

STEBEN COUNTY AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, October 7, 2020

9:45 a.m.

*Legislative Chambers, 3rd Floor, Annex Building
Bath, New York*

****MINUTES****

COMMITTEE:	Robin K. Lattimer, Chair Aaron I. Mullen	K. Michael Hanna, Vice Chair Paul E. Van Caesele	Hilda T. Lando
STAFF:	Jack K. Wheeler Tammy Hurd-Harvey Matt Sousa	Christopher Brewer Andy Morse Mitch Alger	Brenda Scotchmer Amy Dlugos
LEGISLATORS:	Scott J. Van Etten Steven P. Maio Frederick G. Potter	Carol A. Ferratella John V. Malter Gary B. Roush	Kelly H. Fitzpatrick Robert V. Nichols Gary D. Swackhamer
OTHERS:	Tess McKinley, Executive Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension James Johnson, Executive Director, Steuben County Industrial Development Agency Jill Staats, Steuben County Industrial Development Agency Kevin Costello, Executive Director, Steuben County Conference & Visitors' Bureau		

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Lattimer called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mrs. Lando stated I would just like to clarify that I had asked about Mr. Swackhamer about the Soil & Water appropriation and why he didn't have the same reaction as he had when Cornell Cooperative Extension presented their budget.

MOTION: APPROVING THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 2, 2020, MEETING AS AMENDED MADE BY MR. MULLEN. SECONDED BY MR. HANNA. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 5-0.

III. DEPARTMENTAL REQUESTS

A. Planning

1. **Appointing a Certifying Officer for CDBG Projects** – Mrs. Dlugos stated with CDBG projects we are required to appoint a Certifying Officer for review and because I am retiring, she would recommend appointing Matt Sousa.

MOTION: APPOINTING MATTHEW SOUSA CERTIFYING OFFICER FOR CDBG PROJECTS MADE BY MR. MULLEN. SECONDED BY MR. HANNA. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 5-0. Resolution Required.

The committee congratulated Mrs. Dlugos on her retirement.

2. **Extension of Housing Study Contracts Terms** – Mrs. Dlugos requested authorization to extend the terms of the housing study contracts from September 30, 2020 to December 31, 2020. Due to COVID, there was a delay. She anticipates they will be making a presentation of the study in November. This extension will

give the contractors, Susan Payne and MJ Lawrence Consulting, time to wrap things up and get everything into the Appalachian Regional Commission for reimbursement.

MOTION: EXTENDING THE TERMS OF THE HOUSING STUDY CONTRACTS WITH SUSAN PAYNE AND MJ LAWRENCE CONSULTING THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2020 MADE BY MR. MULLEN. SECONDED BY MRS. LANDO. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 5-0.

3. **Transportation Plan** – Mrs. Lando commented the Corning City Council approved a \$10,000 grant to work with the County on the plan for transportation. Mrs. Dlugos stated yes, that is the Local Government Efficiency Grant from last December and the County and the City are paying the local share. We are doing some things and looking at how to do operations more efficiently on the administrative side. Mrs. Lando asked what was done in the past? Mrs. Dlugos replied we had looked at the coordination of the actual services, but we haven't looked at the contract and grant administration side of it.

B. County Manager

1. **License Agreement with Steuben Centers** – Mr. Wheeler stated we received a request from Steuben Centers for a license agreement and Ms. Prossick sent everyone the draft license. Ms. Prossick explained Steuben Centers contacted us. They are required to have numerous egresses. There is an egress out the back door, but the last couple of steps go into the public safety building's parking lot. They are asking to use that for emergency evacuation purposes. The space that they would be using is about 400 square feet. We had asked if they wanted to have an easement and they said no, that this was just for their use and a license would be sufficient.

Mr. Mullen stated I think this is a good idea. Will we be able to revoke it at any time? Ms. Prossick replied yes, with sixty days' notice.

MOTION: APPROVING A LICENSE AGREEMENT WITH STEUBEN CENTERS RELATIVE TO USING A SMALL PORTION OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING PARKING LOT FOR EMERGENCY EVACUATION PURPOSES MADE BY MR. MULLEN. SECONDED BY MRS. LANDO FOR DISCUSSION.

Mr. Wheeler commented part of the line are pretty close to our property by the impound yard and the back Jail parking lot. I don't see any operational issues for us. He commented Centers is now actually constructing the independent living center now.

VOTE ON PREVIOUS MOTION: ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 5-0. Resolution Required.

IV. **OUTSIDE AGENCIES**

A. Steuben County Conference & Visitors' Bureau

1. **2021 Budget Presentation** – Mr. Costello shared a PowerPoint presentation with the committee. He reviewed the 2020 Room Tax Allocations and the 2020 Estimate of Room Tax Revenues and Room Tax Expenditures versus Revenues. Additionally he provided percentages of estimated Room Tax for 2021. He stated that the revenue for 2021 is difficult to forecast, however a conservative estimate is \$550,000 unless containing COVID happens.

Mr. Swackhamer stated thank you for the time you put into this and for asking for a reduction and not looking for the pie in the sky. Great job on your report. Mr. Costello stated his approach was very conservative and the Room Tax revenue is just an estimate. He stated in his organization they have taken the necessary steps to cut expenses and manage within budget constraints. He is asking for funding in the amount of \$412,500.

Mr. Mullen stated with the room tax revenues, it was hard for a lot of people, however, lake rentals are booming. Have you seen a lot of room tax revenues from that? Are hotel revenues down? Mr. Costello replied room tax revenue through September 25, 2020, was \$409,000 compared to \$830,000 at the end of September 2019. That did include the receipts from the Air B&B contract that the County has. We have not gotten the September report

yet and hopefully we will see a little online growth in September/October. If we are lucky, next year we will see flat or a little incline. Mr. Costello stated we are definitely seeing people traveling into the area and staying at short-term rental properties. We should see an increase in Air B&B revenues. Mr. Mullen asked should we be doing something to try and collect on other short-term rentals? Mr. Costello replied my personal opinion is yes. Other counties have enacted room tax on short-term rental properties. Every year something goes before the State Legislature and nothing has been passed yet. Mr. Van Etten commented Yates has room tax on short-term rentals and it was very contentious initially.

Mrs. Lando asked what about VRBO? Mr. Wheeler replied we have reached out to VRBO to get a similar agreement to what we have with Air B&B. We are also working with NYSAC on this. Mrs. Lando commented it would be great if VRBO signed on. Ms. Lattimer commented I would be more inclined to pursue voluntary compliance.

Mr. Van Etten stated I appreciate what Mr. Costello did with his presentation, but the fact that you recognize the room tax is way off, this was a responsible way to do it. I would hope that the other outside agencies recognized that, but it will be up to us to determine.

Mrs. Lando stated as a board member, the percentages are the way to go as it is fair, although the other agencies may not think so. I appreciate Mr. Costello and his staff for their work on this.

B. Steuben County Industrial Development Agency

1. **Steuben County Industrial Development Agency** – Mr. Johnson provided the committee with a PowerPoint review of 2019 activities.

- *COVID Response* – Mr. Johnson stated I cannot say enough about the County's response to COVID, particularly the work of Mr. Wheeler and Mrs. Smith. With the Governor's recent announcement about starting to look at zones and hotspots, we wanted to make sure that we let our businesses know that it is not occurring here, but that it could.
 - *Steuben County Emergency Loan Fund* – Mr. Johnson stated this did not get as much interest as we had originally thought. Our program came out after some of the Federal programs. To-date we have approved 11 loans and two are pending. We have disbursed \$148,500 in funds. He commented the funds are administered by REDEC and they have done a phenomenal job of partnering resources. I believe we will see an uptick in demand as we go into fall and winter.
 - *Primary Point of Contact* – We have served as a primary point of contact for the business community through COVID. Mr. Johnson stated I believe we will see a lot of our businesses struggle through the coming months.
 - *Workforce* – Mr. Johnson stated workforce is a large issue. We have a 9 percent unemployment rate, so many businesses are saying they cannot find employees. A couple of reasons for this is the economic assistance stimulus package kept people from going back to work and childcare is also a huge issue as now kids are home in a virtual learning format at least part-time. He commented another issue is do the needs of the businesses align with the skills of the workforce.
 - *Repositioning* – Mr. Johnson stated we are working closely with the Village of Bath and Erwin on projects. We have received a proposal for the Philips site to do a redevelopment plan. This election year is causing havoc with the economy as well as COVID and the uncertainty of what the future will look like from a political standpoint.

- *Business Retention, Repositioning & Expansion Strategy* – Mr. Johnson stated this is a collaboration between our agency and Three Rivers to identify opportunities for business growth and repositioning, new business development and investment and potential joint initiatives between regional business. We are looking at targeted business such as healthcare, manufacturing and advanced manufacturing. We have met with six businesses and this has been very well received. We are very excited to keep meeting and roll this out.
- *Projects*
 - *Dana Lyons Redevelopment* – Providence Housing has submitted a \$17 million redevelopment plan to the State which would provide 47 apartments and 8,659 square feet community arts space.
 - *IDA Park* – We are looking at a new healthcare complex, Finger Lakes Community Health, to begin construction in 2021.
 - *Solar* – Mr. Johnson stated we have investments in the Town of Bath, Troupsburg and Dansville. There are six new solar projects in development.
 - *Wind* – Mr. Johnson stated Baron Wind and Canisteo Wind will begin construction in 2021. Eight Point Wind will begin construction in 2022. Another 10 projects have gone through the approval process. We expect 2021 and 2022 to be big years for renewable energy.
 - *Infrastructure* – Mr. Johnson stated J.C. Smith continues to work on various infrastructure projects in the County. The Hammondsport Sewer project is now where it needs to be and the engineering is underway. By the beginning of next year they will be going out to bid. The Prattsburgh Sewer project is for the municipal sewer system for the downtown area. Mr. Smith has secured EDA funding and they are lining up the remainder of the local match. The other project is the Town of Bath Water Quality Study. We are working with Hunt Engineers and the Town to make sure they do it in a manner that is thoughtful and smart.

Mrs. Lando stated you had said at a prior meeting that the Prattsburgh Sewer project was almost an emergency because of Empire. Is the timing of the project okay for Empire? Mr. Johnson replied that continues to be a concern and something that we are very cognizant of. There is a \$400,000 gap and we are looking at creative and unique ways to fill that gap. This is very concerning to Empire and others that they do not have sewer there, but there is a financial gap and we are trying to figure out a means to close it.

Mrs. Lando stated there is a shopping center that borders right on Corning into Riverside. Are you involved in any of the rehabbing of that or replacing it? Mr. Johnson replied if you are talking about the old dry cleaner that is under demolition, yes. I have had a number of conversations with Mark Ryckman and Corning Enterprises have committed Fred Arcuri to help with that. We have shared some of our ideas and contacts about what could go there. We are serving a support role. Mr. Maio commented I know with that particular property the City of Corning had some tax incentives? Mr. Johnson replied any incentives that the property developer could access would be dependent on the use. There is the possibility to look at other tax incentives. The fact that the property is under demolition and the DEC issues are worked out is positive. There is so much uncertainty around COVID that does make it a little challenging.

Mr. Mullen stated I have a question regarding banking in the County. Avoca and Bath both lost Five Star Bank branches and Community Bank just took over Steuben Trust. There are two Community Banks in Bath and I'm assuming there are some other ones that are coming in or may be at risk of going out. Do you know if there has

been any buzz about other banks coming in or are we looking at losing a lot of brick and mortar banks? Mr. Johnson replied when a bank closes, they have some restrictive covenants or non-competing clauses to keep other banks from coming in. I think the banking market is such that we will see a lot of brick and mortar on the market for development. I don't think brick and mortar banks will be the future of banking. COVID has put that over the edge and the days of people walking in and seeing a teller are largely over.

Mr. Potter stated with regard to the solar project in Troupsburg, there have been issues with one of the projects and the town is considering a moratorium. Are you working with the town and developer to resolve that? Mr. Johnson replied no. There are several communities that are concerned about solar development and many are not prepared. We are working with our partners and Southern Tier Central to make sure that communities are prepared for this. Ms. Staats stated with the Abundant Energy project she has not heard anything. My understanding is that project is almost complete. I can reach out to the town and see what is going on. Was there a particular item of dispute? Mr. Potter replied it is the way it was built; very sloppy, very unsightly. The town is considering a resolution to put in place a moratorium because of this project. Mr. Mullen commented a lot of towns are working on solar laws right now.

Mr. Malter stated there was an article in the paper that Gunlocke is laying off more people and that one of the production lines is going out of Wayland. Is this a sign of things to come? Mr. Johnson replied what the article in the paper references is something that has been in planning for over a year. They had discussed moving the chair division to a plant in Iowa and they are slowly doing that. The focus of HNI is to establish centers of excellence focusing on specific types of furniture. Gunlocke is the center of excellence for box and wood operations. Anything not related to a table or desk is being moved out. The removal of the chair division will impact 27 employees. There has been a little bit of an extension because during COVID they used those employees to make PPE. This was in the works for a while. I can tell you that this is one of those businesses that I get concerned about and that is why we keep in constant communication over the future of that facility. In fact I had a conference call with them two weeks ago. The upside is they are looking now at other divisions and how they can bring work that is wood related in from other divisions. So that was promising to hear. Corporate is telling us that this is part of their corporate restructuring. The Center of Excellence is a new direction/trend. They will be the Wayland Center of Excellence for Wood Products. Mr. Malter commented you would have thought that HON would have made a statement to the effect to satisfy the people in Wayland. Mr. Johnson stated we are hopeful they will be better communicating to the public in the future.

Mr. Hanna asked how much acreage is required for a solar site? In real estate we are seeing they are looking at a range of about 50 acres. Ms. Staats replied it depends on the size and scope of the solar farm. Community projects that are 5 megawatts are generally in the 5 – 30 acre range. If you are seeing 300 acres, that is pretty large. Typically 5 – 7 acres is about 1 megawatt. All of the projects we have been seeing, with the exception of one, have been 5 megawatts. There is a project in Allegany County that is 93 megawatts.

Ms. Lattimer stated you said that with respect to workforce development, employers are struggling to upgrade skills for the unemployed, with COVID that has been much more exacerbated? Mr. Johnson replied correct. When you are below 5 percent unemployment, you are almost fully employed. The challenges with upscaling are more difficult than when you are at 9 percent unemployment. Child care is an example. How many are not going back to work because of virtual learning? Those without flexibility have to stay home as there is no other choice. I think we really need to understand what these challenges are before we can put forth any recommendations for how to battle it. The information we get from the State is one month behind. This is a huge issue right now and how we better it is a big question. We cannot predict what will happen with COVID and the State. Ms. Lattimer stated what worries me is even if you define the challenges and come up with a plan, where will the money come from? Mr. Johnson replied that in and of itself is part of the challenge and I would think there is some opportunity to work with some of our area industries. There may be an opportunity if we can find a solution, they could be a partner in that. Mr. Mullen stated child care was an issue before COVID. Even if COVID is gone in 2020/2021, we will still have child care issues. Mr. Van Caesele asked how much of this is related to or blamed on COVID? Mr. Johnson replied COVID exacerbated the issue. This presented different challenges, but the

issues are the same. Instead of needing after-school care, it is needing in-school care. For the most part COVID just exacerbated the issue.

Ms. Fitzpatrick commented hopefully we can leverage and put ourselves in a position where we have to address issues such as broadband, child care and harness that and use that to our advantage and tackle these big issues. Mr. Johnson stated for the most part every manufacturer we have met with in the past month have said they are busy, really busy. They are very reluctant to add employees to meet the increased demand. This is a good sign as there is pent up demand in the economy. The prolonged shutdown of the economy could evaporate quickly.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

A. *Animal Cruelty RFP* – Mr. Mullen asked what is the status of the RFP for housing animals seized as a result of animal cruelty cases? Ms. Prossick replied she has not heard anything back from District Attorney Baker but she will follow up.

MOTION: TO ADJOURN MADE BY MR. VAN CAESELE. SECONDED BY MR. HANNA. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted by

Amanda L. Chapman
Deputy Clerk
Steuben County Legislature