

Antrim County

Economic Development Corporation

Mission Statement: Retain, expand, and promote County-wide economic growth and stability.

April 28, 2020
Minutes

Members present: Rachel Krino, Mike Allison, Pete Garwood, Sherry Comben, Bonnie Robbins, Dave Heeres, Veronica Welter, Kathleen Peterson
Members Absent: John Meeske
Others Present: Margie Boyd, Jeremy Scott, Joanie Moore, Sue Palmisano, Buck Love, Leslie Meyers, Dan Leonard, Ed Boettcher, Elise Craft, Christian Marcus, Karen Simpson, Tom Kern (joined at 9:30 a.m.)

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:12 by Mike Allison. Mr. Allison turned the meeting over to Rachel Krino, Vice Chair.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. COVID-19 Recovery Plan

Leslie Meyers, Emergency Manager, introduced herself to the group. She described what the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is, who makes up the Antrim County EOC, and what the EOC does. Ms. Meyers indicated the EOC is beginning to look forward and is beginning to write a recovery plan for Antrim County.

Ms. Meyers noted that in order for the recovery effort to be successful, that effort should be coordinated and unified. She said the EOC has a great deal of expertise in a number of different areas. She asked what it was the EOC could do to help the EDC in the economic recovery effort. Veronica Welter thanked Ms. Meyers for the work that she and her staff have been doing.

Pete Garwood asked present chamber representatives what they have done so far to get public input. Sue Palmisano, Executive Director of the Bellaire Chamber of Commerce, said the Bellaire Chamber sent out a survey last week, the results of which went out to chamber members yesterday. She indicated respondents are somewhat hesitant to return to “normal.” Ms. Palmisano said she is anxious to see what the County plan will look like.

Joanie Moore, Executive Director of the Mancelona Chamber of Commerce, indicated chamber members had expressed a number of concerns, including: lack of PPE for contract services and difficulty getting personal protection equipment (PPE); concern that shoppers in local stores are not being mindful of other shoppers and employees; She indicated local restaurants are putting up plastic shields at drive-thrus and cash registers. Ms. Moore said businesses would stress continued use of social distancing, regular deep cleaning of the workplace, and would continue to offer curbside services. She also said some business owners would like to see more from the County rather than the State and Federal government.

Ms. Palimsano brought attention to a Michigan Occupational Safety & Health Administration (MIOSHA) document that was received by a number of businesses and governmental entities. She would like to find a way to distill the information in the document for local businesses in a way that is easy to understand. Ms. Welter would like to have a document summary that is concise and easy to reference. Sherry Comben suggested making available all referenced documents in their entirety for those that might be interested.

Ms. Palmisano raised the question of how to mitigate liability. Tom Kern, Elk Rapids Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, said he contacted their insurance provider regarding communicable disease riders. He suggested event holders consider adding riders to their insurance policies to help mitigate liability. Mr. Kern said his chamber was considering ways to hold big events while still maintaining social distancing (booths at 10' intervals, no touching of products, etc). Mr. Kern also stressed that the chambers should not advise members, but should provide them with information. Ms. Welter said it is likely that the area will see a decrease in revenue because people are hesitant to travel. Ms. Krino said the best way to bring people to the area would be to make people feel safer.

Ms. Comben asked what role the district health department will play moving forward. Ms. Meyers said she hopes to get the health department involved. Ms. Meyers let the members know that the EOC has some PPE available to all essential workers. She also said that an EOC newsletter has gone out with this information. Ms. Meyers said it may be difficult to find some of the information that the health department has made available, but it is there.

Dan Leonard with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) said the MEDC is focused on those that are biggest hit by the shutdown - small businesses in downtown areas. Mr. Leonard provided information on the miplace.org website where a number of resources are available. He indicated the MEDC is in the final stages of finishing up a couple of programs that are targeting main street program participants, none of which are in Antrim County, that would provide additional resources. He noted "Public Spaces, Community Spaces" funding is being shifted to help small businesses that are hardest hit by COVID19. The Match on Main program (part of Main Street Program) could potentially help with inventory – max to apply for is \$50k. Both programs will be available to all businesses, not just Main Street Program members. The MEDC is targeting early June to begin rolling out some additional programs.

Ms. Welter asked about the availability of someone in Antrim County to help write grants for small businesses. Ms. Palmisano indicated the Bellaire chamber has a foundation that works specifically on grant writing. Buck Love, Business Retention & Growth Specialist with Northern Lakes Economic Alliance (NLEA), said there are specialists within the NLEA that can help with grant writing, but generally speaking, they work more with non-profits and governments on grant targeting specific projects. The NLEA works mostly with regional grants, specifically technology infrastructure, manufacturing, and healthcare not individual small businesses. Mr. Garwood said his office has been working with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) on obtaining funding to install broadband into the interior communities of Antrim County, with the emphasis on assisting the business community. Ms. Meyers said grant writing is something that could be facilitated through the EOC, whether it is training area chambers to write grants or offer EOC services for help in writing grants. She suggested creating an EDC subcommittee that is focused specifically on economic recovery in Antrim County. Mr. Kern suggested Ms. Meyers put together the subcommittee. She will get with the EDC later this afternoon.

Mr. Love said he recently attended a regional meeting at which four (4) specific concerns had been discussed:

- PPE sourcing and access;
- cash flow analysis and assistance;
- marketing strategies; and
- liability.

Mr. Love provided details on a number of resources that are available and being shared in a larger regional group.

4. Various Matters

Mr. Allison indicated another special meeting will be called once the subcommittee has come up with a plan.

12. Member/Public Comment

Elise Craft with Community Resource Development (CRD) said Rotary Charities has created a COVID response team that is available to help complete grant applications. Ms. Craft volunteered to sit on the subcommittee.

Ms. Comben thanked Dan Leonard and Buck Love for their valuable input.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:30.