



Meeting Minutes
Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board
January 8, 2020 – 7:00 p.m.
Peaks Conference Room at Falling Creek
1257 County Farm Road, Bedford, VA 24523

Present: Pete Fellers, Don Gardner, Sam Gardner, Ronnie Gross, Ken Newman, Jeff Powers, Joy Powers

Absent: Matt Baumgardner, Beth Bays, Chuck Grove, Lindsay Tomlinson, Pam Willoughby

Staff Present: Scott Baker, Traci Blido

Staff Absent: Robert Hiss, Amanda Kaufman

Transcriber: Julia Peters

Guests: None

(1) APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Powers noted that several members have not been reappointed officially yet and therefore not enough members are in attendance for a quorum. This meeting will be informational with no votes being taken and last month's minutes will be voted upon for approval at the February meeting. Mr. Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the January 8, 2020 agenda. There were no objections.

(2) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - December 4, 2019

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the December 4, 2019 meeting minutes. There were no objections.

(3) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Mrs. Blido attended the hemp conversation with DMV leaders in Vinton and was glad to represent the Ag Board there. It was very well attended and very interesting and she has asked for their PowerPoint presentation so she can send it out to the Ag Board members. One farmer that spoke said growing hemp for the CBD oil is not worth complying with all the rules and regulations, but growing industrial hemp is the way to go because it has many uses in insulation products, animal bedding, and many other things. She was on radio channel WIQO this morning regarding Teva Pharmaceuticals, which is currently downsizing and will close this year. She talked about what is being done to help the employees and marketing of the facility. Over the years, she has received at least a dozen inquiries and she turns these leads over to Teva who owns the building. Yesterday, Comcast TV interviewed Mrs. Blido and County Supervisor Edgar Tuck, for a commercial promoting Comcast internet. Over 5,000 residents and businesses have been connected to Comcast internet in the Smith Mountain Lake area and by the end of the year will expect to have 7,000 signed up. The County Administration continues to work with Blue Ridge Towers who wants service up and running by the middle of this year and are working hard to accomplish this goal. She will be attending a press announcement with USDA at Huddleston Elementary at 11 a.m. tomorrow morning if anyone else would like to attend. The announcement relates to fiber optics for that area. Discussion followed regarding different internet services and companies providing service.

Mr. Powers said Halifax County is building a hemp processing plant. Mr. Baker noted that Wytheville is also building one. In response to a question about harvesting hemp, Mr. Baker said he understood the process is similar to cutting hay and drying it in the field. Discussion followed about hemp production and its pros and cons.

(4) ADMINISTRATION REPORT

Mr. Hiss sent an email to Mr. Powers stating he and Ms. Kaufman could not attend tonight's meeting due to another meeting conflict. He noted that the Board of Supervisors (BOS) will probably reconsider the airport zone issue since all parties impacted express concerns and the Planning Commission voted 7-0 recommending denial of the airport zone. It is unclear what the next step will be but he expects a court case will be litigated sometime in the future regarding the airport zone situation. Dr. Gardner asked for clarification of how this issue began. Mr. Baker said Liberty University asked to rezone the property they owned to accommodate expansion of the airport and then the BOS instructed the Planning office to draft an airport district zone. The County still does not have an indication from Liberty about what they are actually wanting. They have not presented any type of plan to the Planning Commission. Discussion followed about the Lynchburg Airport being 15 minutes away where anything can be done and that airports are handled at the federal and state level and counties do not get involved normally.

(5) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT

Mr. Baker reported that the first weaned and vaccinated cattle sale of the year will be January 24 at Springlake Stockyard. He submitted the budget request for \$2,500 to help fund the invasive plant management cost share pilot program for stream fence lines in Bedford County. Approval may not be known until April or May and he will keep the Ag Board briefed and begin working on specs for the program so it is ready to implement if the funding gets approved. The Beekeepers Association in Bedford will offer an introductory beekeeping course in the spring and one of its members is willing to foot the bill for a few students to go through the course. Mr. Baker will send registration information to Ann Jones and he informed Ms. Powers that older 4-H members may be interested.

(6) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU/YOUNG FARMER'S REPORT

Sam Gardner reported that the board met with the sheriff's office to discuss how to work together for farm and road safety. Dr. Gardner noted that some education is needed for the officers and dispatchers regarding the size and appearance of different breeds of animals to help with describing animals at-large and finding them safely. Mr. Baker will reach out to Jeff Johnson, Director of 911, and tell him the concerns that the Ag Board has expressed.

(7) COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Education & Events

1. Upcoming Events

Ms. Powers said her 4-H group went to the Agape Center in Moneta and helped out after Christmas. The Center offers counseling and support to families and can provide them with clothing, toys, and groceries. Livestock season has officially started with students working on show projects and practicing for livestock judging.

2. County Fair Update

The Virginia Association of Fairs had their meeting last weekend. Our Miss Bedford County Fair attended as well as two other Bedford County girls who were representing Chesterfield County and the Apple Blossom Festival in Winchester. There were 28 contestants in total and it was a good experience for all. The fair committee is working on the plans for next year's fair and have talked about having a public meeting for feedback. They welcome new ideas. They also said goodbye to Ken Palmer. Dr. Gardner said that in one of the farm magazines/newspapers he reads, Bedford was not listed as one of the counties having a fair. Ms. Powers will check into it and said it is probably an oversight.

3. School Ag Programs Update

Ms. Powers reported that Staunton River High School will be adding another course to the agriculture curriculum next school year. Three full-time teachers will now be needed at the high school level which has been the goal to achieve.

b. Marketing & Production

1. Farmers' Market Update

Mr. Gross said Forest will have an indoor market Saturday, January 11, from 8 a.m. to 12 noon in the Ruritan building. The McFadens will be running the Bedford market again this coming year and are planning to have a meeting within the next six weeks and hope to be open the first of May.

2. Coyote Lottery Update

Dr. Gardner checked with Southern States last week and they had about 52 coyotes, so the number is down. Mr. Powers said the Ag Board will work on getting some publicity regarding the lottery since deer hunting season is over and it would help draw some attention for more participation.

c. Land Protection & Conservation

Mr. Fellers said the General Assembly started today and he will wait to see what may be generated from the session.

(8) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

The annual Virginia Biological Farming Conference is this weekend at the Hotel Roanoke. An email was sent out earlier with more information.

The Ag Board will elect new officers and committee members and take a photo at the February meeting. Mr. Powers hopes all will be able to attend.

Vista Foods will be shutting down at the end of the month but another individual is interested in going in and hopefully it will transition into a great opportunity.

(9) ADJOURNMENT

7:58 p.m.