

Members:

Bob Egan
Jim Behling
Emil Bakka
Charles Rayala
Ralph Sitzberger

VILAS COUNTY
Economic Development Committee
330 Court Street
Eagle River, WI 54521



Bob Egan
Chairman
Jim Behling
Vice-Chair

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Manitowish Waters Town Forum
Manitowish Waters Community Center
February 12, 2009, 7:00 p.m.

Minutes

Members Present: Bob Egan, Jim Behling, Charlie Rayala, Ralph Sitzberger, Emil Bakka

Others Present: Kelly Haverkamp, UW-Extension, 6 community members

1. Chairman Egan called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. A handout entitled "Vilas Vision for Vitality" was distributed (on file in the UW-Extension office).
2. All in attendance introduced themselves.
3. Egan gave a recap of his recent attendance at the Wisconsin Counties Association legislative day at the Wisconsin Legislature, and indicated that the stimulus packages being discussed will provide little financial assistance at the local level. Rayala noted that the NEWCAP community action agency which serves Vilas County will have more money available for low-income weatherization assistance, and there will also be additional money for rural transit. Behling gave a recap of his attendance at the Wisconsin Economic Development Association conference, noting the State is focusing on green development and attracting/growing pharmaceutical research companies. The Governor has appointed a 15-member commission to guide the economic stimulus package coming from the federal government. [Office of Recovery and Reinvestment].

Egan provided a history of the Vilas County Economic Development Committee, noting the county is now part of the Grow North Regional Economic Development Corporation as well as the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and is taking advantage of the services those organizations have to offer. The County's membership in the NCWRPC means that all towns and city in the county can now access the services of the RPC for planning and development assistance of many types, including a revolving loan fund for business development. Egan indicated the county's interest in forming its own development organization to manage development and a revolving loan fund at the local level.

Egan noted the county is “behind the curve” in development terms, but that also provides some measure of insulation from the devastating impacts of the current economic recession, such as job loss. Rayala noted the County is working on three areas to create an environment for development: 1. Internet access; 2. Highways; and 3. Cell phone coverage.

Citizen attendees discussed a variety of topics with the committee:

- lack of viability to develop water and sewer service to support development, but potential for a regional water/sewer service
- tourism and its impact on the economy and environment, Vilas County’s image and the need for regional cooperation, and green tourism
- the potential for light industry and/or office parks as a Vilas-friendly type of development
- potential for a business incubator
- need for manufacturing jobs and the potential for newcomers to start production rather than service businesses
- setting up kiosks for high-speed internet use by business people at the town halls
- the lack of technology services in the county to meet the needs of residents, such as video and/or web conferencing, and high-speed internet as a necessity for marketing products
- aging of the population and lack of good-paying jobs to attract a younger workforce
- technical assistance needs for small business, such as a once-a-month mentoring program or off-season business network
- an economic development corporation that could provide seed capital and/or bridge loans for business assistance
- lack of affordable housing to meet the needs of new employees attracted through economic development
- potential to be a call center for larger corporations
- a need for classes to help the business skills of those who are in the construction trades

4. Egan thanked the community members for attending. Motion to adjourn was made at 9:00 p.m. by Behling, second by Bakka. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted by Kelly Haverkamp