

IRON COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
Iron County Courthouse, Hurley Wisconsin 54534
Tuesday, October 22, 2024

Approved: Minutes approved December 18, 2024.

Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Rick Boes.

Pledge of Allegiance: Recited

Acknowledge proper meeting posting: Youngs acknowledged.

Roll Call and Introductions: *Iron County Board of Supervisors*—Rick Boes, Committee President; Larry Youngs, Committee Vice President; Doug Swartz; Jamey Francis; Roy Haegar; *Business Owners*—Julie Doucette; Brooke Gilbertson; Neil Gilbertson; Autumn Hill; Ken Saari; Karl Zinsmaster; *Chambers of Commerce*—Jackie Wiedower, Hurley Chamber of Commerce; Melissa Copp, Mercer Chamber of Commerce; Gary Pelkola, Hurley Chamber of Commerce

Election of Officers: Nomination of Officers to serve as Treasurer and Secretary. Julie Doucette nominated for Treasurer by Francis, seconded by Saari. Vote to approve, all aye. Nomination of Secretary tabled. Hill expressed interest in future nomination.

Discuss vision of the future for Iron County Economic Development: General discussion on how to structure this committee and what areas of emphasis might be prioritized.

- Saari discussed the importance of youth retention and what features and businesses support that goal.
 - Housing availability is a concern here, as it is in many places across the country.
 - The number and variety of restaurants are a concern, as well as the lack of other leisure activities.
 - Iron County has an abundance of natural resources—how can this committee support or increase natural resource tourism?
 - A survey may be helpful in determining more specific topics and attitudes.
- Francis and Youngs briefly discussed Impact Seven Hurley-HOMES housing development.
 - Development will be 40 duplex-style units, located off US Hwy 77, near Cary Mine Market.
 - Others mentioned smaller, privately funded housing development projects in Ironwood.
- Doucette discussed need for suitable daycare facility in supporting youth retention and economic development.
 - Cornucopia was mentioned as a potential case study to better understand targeted growth and development.
- Early priority areas include childcare/daycare center, housing for all income levels, and broadband internet infrastructure expansion.

Budget Overview: Youngs presented approximate budget numbers. The committee will operate with a \$10,000 budget, half for advertising and half for other uses.

- Website will be high priority, support will expire at end of year.

- Committee discussed Travel Northwest Wisconsin, a regional tourism promotion group that has been a useful tool for both Chambers of Commerce in the county.
- Short discussion of economic development news around the county, including Cobblestone Inn development, establishment of TIF district in Hurley, and potential daycare facility development.

Discuss/Recommendation on Economic Development Website: General discussion of county economic development website purpose ensued. Committee will review other websites and bring samples to the next meeting for discussion.

Discussion on UW Extension Community Economic Development Programs and Resources: Miller spoke briefly about UW Extension's Rural Wisconsin Entrepreneurship Initiative (RWEI) and Rural Entrepreneurial Ventures (REV) programs.

- Additional information regarding Wisconsin Rural Entrepreneurial Ventures program was requested.

Discussion on Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation Opportunity Attraction Fund: Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) has several grant programs that may be of interest to the committee. The purpose of the Opportunity Attraction Fund Program is to attract major opportunities and events to the State of Wisconsin by funding bidding or hosting costs.

- Discussion focused on various large events in the area, including the Gus Macker 3-on-3 basketball tournament in Wakefield, the AMSOIL Mt. Zion Snocross National in Ironwood, the Wakefield Outboard Nationals, the Midsummer Bluegrass Festival in Manitowish Waters, the Wausau 24 mountain bike race, and the World Championship Snowmobile Derby in Eagle River.
- Doucette discussed creating an event unique to Iron County, suggesting an annual Hurley Hootenanny.
- Discussion on the suitability of event space for a large crowd ensued, Swartz mentioned the Iron County Fairgrounds as a potential location.
 - Availability of water was discussed. Fairgrounds infrastructure improvement was added as a potential priority area.

Questions/Comments from New Committee Members: A variety of topics were discussed:

- Email was identified as the preferred method of communication for the committee.
- Additional discussion on the committee's role.
 - Survey to determine what new businesses Iron County communities would like to see.
- Skilled labor is becoming more difficult to find in our area, especially refrigeration services, electricians, and plumbing.
- Community surveys would be helpful for understanding committee direction and public expectations.
- Mentorship opportunities for county business owners may be beneficial.
 - There is a need for new business owners and entrepreneurs to learn from an organized local mentorship program.
- The need for full geographical representation was discussed, as well as what types of businesses and organizations would best represent the county's needs (such as banks, credit unions, skilled trades groups, and educational institutions).

- The county waterfall brochure was noted as the most popular local attractions brochure and was previously funded by the Iron County Economic Development Zone, considerations for future print runs will need to be discussed.
- Identification of committee members' skillsets will be helpful for determining committee direction.
 - A Mission/Vision/Values or Purpose statement will be helpful in defining committee's overarching goals and how to work together toward achieving those goals.

Next Meeting: The next committee meeting will be Wednesday, December 4, 2024 at 6:00pm.

Adjourn: Boes adjourned at 7:45 p.m.