

Town of Maggie Valley
Economic Development Committee
September 16, 2009
MINUTES

Members Present: Chairman Ken Brown, Lynda Bennett, Kathleen Klawitter, Stephen Shiver, June Johnson, Beth Reece, Ryan Moody, and Woody White

Staff Present: Vickie Best, Town Clerk

Others Present: HCTDA Director Lynn Collins, Fall Decorations Committee Member Sue Pendley, and Jim Blyth with Elk Realty

Meeting Called to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Town Hall Boardroom.

Before beginning Ms. Collin's presentation, the committee briefly discussed the September 15, 2009 Council meeting.

- Council directed Manager Barth to move forward with efforts to hire an events coordinator.
- The Clerk explained the agenda item for writing off the debt owed from the festival grounds to the general fund.

The Finance Officer brought it to Council's attention that a problem was mentioned during the audit this year.

During the 2008-2009 audit, the question has arose as to how to handle the debt the Festival fund owes the General Fund. As of June 30, 2009, the Festival Fund owes the General Fund \$238,310. These figures are accumulative, since the purchase the property in 2002. With the debt forgiven, it will only be the amount as of June 30, 2009 and at the end of each fiscal year Council will look at the debt and make a determination as to how to handle it on an annual basis.

Mr. Shiver recommended the town supplement the Chamber and allow the Chamber to do the festivals. Ms. Reece responded that the Chamber is not interested in being in the festival business.

When Mr. Shiver was President of a Chamber of Commerce in Florida, the municipality allocated \$25,000 to the Chamber annually.

Maggie Valley needs someone to bring events to the Festival Grounds, instead of the Town or the Chamber trying to do the events themselves.

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Haywood County Tourist Development Authority Director: Lynn Collins

Ms. Collins provided everyone with a packet of information before beginning her presentation.

Ms. Collins stated that “everything starts with a visit”. After visiting, people decide to relocate, purchase a second home, or open a new business. Economic Development begins with a visit. Ms. Collins explained how the town had the Buxton Study done several years ago and suggested that each member get a copy for review.

As for Maggie Valley being a tourist destination, more entertainment is needed. Leisure visitors are mountain visitors. HCTDA is consistently working to make Haywood County a year-round tourist destination.

The HCTDA also continues to work on collecting occupancy tax from rental homes throughout the county. Approximately 31% of the visitors stay in single family homes. Those homes should also pay occupancy tax.

Approximately 61% of the visitors come to enjoy the sites.

Ms. Collins recently attended a seminar on tourism that included medical tourism. One of the newest trends is an assistant living facility that accepts animals. These facilities have multi-year waiting lists. Some facilities are going as far as building barns, stables, and creating pastures. Pet tourism has always had an impact. People want to take their animals with them.

As a Maggie Valley and a Haywood County Planning Board member, Ms. Johnson had access to the building industry’s data. North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee all saw a major decrease in issuing building permits except for one county. It was assumed that it was misprint, when in fact the 97% increase was due to a major retirement community coming to the county. “Nationally we are an aging population.”

Maggie Valley has depended on repeat business for years, now those people are dying off and it is time that Haywood County change the way tourism has been sought. The county needs to market to the younger adults.

Maggie Valley is responsible for 58% of Haywood County’s occupancy tax revenues. 1% of the funding goes to each zip code from where it was collected. Maggie Valley has five members on the 1% committee. 33% of the funding can be used for infrastructure/ capital improvements. \$20,000 is paid annually from 1% funding for the lighting on the festival grounds. If the requesting agency is a DMO, a match is not required. If the agency is for-profit, the maximum that can be requested is \$3,000 and must be matched. Ms. Collins reported that the MV1%TDA Subcommittee is doing an excellent job distributing the funds.

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The Lodging Association is advertising to motorcycle enthusiast. The Hotel/Motel Association bought into co-op advertising to enable the members/Maggie Valley more exposure.

Ms. Johnson wanted to be assured that the MVEDC does not duplicate efforts.

Director Collins informed the committee that the HCTDA is attempting to develop more of an outreach program/ product development. "We know what visitors are looking for; it just hasn't been packaged properly. The HCTDA is currently working with the Arts Council to bring the Quilt Trail to Haywood County. The Quilt Trail has been very successful in Mitchell and Yancey County. The program has created 12 jobs. A quilt block is painted that tells a story. There are no duplicates. A book, providing directions for the driving tour and the story behind each quilt pattern is created. The business/person is provided a certification, lapel pens, and cards telling the story for the pattern. Ms. Collins purchased a book at the seminar for \$14 that takes you on a five hour tour displaying 32 quilt blocks.

The HCTDA is also very involved in "Buy Haywood" which encourages people to buy produce from local farms. There is a map showing where tailgate markets, restaurants, vineyards, farm lodging, farm stands, farms to visit, apple farms, B & B's, and U-pick farms are located through out the area.

Director Collins displayed several beautiful outdoor pictures advertising the area, targeting a wide range of visitors. One of the advertising pictures is of Soco Falls. There are 27 falls in Haywood County. The HCTDA is focusing on WNC's natural resources. The tourist guide will be downsized, easier to read, and more photos will be added. HCTDA is doing photo shoots for every season. Spring will be promoted as the "other" color season.

Mr. Shiver was interested in target markets and using vehicle wraps to "put Ghost Town on the road" and then go to big events such as food shows, bike rallies, etc.

In view of tourism, everyone needs to think much broader; the more that happens in Haywood County helps everyone.

Mr. Shiver agreed, we need to capitalize on the names that already have an identity. "Make Maggie Valley your base camp."

Tennessee advertises as having the Great Smoky Mountains. Decades ago, Maggie Valley advertised as being the gateway to the Smokies. Waynesville has now become the traditional arts area. The building where the recently closed Furniture Village store was located on Main Street in Waynesville is now going to be turned into an arts and crafts shop, where people can rent space and do demonstrations.

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Ms. Johnson has always felt that it would be a brilliant idea to bring this to the Soco Zoo property. Advertising to the birdwatchers is an excellent idea as well.

Included in the data packet provided by Director Collins was the HCTDA Marketing Plan. The committee thanked Ms. Collins for the much needed data packet and the informative presentation.

Fall Days in Maggie Valley: Ms. Sue Pendley

Ms. Pendley explained the process and with the help of Jeff Smith has grown since the inception in 2001. A group was organized that would take orders for fall decorations and then deliver them to each business. Donations were made to decorate the 200 Town light poles and vacant areas throughout, to provide color. The growers of the Big Mac pumpkins and gourds have remained the same in pricing. The corn stalks come from Balsam. The pumpkins come from Tennessee. Maggie Mountaineer Crafts puts out two large displays each year. In recent years the backdrop panel had to be repainted six times where people signed their names from as far away as France. The MVTDA 1% committee allocated \$4,500 to the Fall Days decorations and advertising.

The concept has grown tremendously. There are visitors that come and stay in Maggie Valley to enjoy the decorations. Ms. Pendley invited everyone to participate and to volunteer to put the decorations out along Soco Road.

Informal Discussion

The committee discussed assigning members to attend different town meetings to provide reports at the EDC meetings. This would assist in providing an overall picture and help to coordinate efforts more affectively. Committees often fail, due to being fragmented.

Mr. Shiver read the duties of the EDC committee from the ordinance creating the committee.

X. Duties and Responsibilities.

- (a) The economic development advisory commission shall serve as the advisory body for the town's economic development activities. The commission shall suggest policies to the Town Manager and the Town Board, within its powers and responsibilities as stated in this article. The commission shall serve as a liaison between businesses, the town and citizens of the community. The commission shall consult with and advise the Town Manager and the Town Board on matters affecting economic development policies and programs.
- (b) The economic development advisory commission shall assume duties for economic development purposes as follows. The commission shall:
 - (1) Make recommendations for the establishment of a system of incentives that will ensure continued interest in both commercial and residential growth in Maggie Valley.

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- (2) Work with the Haywood County EDC (Economic Development Commission) and the Maggie Valley Chamber of Commerce to develop programs to supplement or enhance their efforts.
- (3) Be aware of economic trends and indicators that may affect economic development in Maggie Valley and the surrounding area.
- (4) Advise and assist in recruiting new businesses or the expansion of existing businesses that may be beneficial to the community.
- (5) Other necessary and proper activities as may be needed from time to time, or as requested by the Board of Aldermen.

Although ambiguous, these are the duties and responsibilities as prescribed.

Ms. Johnson felt that the committee has to pay attention to the residential aspects.

Director Collins agreed, "You must remember who brought you to the dance."

Mr. Shiver stated that there is not a clear picture of where the majority of the tax base is levied. Due to recent annexations over the last few years, Town staff states that the majority of the tax base comes from residents. Mr. Shiver felt if the Town had a clear analysis of how many single-family homes are used as rentals; those number would shift.

Mr. Blyth, stating that he was a bricks and mortar kind of guy was able to bring Staples to Waynesville. According to the Buxton Report, (a marketing study that the town had done in 2007) an 84 Lumber would be a fit for Maggie Valley. This isn't true because an 84 Lumber store needs a trail head. Traffic counts are the most important issue to consider when trying attracting a business to your area. The Town of Sylva is in a lawsuit with the Buxton Company. Mr. Shiver agreed; the same thing happened in Homestead, Florida, "They use the same templates as a wish list."

The Clerk reported that Council has approved the purchase and installation of below-pavement traffic counters. The counters will be installed in coordination with the repaving of Soco Road in April and early May 2010.

Again, the committee agreed that Maggie Valley needs to pick the low hanging fruit i.e. our natural resources. Ms. Bennett questioned who was in charge of recruiting new businesses. Ms. Bennett also wanted to set aside a meeting to brainstorm.

Mr. Blyth asked that the committee think "large". "Who would have thought that a nursing home would be included in tourism? We could have gotten a nursing home in Maggie Valley years ago."

Some suggestions to address at the next meeting scheduled for October 7, 2009

- When considering branding, think about what we already have.
- Build on what we have. Tag on to the Great Smoky Mountains 75th Anniversary. Reclaim the Smoky Mountains and the Blue Ridge Parkway.
- Advertise Cataloochee Valley and the elk.

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- Cherokee is open to working with Maggie Valley; investigate getting transportation back and forth across Soco Mountain from Cherokee to Maggie Valley.

ON MOTION OF MR. SHIVER, SECONDED BY MS. JOHNSON, WITH ALL IN FAVOR THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7:35 P.M.

Ken Brown, Chairman

Vickie Best, CMC, Town Clerk