

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – JUNE 22, 2020

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS  
PRESENT: Fedler, Campbell, Hicks, Shaw, Skellie, Griffith

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS  
ABSENT: Rozell

SUPERVISORS: Hall, Henke, O'Brien, Hogan

Debra Prehoda, Clerk of the Board

Chris DeBolt, County Administrator

Roger Wickes, County Attorney

Al Nolette, County Treasurer

Laura Oswald, Economic Development Director

AGENDA AS PRESENTED IN COMMITTEE NOTICE:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Accept Minutes – February 25, 2020
- 3) Update on Planning, Economic Development & Tourism – Laura Oswald
- 4) Other Business
- 5) Adjournment

Chairwoman Fedler called the meeting to order at 1:08 P.M.

A motion to accept the minutes of the February 25, 2020 meeting was moved by Mr. Campbell, seconded by Mr. Skellie and adopted.

UPDATE ON PLANNING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM – Laura Oswald, Economic Development Director, addressed the following items with the committee:

- Planning
  - Grants – The office has been very busy with grant administration.
    - Trail Grant - Just submitted a progress report for the trail grant consisting of 781 pages of documents.
    - Assessor's Grant - The Assessor's grant is a problem right now because the contract between the County and the State was rejected it was rejected by the State Comptroller's Office due to missing paperwork with the Department of State (technical difficulty) – vendor responsibility questionnaire has been corrected and resubmitted. No estimated time on executed contract and currently working without a State contract. Invoices totaling \$150,000 have already been paid. Laura Chadwick, Real Property Director, stated the vendor, who the County has a contract with for this Assessor's grant work, started and has been working. The Treasurer cautioned starting without a contract.
    - DPW Highway Project grant took quite a bit of work working with the consultants to get a final report acceptable to County and Department of State. We do have a final draft report and in the process of closing out the grant. The County Administrator and Superintendent of Public Works have reviewed it and anticipates the report will be presented to the Board for review.
  - Hazardous Waste Management Plan - Required by DEC to have a hazardous waste management plan. The Junior Planner has been working on this and has a draft plan.
  - Website - In the process of cleaning up the website regarding COVID resources.
  - Census – Continued to do outreach as much as possible. They have given a banner to the Town of Fort Ann to display at the town hall and would like to circulate banner around to

other towns. Lowest response rates from the towns of Dresden, Putnam and Fort Ann. Census takers have been trained and will go out in July.

- Fort Ann to Whitehall Trail has been in hiatus since the beginning of the year due to conversations with CP Rail real estate people in Canada working on the trail alignment without infringing on the tracks, as far away from wetlands as possible and as inexpensive as possible. Waiting for response from CP Rail.

#### Economic Development

- Unemployment – Up until the week ending June 6<sup>th</sup> 5828 filings for unemployment; 18% to 19% unemployment. The unemployment rate prior to COVID was under 3% and during the great recession about 10% or 11%.
- COVID Response – Trying to make sure they are interconnecting resources as much as possible. Receive a lot of calls for assistance and what are the available funding resources.
- Workforce Development Board – The Economic Development Director is an appointee to the Board and there have been some issues largely a communication disconnect with the Board on the roles and responsibilities and oversight with the career centers. Due to resignations some open seats. They have started to post public notices and resources on the WIB website. The County Administrator stated continuing issues.
- HVADC – Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation – Activities during COVID: provided technical assistance, received funding that allows them to provide assistance to help hire someone to allow farm/ag business to know what is the best funding source to follow up on, they also have a loan fund targeted for equipment, and Northern Borders \$25,000 as a potential match – possibly ask for assistance from Farm Bureau or Cornell to make farms aware this is available.

Broadband – Given COVID crisis, broadband has become an even hotter topic.

- Spectrum 145,000 new passes by September 30, 2021 and are ahead of schedule and effectively done in Washington County and will continue to address opportunities to do other build outs,
- Verizon on track to complete build out by end of year, about 99% complete,
- Slick – make ready work has mostly been done at the northern end of the county down to Salem area but gaps due to pole work – have to move around. Expecting to start hook ups in Putnam and Dresden in August and work their way down. Hoping to be substantially complete by the end of year or early next.
- As part of the State budget, NYS DOT implemented a fiber line tax on any fiber on the State right-of-way. The tax ranges from twenty cents per mile to thousands of dollars per mile. The tax does not apply to providers implementing the rural broadband program. The providers are being taxed on their existing network and cannot pass that tax on to customers which has caused some providers in rural areas to cancel projects. Mentioned towns should look at Rural Digital Opportunity Fund to possibly fund broadband expansion; maps available showing eligible funding areas. The County Administrator stated for the next round of stimulus funding possibly after August recess, NYSAC is compiling a list of infrastructure needs at the county level and he included roads, bridges, municipal complexes and rural broadband.

#### Tourism

- I Love NY - Moved our tourism program from being marketing and branding the county to areas outside the county to attract people in to try to become a public service messaging entity because

we wanted residents within the county to understand what businesses were open and how they were providing services. Promoting as much as possible what businesses are open. She has serious concern that the I Love NY funding is at risk. Spent about \$55,000 in total to date but noted that our I Love NY money has not been received, typically receive around February, and starting to hear if the money comes. Unsure if any funding at all or reduced. If no confirmation by July then she recommends adjust our spending to match the \$82,000 in budgeted money. Also, should look at the \$10,000 that was provided to Cornell Cooperative Extension.

- Airbnb/Occupancy Tax - She stated the committee has been talking about instituting some sort of a bed tax on Airbnb entities for a couple of years and if that had been done the County would have a revenue source but that has not progressed. The State Legislature would need to approve any change to our current Occupancy Tax law. She asked Andrew Meader, 8ofeight, to look at sample agreements that other counties have entered into with Airbnb. Counties entered into agreements with Airbnb without changing their occupancy laws to collect a 3% fee. If there is a law in place then Airbnb would follow that at the designated percentage. Airbnb has agreements with 28 counties in the State. Based on last year's Airbnb figure of 1,967,781 then the County would have collected \$59,033. If collected on all vacation rentals, Airbnb and others, it about double that amount. The County can enter into an agreement with Airbnb without changing the law and continue to attempt to change the law. The County's current occupancy tax is 4% If a law was enacted in the county then it would supersede the agreement with Airbnb. Airbnb has not agreed to more than 3% in their other agreements. Mr. Griffith stated if the County goes into an agreement with Airbnb that should be an equal agreement with Vrbo – vacation rental by owner. Mr. Meader has a contact for Airbnb but not Vrbo and agrees the County should pursue agreements with both. The host would just add on this 3% to the consumer. Discussion ensued. Committee consensus to move forward with agreements with Airbnb and Vrbo; make it work.
- Number of users on website up and social media up also. Stopped spending on traditional media until sure of I Love NY funding.
- County Administrator suggested the following individuals meet prior to next month's meeting to run some scenarios on I Love NY money: Andrew Meader, Economic Development Director, County Administrator, and Chairwoman Fedler to discuss options for moving forward. Mr. Griffith stated also possibly a review of the Occupancy Tax and the Treasurer stated \$1,600 currently and noted some are annual filers and some have closed their businesses. Treasurer reported at the close of 2019 had collected \$18,200, \$21,600 in 2018.

#### OTHER BUSINESS:

Lakes to Locks submitted an update. They are continuing to work with the National Scenic By-Ways Foundation to work on bills in Congress to get federal funding, involved in invest in America Act, federal transportation, and also the Great American Outdoor Act. Focused on social media and social marketing.

ASA Magazine contains an article on former Supervisor Alan Brown's farm, Lewis Waite Farm in the town of Jackson.

The meeting adjourned at 2:33 P.M.

*Debra Prehoda, Clerk*  
*Washington County Board of Supervisors*