



Meeting Minutes: 02/15/2023

Skilled Trades Building - UA Cossatot De Queen Campus

Attendance

✓ Mike Branson, President

✓ Greg Revels, Vice President

✓ Jay Bunyard, Secretary/Treasurer

✓ Jimmy Bristow

✓ Dr. Steve Cole

✓ Ned Hendrix

✓ Angie Walker

✓ Tiffany Maurer, Ex Officio

Others in Attendance: Jeff Brown, Eddie Halter, James & Suzanne Babb, ZZ Kamruddin

Minutes

The board voted to approve the 1/18/2022 minutes with a motion from Dr. Steve Cole and a second from Greg Revels

Tiffany updated the members on the financial reports. The 2021 and 2022 budget surplus reimbursement checks were processed and deposited on 2/15/2023 after the meeting ended.

The board voted to start including the FRIENDS Board meeting minutes on the economic development website with a motion from Greg Revels and a second from Angie Walker.

Tiffany updated the board on the Community Navigator grant with the first annual site visit completed last week and some additional clarification from the SBA on documentation requirements. Other updates provided were:

- Business cybersecurity consultations and risk assessments are now available through NextStep Technologies
- Contacted staff at Arkansas Hospitality Association to offer another in-person hospitality training
- Contacted a business lawyer (recommended by Startup Junkies consultants) to come to De Queen and provide in-person training on the basic legalities of business partnerships
- Received and will use recent SBA guidance to allocate additional funds for marketing
- Greg Revels will be providing training soon (dates TBD) on filing Articles of Incorporation with the state and establishing a business with the IRS
- Dennis Guzman, social media coordinator for UA Cossatot, will soon be providing short social media marketing tip videos in English, Spanish, and Marshallese on the grant website (seviercnpp.com) and Facebook page
- Plan to schedule regular (monthly) radio appearances to discuss services and events for the grant



Meeting Minutes (Continued)

- Working with the Continuing Ed. department at UAC to offer in-person grant writing classes for small businesses. They're currently looking for an instructor to provide the course

Angie recommended Tiffany and Diana pursue a marketing course series with a local marketing professional with topics/sessions covering individual social media platforms and a special session highlighting maximizing tourism opportunities with the upcoming 2024 solar eclipse. Other suggested education and technical assistance topics Angie recommended included developing an app for a small business, real estate investment courses for small business owners, and education sessions for small businesses regarding the solar eclipse.

Dr. Steve Cole shared a federal grant opportunity for community economic development projects. He tasked the board to consider projects to pursue with the grant and to bring ideas to the next board meeting to decide if the foundation should apply. The application deadline is May 8, 2023.

Mayor Jeff Brown shared the City of De Queen's updates on the Census re-count effort. While individuals living in multi-family households will always be undercounted, the City can document more than 2,700 households connected to the City's water services with active accounts, which severely conflicts with the Census Bureau's previous count of 2,100 households in the City.

Mike Branson called for CEDS committee updates from committee chairs, with reports provided below:
Entertainment/Recreation (chairperson: Ned Hendrix) – Primary areas of focus for 2023 will be supporting the De Queen Lake Trails sub-committee and the Eclipse 2024 planning efforts throughout Sevier County.

Housing (chairperson: Angie Walker) – Building costs are coming back down some and labor costs have stabilized but aren't expected to ever return to their pre-pandemic rates, since labor in our area has historically been lower than in other areas. There is becoming an extreme need for skilled labor workers in housing such areas as electricians, plumbers, framers, general contractors, flooring installers, etc. There has been an increase in diversity among local contractors with more companies offering services in English and Spanish. Eddie Halter shared that Pilgrim's currently busses 56+ employees to the De Queen plant from Texarkana daily due to the lack of available affordable housing within the county and their primary need is for "starter homes" or low-middle income housing for rent or sale.

Job Diversity/Quality (chairperson: Jay Bunyard) – They are happy to hear/share the news of Suzanne Babb being brought back on at the Chamber of Commerce as their executive director. They believe she will help bring back the vitality and stability of the chamber.

Broadband (chairpersons: Greg Revels & Jimmy Bristow) – The committee has been supportive of Four States Fiber's broadband rollout throughout the county and named them as a choice provider for proposed funding for broadband in the county. With REA hiring a new CEO, Kecia Wolf, Greg and Jimmy will reach back out to them to make sure their intentions for internet connectivity in the county remain the same.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned.