

CALHOUN COUNTY
PROCEEDINGS OF THE
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

April 11, 2006

The Calhoun County Board of Commissioners convened in Joint Session with the Calhoun County Economic Development Corporation at 6:00 p.m., Tuesday, April 11, 2006 at Schuler's Restaurant and Pub, 115 South Eagle, Marshall, Michigan.

Roll call: Board Members Present: Comrs. Bolger, Miller, Moore, Segal, Solis and Todd. Excused: Comr. Strowbridge.

Corporation Members Present: President Stoffer, Vice President Dehn, Treasurer Spicer and Members Frantz, Folk and Garcia. Excused: Members Petredean-DiSalvio and Baldwin.

Also Present: County Administrator/Controller Greg Purcell, Sheridan Township Economic Development Director Marilyn Hennon, Assistant County Administrator Wendee Woods, Marengo Township resident Gardy Berezonsky, Marshall City Economic Development Director Scott Powell and Deputy Clerk Mary Lou Barrett.

INVOCATION:

A Moment of Personal Prayer was observed.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

“Motion by Comr. Moore, supported by Comr. Bolger, adopt the following: Resolved by the Calhoun County Board of Commissioners and the Calhoun County Economic Development Corporation approve the April 11, 2006 agenda as presented.”

Voice Vote: Motion CARRIED

CITIZENS' TIME:

Mr. Berezonsky inquired who shall be paying for the dinner. President Stoffer advised that he is paying the expense.

SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS:

Introductions

All provided a brief introduction.

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Corporation's 2004/2005 Activity Report

Pres. Stoffer reported that the year began with the December 2004 meeting where the Corporation elected its current slate of officers for a one year term. The Corporation discussed additional members to replace members that had retired from the Corporation. The past year's report was read into the minutes and a motion passed to accept the report.

Pres. Stoffer advised that county updates included the Southwestern Michigan Rehabilitation Project and Progressive Dynamics, neither of which resulted in a proposal to move forward with any bonding issue. Community updates in the county followed and the annual schedule for quarterly meetings was approved.

Pres. Stoffer stated that at the March meeting the Corporation welcomed new member Carol DiSalvio and there was extensive discussion regarding the Oaklawn Expansion Project, as at that time they were exploring financing options with the Board.

Pres. Stoffer continued that the possible base closing due to the BRAC Commission's recommendations resulted in a lengthy discussion with Jim Hettinger of Battle Creek Unlimited (B.C.U.). A motion was approved to continue working with B.C.U. and other entities to do all the Corporation could to help keep the base open. There were additional updates on the Guardian Expansion Project possibility and the final report of the County Economic Development Forum, a project that had its funding funneled through the Corporation. Final discussion centered on the Corporation's mission and a historical view of what the Corporation's responsibilities were.

Pres. Stoffer further reported that the June meeting was mostly a discussion of the possibility of the base closing and how the Corporation could help in the presentations to the BRAC Commission to try to keep it open. The Corporation approved up to \$5,000 to help defray costs for citizens to travel to the Commission's area meeting and with the presentation. The County Board Chairman participated in the meeting, as well as B.C.U. Under old business, the Corporation received county updates by participants and discussed the joint meeting the Corporation proposed to hold annually with the County Board of Commissioners.

Pres. Stoffer advised that the next meeting was the joint meeting held with the members of the County Board of Commissioners and was open to the public. This was a very productive meeting and discussion ensued regarding the history of the Corporation for the benefit of new Commissioners. After a question and answer period, the Corporation discussed the mission of the Calhoun County Economic Development Corporation and how the Corporation could communicate on a more extensive level with the Board.

Pres. Stoffer advised that at the joint meeting those present discussed ways to make the Economic Development Corporation a more visible entity in the county and ways to include both business and perhaps the Upjohn Institute to develop a survey to identify the county impediments to helping business survive and grow in the county, which would enable the Corporation to take this information to the County Board and communities in

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an effort to remove such impediments and assist business to grow jobs in the county. All seemed to feel this was a helpful meeting and should be held each year to better communicate with the County Board.

Pres. Stoffer continued that at the September meeting the results of the BRAC decisions were discussed, as well as Hurricane Katrina efforts in the county since displaced persons were being housed at Fort Custer. The County Health Department and the Emergency Management Division were involved. The Anderson Grain Property Warranty Deed was executed to allow them to proceed with their expansion efforts, which will add many jobs to the Albion area. Pres. Stoffer advised that the Corporation directed him to proceed with adding another member to the Corporation and authorized him to submit a name to the County Board for approval. The County Board has since approved the appointment of Joseph Garcia to the Corporation and the re-appointment of those whose terms had expired, but wished to remain on the Corporation. County updates of the communities were received.

Pres. Stoffer stated that this was an active year and the Corporation moved forward with mission development and better communication with the County Board of Commissioners, which the Corporation believes will further enable the Corporation/Board to work together to bring additional jobs to the county and identify those areas that impede growth and help change them.

Pres. Stoffer advised that the report will be presented at the June 1, 2006 Board of Commissioners Meeting.

Michigan Minority Business Council Breakfast Event Update

Pres. Stoffer advised that he attended the breakfast, which was a huge event and grows larger each year. Pres. Stoffer encouraged other communities to become more involved with the Council because it is a moving factor in the state.

Corporation Member Garcia reported that the breakfast event was hosted by the Michigan Minority Business Council, which is the largest of 39 Councils in the United States. Member Garcia stated that the Council's purpose is to bring corporate America and certified minority-owned businesses together for a day for one-on-one networking. Member Garcia advised that 73 sponsors were present, with only three that did not network, and 1,003 business owners were in attendance.

Member Garcia stated that new companies were represented this year; e.g., Toyota and Honda and their suppliers; and minority-owned business enterprises from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, New York and New Jersey; further, the President from the National Council attended. Member Garcia stated that the City of Battle Creek is the Council's biggest supporter of the event, and Kelloggs is one of the underwriters.

Mr. Purcell inquired whether the next breakfast event will be conducted in Calhoun County. Member Garcia responded "Yes, for at least the next three years."

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Chairman Miller inquired whether the Council has any outreach to the local units of government to have their purchasing departments attend the breakfast event. Member Garcia responded that the Council invited the local and state governmental purchasing departments and pretty much received a no from everyone with the exception of Calhoun County, Benton Harbor, Portage, Kalamazoo and the City of Battle Creek; further advised that all of the county and city commissioners were invited, however, the Council received no responses.

County-wide Business Survey Regarding Barriers to Business

Pres. Stoffer reported that the Corporation has discussed perhaps contracting with the Upjohn Institute and what business lists to use, which he believes the Institute has better ways of determining that information; however that the Corporation needs to “flesh” that out more to determine what the Corporation and the Board are “shooting” for. Pres. Stoffer inquired what the Board believes should be included within the survey.

Chairman Miller recommended that the Corporation start off by employing the services of George Eriček to conduct a survey to ascertain what those problems to businesses might be. Pres. Stoffer stated that he believes the money would be well spent.

Mr. Purcell advised that the Board Chairman shall be sending out a letter probably in mid May to all Calhoun County area businesses to offer an advertising opportunity through the West Michigan Digest that shall be doing a supplement focusing on Calhoun County. Mr. Purcell pointed out that the Digest has broad coverage and goes out to 12 or 13 counties. Mr. Purcell stated that there has been no determination regarding specific topics yet, however, that one topic could be the Corporation if the Corporation is interested. Mr. Purcell stated that this is an opportunity for the county to put its best foot forward in terms of projects, businesses and opportunities within the county. Mr. Purcell advised that there shall be no cost to the county for advertising within the supplement.

Pres. Stoffer inquired whether this type of advertising has been conducted before. Asst. County Administrator Woods responded that the county did something similar in 2001, however, not with the West Michigan Digest. Mr. Purcell pointed out that the publication has pretty good distribution, and that he believes a lot of businesses and community leaders look at it. Pres. Stoffer stated that he believes advertising in the publication is an excellent idea, and that perhaps the Corporation could put something together.

Mr. Purcell offered to show Pres. Stoffer an example of what Kalamazoo submitted last year. Mr. Purcell advised that B.C.U. regularly advertises in the Digest, as well as the Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Purcell stated that he would also like the Marshall and Albion Chambers to become involved.

Sheridan Township Economic Development Director Hennon advised that the Township published an article in the Digest.

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Pres. Stoffer advised that the Albion community, through the Chamber, has had an expo in the past; however, now has a virtual expo on-line whereby it can be viewed year round which has been very successful. Mr. Purcell inquired who maintains the site. Member Spicer responded that the Albion Chamber hires someone to maintain the site.

Comr. Bolger advised that the Battle Creek/Calhoun County Visitor and Convention Bureau has been working on Destination Calhoun County, and inquired whether there is any work that the Corporation/county can do to support that work in getting guests to stay in the Calhoun County area for extended periods. Comr. Bolger stated that he believes it will take “buy in” by the communities to advertise the other communities.

Comr. Bolger stated that he is very interested in getting the information regarding barriers to doing business to determine what types of issues there are. Comr. Bolger stated that he does not know whether B.C.U. can provide that information, or whether Mr. Erichek can provide it. Chairman Miller stated that he believes the idea of a survey is a good one as a survey would provide a sense of what businesses need to stay and would be an incredible resource to not only the county and the Corporation, but to B.C.U. and the Chambers. Chairman Miller stated that he would endorse employing Mr. Erichek to perform the survey.

Comr. Segal stated that one thing she keeps hearing in her district is that there is nothing here to keep people/businesses, which she believes is mis-education. Comr. Segal stated that she believes the survey regarding barriers to doing business should address what is available and address the spousal issue, and what can be done to attract businesses and more families to live in the communities.

Pres. Stoffer stated that the larger companies should realize that the employees need some incentive to live here. Comr. Segal addressed Kellogg’s relocation packages, pointing out that the housing information provided was Kalamazoo and Portage based and the employees were advised that housing and schools are better in those areas.

Member Dehn advised that B.C.U. assisted Kelloggs with their relocation, and Kelloggs wanted the employees to see a large regional area and hired a company to essentially handle the process. Member Dehn stated that if Kelloggs were to set specific residency requirements, it would reduce their ability to recruit; therefore, he believes it is reasonable that Kelloggs set no specific requirements regarding areas to live. Member Dehn advised that B.C.U. provided a lot of information regarding this region; however despite that, with the relocation company having the majority of their listings in Kalamazoo/Portage and being that their business is to make money by selling their listings, it was not the fault of Kelloggs. Member Dehn stated that B.C.U. learned a lot in that process and that one thing B.C.U. determined was that a trailing spouse network needs to be developed. B.C.U. is looking at ways to work with the company to improve relocation services for the future and perhaps change the culture of the company.

Comr. Segal advised that she must leave to attend a previous commitment, and stated that she looks forward to reviewing the minutes.

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Comr. Moore stated that one thing that came to his attention is that nothing trumps personal conversation; i.e., from one employee to another. Comr. Moore questioned how many times those present have heard people “bad mouthing” Portage from within their own community, pointing out that he hears nothing but bad mouthing of this community. Comr. Moore stated that it is the same at the state level also, and questioned what it is that makes Michigan so bad.

Comr. Moore inquired whether there is a central depository to get statistics regarding this community’s businesses; i.e., type of business, large or small businesses, different support structures required, number of employees, etc. Member Dehn responded that Mr. Eriчек would be able to pull together that information. Member Dehn advised that B.C.U. keeps records for the Fort Custer Industrial Park tenants and have a good “handle” on the larger employers within the City of Battle Creek, however, it is not a comprehensive listing of every business. Mr. Purcell concurred that he believes Mr. Eriчек could provide the information.

Mr. Purcell pointed out that there are political issues on the table that Michigan must address; i.e., the single business tax. Mr. Purcell stated that he believes that the community must invest in itself, advising that when he was in Fort Wayne they did public relations radio jingles profusely which had a very positive impact in helping Fort Wayne.

Comr. Bolger stated that he believes the communities need to be encouraged to work together. Comr. Bolger pointed out that everyone is mobile today and are willing to commute. Comr. Bolger questioned whether the community can broaden its scope of what its region is and broaden what this community has to offer once it is determined what is attracting people to a Kalamazoo community.

Chairman Miller stated that the only thing he would disagree with is the variables beyond the government’s control. Chairman Miller stated that Commissioner Bolger’s point regarding commuting is well taken; advising that if he had a couple of young kids, he would commute to Kalamazoo to get his children’s college tuition paid. Chairman Miller agreed that the county needs regional considerations, however, that he believes you have to sell what you have; i.e., home town feel, safe streets, small class sizes.

Member Folk addressed MEAP scores, and the three brand new school systems in the communities that should be marketed. Comr. Moore stated that Michigan schools have higher standards than other states and that it would seem that the state would be promoting the MEAP scores. Member Folk addressed the book “The World is Flat,” which discusses why so many jobs are being lost today.

Member Dehn suggested along with the survey, a committee to go out and talk with the businesses and develop relationships. Pres. Stoffer stated that the survey could also be taken to the communities and that perhaps all the economic development corporations should be working together again.

Pres. Stoffer advised that the Corporation will meet with Mr. Eriчек to discuss the survey with him, determine the expense, and perhaps solicit donations from the businesses if the survey costs beyond the Corporation’s

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budget.

Board of Commission/Corporation Future Interaction Discussion

Pres. Stoffer stated that he believes the annual meeting is good and would like it to continue.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS:

Chairman Miller thanked Pres. Stoffer for the dinner.

CITIZENS' TIME:

Mr. Berezonsky pointed out that new schools does not make good education nor good students. Mr. Berezonsky stated that he believes one reason people are living in Kalamazoo is because of the lakes; further, pointed out that Branch County is growing and has decent roads. Mr. Berezonsky stated that Calhoun County's roads are crummy while the Road Commission keeps saying that they do not have any money, yet they turn around and give themselves raises.

Mr. Berezonsky advised that he opposes the new ethanol plant in Sheridan Township as it will pollute the river, and inquired how many jobs the plant will bring in. Pres. Stoffer responded that he does not know the exact number, however, quite a few. Member Folk stated that the \$80 Million investment is a tremendous benefit to the local economy; further, pointed out that the plant will assist with the country's dependency on foreign oil. Ms. Hennon added that the plant shall help the farmers by stabilizing the market.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

mlb