



THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITIES
OF BEDFORD COUNTY AND
TOWN OF BEDFORD, VIRGINIA



EAST MAIN STREET
BEDFORD, VIRGINIA 24523

MEETING MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY OF THE COUNTY OF BEDFORD, VA
and the TOWN OF BEDFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Bedford County Administration Ground Floor Training Room
122 E Main Street
Bedford, VA 24523
March 17, 2022
5:30 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Bedford County Chairman Robertson at 5:34 PM.

Economic Development Authority:

Present: Chairman Jimmy Robertson – Dist. 6; Vicki Gardner - Dist. 2; Wyatt Walton - Dist. 3; Kristy Milton - Dist. 5; Matthew Braud - Dist. 4

Absent: Rhonnie Smith - Dist. 1; Jim Messier - Dist. 7

Staff Present: Amanda Kaufman - Deputy County Administrator; Pam Bailey – Economic Development Director; Holley Scheffel – Business Programs Coordinator

Town of Bedford Economic Development Authority:

Present: Chairman Jonathan Buttram, Liz Brown, Ryan Kirkpatrick, Lynn Scott, David Sensenig, Michelle Crumpacker

Absent: Kevin Turner

Staff Present: Mary Zirkle - Town Director of Planning and Community Development

(1) INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Robertson thanked everyone for attending the meeting and noted that this was a great opportunity for both EDAs to work together with the shared goal of bringing economic development to Bedford. Chairman Robertson personally thanked and acknowledged Jim Messier for his service and longevity as the previous EDA Chairman.

(2) COUNTY PRIORITIES

A. Review County EDA Strategic Plan

Chairman Robertson gave some background on the strategic plan and pointed out that 2013 was the last time it had been updated. He said the strategy has changed as to how to address economic development due to instabilities in the economy, marketplace, and labor force. He indicated that he, Mrs. Gardner, and Ms. Bailey met in September 2021 after receiving results and recommendations from a consulting firm. This firm was charged with analyzing, reviewing, and providing

recommendations for the strategic plan. The committee of three used the consulting firm's findings to update and simplify the current plan and ensure that the EDA's goals and benchmarks were aligned.

B. Review County Economic Development priorities

Chairman Robertson also stated the four primary goals of the EDA. They are to support the expansion and retention of existing businesses, attract new economic opportunities, assist in developing a skilled workforce, and increase awareness of economic development assets. He went on to say that the primary focus for new business growth is on the following industries: manufacturing, service sector projects new to Bedford County, tech-based projects, real estate redevelopment projects, new business start-ups, and retail and commercial projects.

In addition, he shared some priorities of the EDA. Those include maintaining a minimum of 200 acres of land that is immediately available for build-to-suit within 40-60 days. He also spoke of other strategies such as promoting the benefit of doing business in Bedford, emphasizing the low cost of doing business here, the ability to offer competitive enterprise and technology zones, providing excellent opportunities for quality of life, continuing to build relationships and open communication, maintaining an inventory of available real estate, executing an effective marketing program, assisting in developing a skilled workforce through partnerships with local, regional, and state programs and opportunities, and increasing awareness of Bedford County's assets.

- C. Ms. Bailey noted the Board of Supervisors (BOS) also completed its strategic plan. Recently, there was a day-long meeting where county directors came together to review the BOS's plan. The purpose of this meeting was to review and analyze how the BOS' plan applied to each director and their department. One objective of the plan is to enhance communication and collaboration with key partners such as Ag partners, the school system, and business partners. Another initiative from the BOS strategic plan was to support the evaluation of social programs to increase independence and reduce poverty. Expanding tourism was also noted as a priority.

(3) TOWN PRIORITIES

A. Town Business / Industrial Park

Chairman Buttram spoke briefly on the Town's strategic plan. He indicated that they are focused on three main projects and those are an industrial park, a business class hotel, and a business development center. He stated that the boutique hotel currently under construction in the town came through the EDA and is now off their books. The ETA for completion is expected in Fall 2023.

B. Business Class Hotel study findings

This project was sparked last year after Vinton announced that they were going to have a business class hotel; this announcement was made during Covid. The Town of Bedford hired the same consultant that Vinton used to conduct an Economic study to see if a business class hotel was viable. The economic report is complete and the results suggest a 95-room hotel. This is currently estimated to be a \$10.5 million dollar project. The Town is now exploring options for a site developer. This project has been in the works for a long time and will serve a variety of purposes.

C. Business Development Center

This is the lowest priority right now due to timing and other projects already underway. The primary focus at present is on housing. He feels that the business plan will build itself in or around 2024. The priority is to get more office space. However, there is a large project that they are working on behind the scenes that blend an industrial park model with a business park model. The intent is to put together a regional workforce center and the Town is currently working on securing a location for the plan. They are currently exploring options as to the best use of space for a project of this magnitude. Metal fabrication is the ideal industry for this initiative due to the overwhelming demand in the region. Once it all comes together, CVCC and other local businesses will work collaboratively to provide hands-on internships for students. The Town will ask for county support on this project moving forward and a press release announcing this initiative is forthcoming.

(4) TRAIN STATION

A. Norfolk-Southern Study – November 15, 2022

Mrs. Zirkle stated that on October 25th information from the previous findings was made available regarding the rail study. There is enough support required for a railway stop in Bedford. Norfolk Southern stated that there are no material delays to their use of the tracks. This means that Amtrak would also be able to use this rail as well.

Del. Terry Austin has assured Mrs. Zirkle that this project will happen. The Town is operating under that promise, and they are waiting on the budget to see how much money will be allocated for this project under the General Assembly. The Passenger Rail Authority is where the money will ultimately be coming from. There are still quite a few unknowns with regards to funding as it relates to state and local dollars.

It should be noted that one directive that came from the study was the requirement for Macon Street to have better access. Mrs. Zirkle stated that a grant is currently in the works to be submitted for this improvement.

Mrs. Milton asked about the success of The Otter Bus. Mrs. Zirkle noted that The Otter Bus has been extremely successful and operates every Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 10-4. A grant was recently submitted to expand the bus service to Mondays. The ultimate goal is for The Otter Bus to run five to seven days a week in order to get people to work. The Bedford Community Health Foundation has been funding this trial period for The Otter Bus up to this point, but the grant would help alleviate the cost. If the grant is received, August 1st would be when those monies would be available. The bus runs on an hour loop and the stops include the YMCA, Elba's, the apartments, health facilities, Wal-Mart, CVS, the Health Department, and the Bedford Memorial Hospital. An app can be downloaded that shows where The Otter Bus is at any time.

(5) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Ms. Bailey spoke regarding the results of a recent childcare survey. Childcare continues to be the greatest challenge for working parents. This is due to several factors. Families who do not qualify for subsidized childcare are facing two-year waitlists for their children to be accepted. Additionally, new

childcare centers require a minimum of 100 children to open. Existing childcare centers are also facing a multi-year waitlist. Another factor is that facilities that have unfilled spots for subsidized childcare are not eligible to free up that space for full-price paying families. These factors combined show the need for additional facilities with alternative options for families. To combat this challenge, several businesses have provided more flexibility with their workers and their work hours. This information sparked a conversation about options and suggestions for additional childcare possibilities. Increasing affordable childcare options would also encourage young families to stay in Bedford. Ms. Bailey will bring the issues, concerns, suggestions, and recommendations back to the childcare committee.

Ms. Bailey shared that on Thursday, May 12th, there will be a Business Appreciation event at Beale's. The time will run from 4:30-6:30 PM that evening. Another announcement was made regarding upcoming Farmer's Market dates. The regular market begins on May 7th. The Bedford Farmer's Market is also moving to Saturdays. In addition, Vittone Farms will no longer be participating as a Farmer's Market.

A question was posed by Chairman Robertson about available real estate for businesses looking to move or expand in Bedford. He stated there are several empty properties that are in town and county. He wanted to know how this information was being shared and how people can find out what is available. Ms. Bailey and Mrs. Zirkle indicated that they communicate daily on this exact concept. They also work with local real estate companies and brokers to see what is active on the market. Ms. Bailey stated that Bedford County Economic Development also has a commercial page on the website for people to view.

(6) ADJOURN

6:59 PM