**Board Meeting Minutes**

**September 10, 2020**

**Perry County Economic Development Authority**

**Perry County Business and Tourism Center**

**New Bloomfield, PA.**

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

**Staff:** Michelle Jones

**Absent:** Jim Fuller, Emery Yoder, Greg Gordon, Derek Whitesel, Mike Lawler

**Excused:** none

**Visitors:** Jason Finnerty

**Call to Order:**

The monthly meeting of the PCEDA Board was called to order by Chair Marti Roberts at 8:02 AM. The meeting was held via a “Zoom” conference call.

**Public Comment:** Jason Finnerty advised that 51 land development plans have been submitted to date for this year, representing 109 building lots – 56 in Marysville alone. This number of plans submitted is 11 less than last years at this time but provides for 76 more building lots that last year. A plan submitted by MJ Land Acquisition consists of 13 dwelling units on 11 lots on 134 acres in Watts Township. He also reported that a land development plan has been submitted for a 31,500 SF poultry operation in Northeast Madison Township.

Mr. Finnerty also reported that Delta Development out of Mechanicsburg has applied for a $4 million RCAP grant to support an industrial expansion of an aluminum extrusions operation in the Halifax area. The company will be providing $7.5 million of its own funds to complete the expansion project. Delta Development is looking for a general consistency letter from the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission. They are claiming this expansion will results in 150 new jobs in the area, with some coming from Perry County.

Marti Roberts interrupted that discussion to advise that Patti McLaughlin will have to leave the meeting shortly and asked that Ms. McLaughlin give the Treasurer’s Report at this time.

**Treasurer’s Report:**

Patti McLaughlin presented the Financial Report for the period ending August 31, 2020 prepared by Robert Morris & Co., which was distributed to all board members on September 9th. Ms. McLaughlin advised that the report reflects normal monthly expenses and payroll costs. USDA’s reimbursement of $10K for the last invoice payment for the LFPP project has been posted as well as the second and final installment of the County’s contribution to the PCEDA. Kevin Fitzpatrick made a motion to approve the Treasurer’s Report as presented, Rich Pluta seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a voice vote without dissent.

The previous discussion resumed.

Kevin Fitzpatrick asked why the addition of 150 new jobs would not be something we should support. Since this project is outside Perry County, a finding of consistency with the County Comp Plan is not applicable to this project. Mr. Finnerty said he will add this item to the next County Planning Commission meeting agenda, and he will likely recommend that they do not endorse this out of county project since it will compete with our applications. Brenda Watson advised that the county priorities for PCAP funding are the expansion of the 911 emergency communications tower coverage and the tavern preservation work in Duncannon. Ms. Watson recommended that Mr. Finnerty attend the next Commissioners meetings. She advised that the County has the necessary matching fund for 911 tower work, but she is not certain what Historical Society is doing for the tavern project.

Frank Campbell asked what was happening with regard to broadband service expansion. Ms. Watson advised that the County has signed a contract for a consultant to assess needs and develop a plan to address those needs in the county. She also advised that they just were advised by the state that the CARES Act funding the county received cannot be used to improve broadband services. Kevin Fitzpatrick asked about the sale of Nittany Media to Zito and the plan to install a pilot project in Perry County. He was advised that CEDA-COG decided to go to Center Wisp as second bidder. They will install a tower in Juniata County in 45 days and then they will install another facility in Perry County, but it will provide service to only about 20 people and a couple businesses.

**Secretary’s Report:**

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

**Chair Report:**

Marti Roberts noted that Michelle Jones provided a comprehensive status report regarding current activities – a copy of which is included at the end of these minutes. She then reported as follows:

* The Executive Committee met last week and discussed that Michelle Jones has asked to cut back her work hours to 10 hours a week, will reassess this in another month. We are not getting traction on major projects right now and all other duties can be done in that time.
* John Gerner asked if the presentation to Harrisburg University regarding the location options for an agricultural studies campus. Marti Roberts advised that a call is scheduled for tomorrow - September 11th - to present 4 different sites. It will then be up to Harrisburg University to connect directly with landowners. Ms. Roberts said she thinks their interest in this type of program is still high, but they seem to be surprised that they cannot get land cheaper here. The impact of Covid-19 on their operations is not really known at this time, so we do not know how that will impact this project.
* Kevin Fitzpatrick asked if we have set any dates for the continuation of the Downtown Revitalization Project. Ms. Roberts said that, as discussed in the Project Status Report Michelle Jones sent out, we cannot seem to reach consensus with the boroughs on how to move forward with the Downtown Revitalization project. Our consultants cannot travel into the county under current state pandemic guidelines. We tried to create hybrid meeting where PCEDA members would meet with borough representatives on site and the consultants would participate via Zoom calls, but that hit too many barriers. Michell Jones said that the PCEV team is finding that everyone is facing the same issues. Those projects that are moving forward are doing so with very little attendance at meetings. John Gerner said that he felt the draft letter Michelle Jones developed does a good job of letting boroughs know what we are facing and what are short term plans are.
* Marti Roberts that our quarterly financial report to the Commissioners is due at the end of the month. She suggested we use the funding spreadsheet Michelle Jones developed and passed out at our August meeting to identify the funds that need to be spent before the end of June, 2021. Rich Pluta suggested we seek a time extension for the use of those funds from DCED. There was some discussion about holding off on a request of this type until early next year, however it was agreed that we would review the detailed budget the board approved against the spreadsheet.

**Staff Report:**

In addition to the Project Status Report distributed in advance of the meeting, Michelle Jones reported on the following:

* Ms. Jones outlined the creation of a Covid-19 Task Force to help county businesses respond to the pandemic impacts. Marti Roberts pointed out that several the counties surrounding us have created this type of working group to explore and share ideas for individuals, businesses, and non-profit organizations to address the challenges they face due to the pandemic. Task force members could be drawn from PCEDA, the Chamber of Commerce, the County Commissioners, financial institutions, and the like. Brenda Watson suggested that the Perry County Literacy Council would be a good addition. She suggested that, to the extent that a formal proposal could be developed in time, this task force concept could be added to the agenda for the Commissioners meeting in two weeks. Frank Campbell suggested adding an agriculture representative. Some concern over size of group and its impact on getting something done was talked about. Rich Pluta proposed a motion that PCEDA should proceed with further development of this task force concept and its presentation to the Commissioners. Frank Campbell seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a voice vote without dissent. It was suggested that a part of putting this proposal together should include securing the agreement of potential organizations/individuals to be a part of the task force prior to its presentation to the Commissioners.

**Old Business/Announcements:**

* Frank Campbell reported that the engineer and the water authority are discussing how to revise the designs in light of the Fair Board’s acquisition of an adjacent property. This could mean a substantially lower cost to provide water to the fair grounds. The engineer is also reaching out to DEP to secure their buy-in on the revised proposal. Kevin Fitzpatrick noted that New Bloomfield Water Authority is the recipient of a $323K grant to make improvements to the Carson Long reservoir. Jason Finnerty advised that DEP and the PA Rural Waterway Association will be developing a free source water protection plan for New Bloomfield’s water authority and they are hoping other municipalities will take advantage of it.

**New Business:** None

**Adjourn:**  John Gerner proposed a motion to adjourn the meeting, Brenda Watson seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a voice vote without dissent at 9:05 AM.

Project Status Report

**Local Food Promotion Program/Ag Study**: Federal Grant secured. Reimbursement requests all made (5) and final reporting complete to close out grant. Kitchen Table Consultants work is complete. Final report available on PCEDA website and internally in dropbox. Three opportunity leads were pursued but have been cold since pandemic began.

Needs: publicity about report and findings. Community outreach for project drivers.

**Branding:** Rural Business Development Grant completed, and final reporting done. Website, social media, and video are complete and live. Yard sign campaign implemented—created significant positive exposure.

Needs: professional “evergreen” content to be rescheduled throughout next year. New content should be created and scheduled. Find additional low-cost marketing opportunities to spread branding message. Campaign to encourage additional businesses to support/adopt cobrand usages.

Additional communications: PCEDA should be releasing a recurring newsletter (digital), blogging and press releases about what is happening in our economy locally and regionally, including resources, success stories, current efforts, etc. This would be a challenge will time and resources as there currently is not much county-wide collaboration or communication. I believe PCEDA should spearhead a work group for economic issues that meets regularly to share data, ideas and “word from the streets.” The group should form for the purpose of Coronavirus economic mitigation and assistance but should continue meeting at least quarterly for ongoing economic viability efforts.

**Downtown Revitalization:** Four of the nine boroughs have had initial community meetings (Newport, Millerstown, New Bloomfield, Duncannon). Two of those have also had initial follow up sessions (Millerstown and Newport). The onset of pandemic response in March delayed any in person follow up sessions for the Spring and Summer. Initial efforts to get hybrid virtual/in person sessions back onto the calendar were met with several obstacles, including travel restrictions with consultants, local logistical issues with boroughs (including some who are not hosting in person gatherings at all) and technology concerns as so much of our county suffers from poor internet access. The executive committee is recommending continuing to hold the project until we can resume in person meetings without as many barriers and community capacity for the projects rebalances. They will reassess in October.

In the interim, several grants have been applied for including the most recent to the National Endowment for Arts Our Town grant which would fund community art installations, as well as several grants applied for through the county grant coordinator that would potentially fund streetscape improvements, pedestrian safety initiatives and connectivity to outdoor recreation opportunities. We will continue to seek and pursue funding opportunities.

We still need to plan for a separate entity/501c3 to apply to the Main Street program and to plan the hiring of another staff person to coordinate the revitalization effort.

**Education:**

Our partnership with the four regional school districts continues. As the districts have come back in session this fall in unprecedented circumstances, time and resources are at a premium. However, the career coordinators at each district and PCEDA staff will be meeting virtual in September to discuss a couple virtual internship programs that might be viable options for students this school year. Board members are encouraged to continue outreach to local businesses and craftsmen to promote the idea of making themselves available to the districts for internships, job shadowing or other opportunities as needed (practice interviews, lunch and learn, etc.) PCEDA/PCCC maintain a database of interested businesses that we make available to districts and we would love to keep adding options for our local kids.

**Regional efforts**

PCEDA participates in our regional PREP and Engage! Programs and is reviewing the budget/contracts for the current fiscal year. The state is currently working on a five-month budget that is up in November. It is anticipated that the remainder of the year’s funding for PREP (flat funded) and Engage! (significantly underfunded) will look much like this five-month budget. The PREP program essentially reimburses counties for incoming economic development inquiries and the Engage! Program seeks to increase outreach to companies (and subsequent connection to the many state/federal resources for money, training, workforce, etc.) Our Engage! Responsibilities will go from initiating more than a dozen in-person business visits and business walks to hosting one virtual industry session for our county and possible two reimbursed outreach phone calls.

**Board development:**

We currently have 17 board members. We have notice that 1, Derek Whitesel, will not seek renewal when his term expires at the end of the year. We also have several who have not been active because of health and other reasons. We should consider if we are cultivating new board members or voluntarily reducing the board size.

**Grants**: attached is the updated chart of grants, deadlines, budgets, and spending. <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1IdV6gD7qcbBweqf2vLpOjootF6Hq94WuDPS9EdZr4vY/edit#gid=212613689>

Most streams have enough time or flexible to weather this lull, however the first DCED grant ends in June 2021 and will need to be spent down. The executive committee is currently looking at the options for encumbering funds (current and/or future contracts, including a downtown staff person) or discussing a request for extension.