNDF, Nespelem/Coulee Dam Area #2
Cal Goolsby, WVC, At Large #A2	Rikki Whipple, Nespelem/Coulee Dam Area #1, NNDF
Lanie Johns, Ok Co Commissioners Rep., Ck of the Brd Co Rep #2	Vacant, CTFC Representative
Vacant, North County #1	Vacant - At Large #5

Guests/Staff:

Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Ex. Director, Economic Alliance	Mason Duke, E. Dev. Specialist, Economic Alliance
Leonel Marcial, Business Outreach Specialist, Economic Alliance	Carolyn Davis, Project Assistant, Economic Alliance
Breanna Sollender, Comm/Outreach Specialist, Economic Alliance	Rachel McClure, Representative for Rep. Dan Newhouse
Jessica McCarthy, Okanogan Co. PUD Okanogan PUD	

Maria Lassila, Chairman called the meeting to order and asked everyone to introduce themselves by signing in on the chat.

Agenda: No conflicts with the agenda items and one change to the agenda – remove “virtual” under the Reminders. Next Board meeting will be in person.

Consent Agenda: Minutes from January 28, 2026 were emailed out and financials as of February 18, 2026, were sent. Andy Bertapalle made a motion to approve the minutes as presented and the financials as of February 18, 2026, as presented. Beth Strohane seconded. Motion passed with no one opposed or abstained.

Presentation

Sarah Jo Lightner reported that she went to Olympia and attended a Creative Planning Session to discuss funding the Creative Economy. Creative businesses made about 2j0% of the economy. Is there any funding that could come to Okanogan County? How can we work with banks and CDFI on how to fund these types of business? Cottage businesses, farmers markets, wineries, breweries, artists, graphic designers are all types of creative businesses. There are a lot of overlapping, but these are creditable businesses and should be able to access funding through banks. Lenders are not educated about these types of businesses. There is a creative district in Twisp. Creative Districts are designated areas that concentrate arts, culture, and creative businesses help to foster economic growth, community identity, and cultural engagement.

Motions

No motions.

Reports

Executive Director Report: (see attachment #1) Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported on what we have been doing over the past month. Had the public hearing for the CDBG for the Loomis Fire Hall and now waiting to hear back on their grant. She has had conversations with SBDC and there are lots of changes happening and lots of budget cuts. Projected to have a contract by March.

Infrastructure Committee: She met with the City of Omak administrator Todd McDaniel, Kurt Danison and Rena Shawver from Okanogan County Community Action Council to discuss the Highway 97 interchange and infrastructure improvements on NE side of 97 and N of Engh Road, (the East HWY 97 Omak project). Hoping to have some affordable housing, some businesses, etc. The city owns 60 acres in this area. Please review the Economic Alliance's newsletter, as Breanna Sollender will be featuring some of the infrastructure projects.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach also reported that the county could be interested in developing some of the county's properties. These could be leased or purchased by private businesses. She will be following up with all the projects to encourage them to apply for Site Readiness funding through the DOC.

Business Education/Outreach: Mason Duke reported that we had been lining up workshops for the next month. Breanna Sollender has been doing a great job creating posters and flyers. Leonel Marcial will be doing a workshop about "Pricing for Your Food Business". He has also spoken with the Community Cultural Center in Tonasket about holding a computer class at their facility.

Leonel Marcial reported that he is looking at workshops that would be in Spanish. The Pricing for Your Food Business will be held on March 25. He wants businesses to understand their costs, profitability, and how to make their business successful. He continues to work with Hispanic businesses and teaching them about cash flow and break-even points. He tries to outline attainable goals for them, such as getting their license, finding out what volume of sales they need to be profitable, etc.

Breanna Sollender has been getting information about Infrastructure Projects and getting these up on the web site. She is still working on the Board member's Bios and getting the monthly newsletters out, as well as updating flyers and social media.

Discussion

Board Member Recruitment: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she has been in touch with the Tonasket Chamber and their new Chamber president is a small business owner and would be a good addition to our Board. She has also met with Chris O'Neil, CEO of Tribal Fuels and Grocery Store, and he is interested in the At-Large vacant position.

Port District: No updates.

Arts in Education and Career & Technical Education: Sarah Jo Lightner reported that the committee did have a meeting and reviewed the workplan and discussed recruiting others to be part of this committee. She will send out an invitation to the next meeting.

Broadband – Bead Funding: Next meeting is scheduled for tomorrow at 2:00. Kendel from the PUD will be running the meeting, as Roni Holder-Diefenbach is in Olympia.

Contract/Grant Updates 2026

No updates. Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the Economic Alliance has agreed to act as fiscal agent for two organizations that applied for funding from the Community Foundation of NCW.

Other Business/News/Member Updates

It was reported that the OCCAC is working to put in a community garden in Omak and they will have spots that can be rented.

Rachel McClure reported that Representative Dan Newhouse will not be seeking re-election and that community project funding “earmarks” are due by March 6th.

A committee has been created to help keep the Okanogan County Fairgrounds open. There is a possibility of eliminating the racetrack and the rodeo grounds.

Kurt Danison reported that Brewster, Pateros, Okanogan County and Tonasket have updated their Shoreline Master Plans.

Lisa Bauer reported that there will be a Job Fair on March 25th from 9 – 2 at the Agriplex Annex.

Opportunity Zones have been designated in several places in Okanogan County. Businesses in these Opportunity Zones can defer taxes with job creation. Currently in process of re-designation of these areas, but there have been some changes to be able to qualify for the designation. The Economic Alliance is available to provide technical assistance if needed. Being an Opportunity Zone does give extra points on other grant applications.

Meeting adjourned, 11:55 p.m.

Next meeting is scheduled for March 25, at 11:00 a.m. in person at the county commissioners hearing room.

Respectfully submitted,
Carolyn Davis

Roni Holder-Diefenbach Executive Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Roni Holder-Diefenbach", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.



ECONOMIC ALLIANCE Executive Director Report

February 2026

Well, we are both happy and sad that the Groundhog saw his shadow, happy because we know that our county is in desperate need of the snowpack if we get more snow, and sad because we are ready for the sunshine and vitamin d that comes with it.

This month I started off by attending the Public Hearing for the Loomis Fire District CDBG grant application. We had several of the local fireman and fire commissioners from the district in attendance who shared that this project has been ongoing for over 30 years and that they were happy to see that it might happen in their lifetime! They thanked both the Board of County Commissioners and the Economic Alliance for the work that we have done on this project. We are now waiting to hear from CDBG on if we have been funded.

This month we also started the conversation with Partners for Rural Washington about contracting with them again to assist our communities and small businesses in accessing grant writing assistance. I am in the process of reviewing the contract (like the one we did last year through the ADO program), to provide specific information pertinent to our USDA Grant that will be paying for this service. We are excited to continue this partnership with them.

I was invited by Mayor Hans Smith from the Town of Twisp to sit in on a meeting with key stakeholders who could assist in providing resources to the Glover Street Businesses during their six-month construction project. I shared with him the work that EA Staff did with the Tonasket Community during the first phase of their project. I also shared with them the City of Tonasket's construction website, their Facebook page, Varella and Associates Facebook page where they shared a lot of information. We will work with the Town, Chamber and Twisp Works to make sure that we meet the needs of the businesses. Staff and I will also attend the upcoming Chat and Sip to gauge what the businesses are feeling that they need preconstruction.

Last week I met with the City of Omak administrator Todd McDaniel, Kurt Danison and Rena Shaver from Okanogan County Community Action Council to discuss the HWY 97 interchange and Infrastructure improvements on NE side of 97 and N of Engh Road. OCCAC recently purchased 60 acres that they would like to use for affordable housing. They are currently reviewing RFP for a master planning process for this property and asked us to review the proposals which I did. We are excited to continue to meet with OCCAC and the City on this project as it addresses one of our goals in our CEDS.

This month I have also been working with several businesses on site selection, expansion opportunities, and investigating information for property purchases. At the BOCC meeting I also shared with the commissioners that there is funding for site readiness planning and development. Larry Gilman the Assessor was at the meeting as well and will start the process of identifying potential land and zoning that could be used for commercial/industrial development and then we can evaluate to determine what to focus on for grant funding.

Mason and I will also be attending the WEDA legislative conference at the end of this month.

NCW Economic Development District
NCW Workforce Development Council
Association CCT& Okanogan County BAT

Community Economic Revitalization Board
Washington Economic Development
Partners for Rural Washington