



Russell County Economic Development and CVB Minutes

Date: 1/12/2023

Time: 7:30AM

Location: Meridy's – Russell

Call to Order: Mike Parsons at 7:31AM

In Attendance

Ashley Wickham, Mike Parsons, Maggie Holloway, Jon Quinday, John Fletcher, Janet Funk, Duke Strobel, Jon Birky, Don Varner, Jim Cross, Aaron Talbott, and Sarah LaRosh – Network Kansas

Approval of Minutes

Jon Birky moved to approve minutes from November 2022. Jon Quinday seconded the motion. Motion approved.

Approval of Financials

Ashley had \$25,000.00 at the end of 2022 moved to help with salaries, her normal transactions include advertising, utilities, and community support. Mike reviewed the Economic Development funds with a diagram to help explain the separation of accounts. The diagram was presented to all board members in their packets. Everything will now be coming out of fund 155-the operating budget, including salaries. CVB will still transfer \$25,000.00 in 2023 to help cover salaries. Discussion was had about the revenue on the financial sheets coming out at \$0. This could be due to the new program. John Fletcher moved to approve financials from December 2022. Jon Birky seconded the motion. Jon Quinday opposed; motion approved 7 to 1.

Russell County Loan Program

Currently there are at least 6 or 7 people going through SBCD for business plans. Current balance is \$52,344.80. There were 2 delinquent loans, one of the two has gone to the county attorney. The other one is almost in the black.

E-Community Loan Program

Sarah LaRosh from Network Kansas came to talk about the Patterson Family Foundation and their GAP financing program. Any businesses that go through E-Community funding can apply for the Patterson Family Foundation program. This is a calendar year program. First come, first serve. The Start-up Kansas fund has been closed. There will be no YEC for Russell High School this school year (a Network Kansas program). Aiming for next school year with Mr. Banker.

Economic Development Update – Mike Parsons

- **Strategic Plan:** Mike provided handouts. There are 5 main objectives (housing, childcare, community development, workforce development and business retention/recruitment and expansions. This document fluctuates and is always changing. The key performance indicators will indicate objectives that have been met.
- **NRP Launch:** Has launched, we have received 5 applicants in two weeks.
- **Project Bookworm-** A community group in Luray has acquired the old Luray school building. The building is in immaculate shape. The goal is for a community center with other things like a kitchen/restaurant, gym, possibly a daycare. Working on funding, applied for the SEED Grant but did not receive it.
- **Workforce Development Proposal:** Northwest Kansas EICI (Economic Innovation Center Inc.) has a program we'd like to apply for. Mike has been in communication with Kayla at the City of Russell. They would like to meet with the area's top employers. The program would offer grant funds that could be used for employee recruitment or retainment. They have started exploring a workforce plan and once it's in place they will get started on the grant. The program has \$60,000.00 in funds available.
- **Project Promise-** Confidential project. It's in the city of Russell and expanding outside of Russell. They filed their paperwork with the state. The paperwork is in for \$1.15 million. A possibility of 3 to 5 jobs.
- **Project T-Bone-** A partner has been found. They are currently going through a business plan and meetings to find a building. A building has potentially been narrowed down.
- **Buc-ee's Recruitment Effort-** Buc-ee's released expansion plans. The effort to recruit Buc-ee's is a partnership with Russell Development. The acreage is available. There are instructions on their website on how to submit for a new location. The plan is to show everyone step-by-step on how to get there on their website and have everyone send in the same phrase. We would like to do a flyer or promotion explaining what to do. The thought is if they see multiple requests from Russell, KS they might consider our location.
- **Project Freaky Fast-** Jimmy Johns owner bought a house and land for hunting. The thought is maybe we should reach out and see if he'd like to invest in the community, he bought some land in.

- **Project Pivot-** Working with a client in the K18 area on a business startup with a potential of creating 3 to 5 jobs.
- **Project Lantern-** Going through a business plan for a floral/gift shop. Client is currently working on a lease for a new building.
- **Community Roundtables/13 Ways Planning-** 13 Ways program has been taken over by the Russell County Leadership Program. We are starting back up this year with community roundtables. There has been discussion about doing the roundtables during Chamber Afterhours. This has not been confirmed, so for now they will do them at 12:00 at Espresso Etc every 3rd Thursday.
- **SFSG/Billboard Program-** Storefront/Signage Grant has closed and we were able to give out the max of \$14,000.00. A total of 7 applications were received, with that number they did not have to be sent out for review. The press release will be going out soon. Woodpecker Archives, Good Karma Dairy, Lucas Community Theater, Paul Lampert, Russell Specialty Books and Gifts, Russell Rec, and The Lodge at Russell. The Billboard program was approved by the commissioners and has been launched. 2 businesses will split the board for 2 years. The commissioners will approve the applications. So far 7 applications have been received. Mike is currently trying to find another billboard on the East side of Interstate for the same price - \$155/per month for the Northern communities in the county. The goal is that the businesses see the worth in billboards and will get their own after the 2 years is up. Applications will be open until March 1st, 2023. Discussion was had about the e-mail blast to the businesses in the county about the program. The office needs to compile the office email and business lists so we can go through them with the board and get everything updated during the next meeting.
- **Internships/Apprenticeships-** Started communications with Ogallala Commons. Some interns are already lined out and are looking for some funds. Switchgrass is looking at one and Agrilead, Inc. is looking at doing it again. There might be a partnership with Russell High School. Need to start working with the City of Russell to see what they want to do with their internship program, this was part of the city dues.
- **Promotional Video-** Ashley and Mike have discussed doing a new promotional video to promote development opportunities, what we have to offer, tourism, etc. They are exploring options. Working on getting quotes in. Estimating it would probably cost somewhere between \$12,000.00 to \$15,000.00.

Other Projects

- Project Open Mind – New client who wants to live in Russell County. He always purchases a building to fix up. They have already done some building tours. He may lease building out for business or include living spaces.
- LATCF Funds (Local Assistant Tribal Consistency Funds) – The county has the option to apply for \$100,000.00. \$50,000.00 this year, \$50,000.00 next year to be used for just about anything other than lobbying. This is something only the County Treasurer can apply for. Trisha is working on it, application date is January 31st, 2023. The office will

hopefully request funds from the commission for some of our projects if the funds are received from this program.

- Housing - Emma Estates has broken ground, already pouring concrete, hopefully they will have the house sitting and up for sale in a month. Mike is also working with a developer that acquired land in the Dorrance area. They would like to do small scale apartment style living.
- Mike was asked to be on the Northwest Kansas Housing Board. They are planning on doing new developments and maybe selling some of the homes they already have around the area and reinvesting in the new. They already have some land in the area to build on.
- Project Tooth-ache- After looking at some properties he has decided he's going to build.
- Mike has a client that's looking into opening an insurance brokerage company for Medicare and other things.

Tourism Update- Ashley Wickham

- Ashley and Mike have ads up at the Dream Theater.
- Tradeshow season has started. Ashley is leaving today for the Sports and Travel show in Denver. Feb. 7th – 9th she will be in Topeka for the “Destination State House” Legislative updates. It will be her first time attending. Feb. 23rd – 25th Ashley will be in Omaha for the Omaha Sports show.
- Ashley purchased the Russell County 2021 report through the state. That should be coming in. It shows the sales tax that was brought in, how many visitors we had, etc. Last report purchased was in 2017.
- Ashley is helping one of the hotels get in contact with KDOT for interstate signage.
- Ashley is still the Northwest Kansas Rep for tourism so she will be attending the roundtable meeting in Topeka on January 17th, 2023.
- Fairport has a new Air B&B. The Port at Fairport. They have been requesting tourist information from the office every time they have someone stay.
- April 15th, 2023, there will be a Road Trip USA convention in Hays with travel writers. Northwest Kansas will be there to represent. Ashley was asked if she could host some of the travel writers the day before and show them around Russell County. She's working on hotel accommodations for this.
- 2023 Kansas Travel Guides are out. The listings for 2024 have already started so she's been reaching out to the local businesses for that.
- Wilson Lake is on the cover of the Northwest Kansas Travel Guide. The guide is already out.
- Ashley learned at the November I-70 meetings that travelers who drive electric cars use a map that shows electric stations. If your community doesn't have a charging station, they typically don't bother to stop. She believes the 24/7 expansion will include some charging stations which is a benefit for the county.

- The new hotel that is supposed to be coming, received a letter from the City of Russell for a notice of default. It gives them 30 days to take care of the default or request an amendment. They have purchased additional land so some incentives will need to be rewritten.
- There is a marketing grant Ashley would like to apply for to help fund the promotional video. The grant doesn't open until June 1st, 2023, and closes August 1st, 2023, with them announcing grant recipients in September. The max on the grant is \$20,000.00. Mike asked if they could start on it before receiving grant funds, Ashley is going to look into that.
- Discussion about the success of sport shows was brought up. Aaron came up with an idea of using a promotional discount card with area businesses. That way we would be able to track how many cards have been used and how many visitors from the trade shows are visiting Russell County.

Funding Requests

Lucas Chamber of Commerce requested \$500.00 for help with their brochures. We have funded this in the past. Jon Quinday motions that we fund the \$500.00 request, Jim Cross seconded the motion. Motion approved.

Community Updates

- Russell – Water Softening Plant is about 60% complete. South Fossil/Edward Ave project is still going. This summer there will be a mill & overlay on West Wichita. State Street (Fossil to the Senior Parking lot at the high school) sidewalks will be rebuilt this summer. Received federal funds for public safety radios and roads. The city is doing good on grants to fund their projects. They will have another investment profile in Site Selection Magazine. Working on lobbying efforts. Also working on the R9 Ranch. Jim and John had a good meeting with Senator Moran. They are also currently looking for storage for rent or lease for 4 to 5 years.
- Luray is bringing back the Fish Fry.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Thursday, February 16th, 2023, at 7:30am via zoom.

