**Board Meeting Minutes**

**May 14, 2020**

**Perry County Economic Development Authority**

**Perry County Business and Tourism Center**

**New Bloomfield, PA.**

**Attendees:** Marti Roberts, Russ Hoover, Patti McLaughlin, Duane Hertzler, Dawn Lowe, Kevin Fitzpatrick, Morgan Tressler, John Gerner, Frank Campbell, Shawna Weller, Rich Pluta, Mike Lawler

**Staff:** Michelle Jones

**Absent:** Greg Gordon, Emory Yoder, Brenda Watson, Jim Fuller, Dereck Whitesel

**Excused:**

**Visitors:** None

**Call to Order:**

The monthly meeting of the PCEDA was called to order by Chair Marti Roberts at 8:01 AM. The meeting was held via a “Zoom” conference call.

**Public Comment:** None

**Secretary’s Report:**

John Gerner presented minutes of April 9, 2020 board meeting which had been distributed to all board members on April 14th. Russ Hoover made a motion to accept the minutes as presented, Dawn Lowe seconded the motion. The motion was approved by voice vote without dissent.

**Treasurer’s Report:**

Patti McLaughlin presented the Financial Report for the period ending April 30, 2020 prepared by Robert Morris & Co., which was distributed to all board members on May 12th. Ms. McLaughlin advised that the report reflects normal monthly expenses and payroll costs. Ms. Roberts advised that PCEDA had received the first half of the financial support the County Commissioners had pledged in support of PCEDA activities. Kevin Fitzpatrick made a motion to approve the Treasurer’s Report as presented, John Gerner seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a voice vote without dissent.

**Chair Report:**

* Marti Roberts reported that she and Michelle Jones had a conference call with Tripp Muldrow and Stephanie Francis. They said that they are ready to begin on-site efforts again and were thinking they would like to come at the end of June to visit western part of county (Blain, Loysville, Ickesburg, etc.). Ms. Roberts said she and Michelle felt it was a little too soon to begin that contact work, thinking that most of the time would be spent “venting” on business closures and stay at home orders. They discussed other initiatives that we can host in the interim, such as virtual discussion groups in the boroughs where we have already held in-person meetings and have some work products to present. We will reassess the situation in early June to see when the in-person sessions would begin.
* We have been inundated by plans for reopening from businesses in the county. Most of them are really the same (mostly safety and mitigation) but they are vague. There was a lot of discussion during the County Commissioners “Zoom” meeting this week about the frustration our residents are experiencing with the county remaining in the red category. Discussion about how to organize next steps. Nothing can get scheduled until we know about shut down status.
* It has been reported that most of the Federal funding funneled to states through the CARES ACT has gone to the seven largest counties, but that some funding will be distributed to the remaining counties for use on economic development projects. Ms. Roberts reported that she, Rich Pluta, and Michelle Jones met with the commissioners to discuss what type of projects the county could seek funding for. The goal is to show economic development with funds. Ms. Roberts said that it was a positive sign that commissioners invited PCEDA to participate in this discussion. PCEDA will continue to work with them on this.

**Staff Report:**

Michelle Jones reported on the following:

* While stay at home orders remain in place, much of the coordination work continues via conference calls and “Zoom” meetings. PCEDA has met its ENGAGE goals for the year and there are no plans to re-open that effort.
* As noted in the Chair Report, Ms. Jones will be looking into hosting virtual meetings with groups in Millerstown and Newport to keep the Downtown Revitalization effort alive. Rich Pluta suggested that a brief note could be sent via email to all the participants we have worked with so far could be a way to let them know that our revitalization work will resume soon.
* Ms. Jones participated in a conference call with the career counselors in each of the school districts and their work on setting up apprenticeship programs with local businesses is continuing. Some of the programs include fire, EMS, and healthcare. They are also talking to some of the union locals about programs in plumbing, electrical, and HVAC trades. Summer job options are also being considered.
* The Southern Alleghenies Conservancy is planning to undertake a Local Food Promotion Program and will be applying for a grant for this effort from the USDA. In doing some preparatory work, they found out about PCEDA’s work in this area and have asked for any help we can provide as they move forward. They have also asked for a letter of support from us. Morgan Tressler made to motion to authorize the issuance of a letter of support for the Conservancy’s LFPP grant application. Kevin Fitzpatrick seconded the motion. There was some discussion about the potential for the Conservancy to attract some of the businesses that have previously expressed an interest in locating in Perry County. Conversely, it was noted that an expansion of the area of consideration may entice more or larger businesses to consider the region in their expansion plans. The “new normal” we are in due to the pandemic – impact on meat and poultry processors – may make previously considered options more promising. Rich Pluta suggested that the motion be amended to include PCEDA’s willingness to collaborate with the Conservancy in their LFPP study. The motion was approved as amended by a voice vote without dissent.

**Old Business/Announcements:**

* Frank Campbell advised that the effort to bring water and sewer services to the Fairgrounds in Newport seems to have stalled over differences of opinion between the water authority and the Fair Board. In addition, the Fair Board has not yet decided on how they will respond to the pandemic. The kids raising their fair entry livestock are still planning on exhibiting and it is the 50th anniversary of the fair, so there is some pressure to continue. The Fair Board believes it still has time to decide.
* Commissioner Watson has expressed interest in enhancing broadband services in the county. Jason Fitzgerald, the county’s grant writer, advises that there is money available to help with broadband expansion and that we could apply for funds to develop a plan. The issue of a wired network versus a wireless network has discussed. Reportedly, PA Net has a plan for providing services that could be considered. No decision on how to proceed was agreed upon.
* Morgan Tressler provided information on costs to acquire the small “campaign style” road signs to promote support local businesses during the economic recovery process. They would cost $8.50 each for lots of 100, and the cost likely would go down as the quantity goes up. The signs would not be specific to a business but promote the local economy in general. It might be a good way to also promote the “Cultivate Perry” brand and kick off that effort. A motion to approve the expenditure of up to $1,000 for these signs was approved***.*** Rich moved to spend up to $2000 on this sign project. Kevin seconded motion. Motion carried.
* Kevin Fitzpatrick advised that future liquid fuels funding to municipalities throughout the state will be reduced due to the sharp drop in oil prices and the lower rate of consumption during the pandemic. A portion of the tax on motor fuels is based on the price of the fuel itself. In addition, the amount of earned income tax collected by local governments and the school districts will be reduced due to current high rates of unemployment. This will result in significant budget shortfalls in the short term and difficulties in providing needed services in the longer term.
* Kevin Fitzpatrick reported that the Talmudic University is talking about bringing students and teachers to the Carson Long campus in the coming weeks. University officials are talking to local businesses about options to provide goods and services to the students and faculty once they arrive.

**New Business:** None

**Adjourn:**  Marti Roberts asked for a motion to adjourn. John Gerner proposed a motion to adjourn, Morgan Tressler seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by a voice vote without dissent at 9:20 AM