

Pulaski County Economic Development
(Pulaski County Community Development Commission)
Tuesday, 6 May 2014
Monterey – Tippecanoe Township Fire Station
Monterey, Indiana

Guest Presentation

Members present: President Bill Champion, Vice-President Lawrence Loehmer (Monterey), Membership Officer Krysten Hinkle, executive-board member Andrew Fritz; County Councilor Doug Roth, Winamac Council President John E. Plowman; Becky Anspach, Greg Comoglio; Executive Director Nathan P. Origer.

Members absent: Secretary David Zeltwanger; County Commissioner Larry Brady, Jamie Bales (Francesville), Medaryville Council President Derrick Stalbaum [family medical], Amy Jo Cantu (Chamber of Commerce); Gregg Malott [medical]; Assistant Terry Howard [training course].

Guests present: Jeff Keller (Keller Insurance & Consulting Group (KICG)), Kathy Keller (same), Sarah Keller, Caroline Keller.

Director Origer introduced Mr. Keller at 6:30 *p.m.*, thanking him for his appearance and explaining the purpose of guest presentations, especially emphasizing an interest in Mr. Keller's insights into the local agricultural economy. Mr. Keller began by introducing his wife, who is vice-president of KICG, and their daughters. He then discussed the history of his business, speaking of both insurance and agronomy services and mentioning various stages of growth, including the acquisition of a Veris machine for enhanced soil mapping and the expansion into property-and-casualty insurance. Relating an anecdote about an insurance-company representative who had trekked to Monterey to visit his out-of-town office, gotten lost, and informed him that the business and the insurance provider would not be a good fit because of KICG's extremely rural location, Mr. Keller expressed that his location has proven to be helpful, offering a centrally located office to serve rural denizens who do not have to travel to larger communities. Asked what sets his business apart, Mr. Keller suggested that not selling inputs allows him to be trusted as unbiased in making recommendations.

Director Origer enquired as to trends observed by Mr. Keller, who remarked upon the significant increase in the use of pivot irrigation and speculated that, with a decrease in commodity prices, fewer new installations likely would be taking place. Crop insurance had also become more popular over the last few years with the rise of input costs. He noted the increased openness to technology in farming amongst younger farmers. Mr. Fritz having asked as to how KICG's crop-insurance strategy differs from others', Mr. Keller emphasized the extent to which the company maps fields and the superior customer service offered by KICG.

Asked about the challenges of starting up, Mr. Keller suggested that being able to provide certainty to prospective clients created potential risks. The director enquired as to how PCED could have helped him, or could assist someone in shoes similar to his now; Mr. Keller emphasized the importance of business planning, as well as start-up capital. Mrs. Anspach remarked that, as a farmer, Mr. Keller is uniquely qualified to know and to understand farmer-clients' needs; he noted, "You gotta fit in", suggesting that being engaged in the community matters.

Director Origer asked Mr. Keller for his advice regarding how PCED better could reach out to and serve the farming and agri-business community. He responded by suggesting speaking with individuals such as himself and his uncle, John Keller, who operates Keller Advisory Group in Winamac. Further, he suggested deciding exactly what the purpose of such outreach would be and preparing an information flyer to distribute to farmers. Finally, Mr. Keller remarked upon the increased average age of a farmer and the difficulty that young would-be farmers face trying to begin their own operations.

Mr. Keller concluded his talk, was thanked, and departed at 6:24 *p.m.*

Regular Meeting Minutes

Members present: As noted above; Jamie Bales. Amy Jo Cantu arrived at 7:04 *p.m.*

Members absent: As noted above, save Mr. Bales and Mrs. Cantu.

Guests present: None.

Call to Order

President Champion called the meeting to order at 7:00 *p.m.*

Consent Agenda

With no requests for extraction having been made, the Consent Agenda was adopted.

Community Reports

- Mr. Plowman: The Town Council would be opening bids for the pool-restoration project on the following Monday; costs are expected to fall in the area of \$600,000; on the previous night, a budget-discussion meeting had been held. Antares Trailers had successfully started up, with a number of trailers having left the property already. Things are well at Link Environmental.
- Mrs. Hinkle: Four County Counseling Center has been preparing for its first summer group for children staffed in-house in Pulaski County; collaboration efforts with Pulaski Memorial Hospital and Eastern Pulaski Schools being expanded.
- Mr. Fritz: Planting has been behind schedule, with only about 29 percent completed. He is hopeful that, with improved weather, farmers would catch up quickly.
- Mr. Comoglio: Sales figures at Plymouth Tube have improved; workforce loss through attrition having bottomed out, replacement hiring has begun, with six new employees so far.
- Mr. Bales: CSX has been significantly upgrading the old Monon line between Monon and Medaryville. Alliance has been quite busy with operating lines and business renewals.
- Vice-President Loehmer: Business has been good, but help is lacking.
- Mrs. Anspach: She enquired of Mr. Plowman as to the possibility of private contributions to the pool project.
- Councilor Roth: Saturday would be the opening day for Star City Youth Baseball, which has 202 participants this year. Operations are underway at Winamac Coil Spring – Winamac Division, where Councilor Roth had spent all of the previous week.
- Mrs. Cantu: The Chamber has been making preparations for German Fest, which will take place on Saturday, 9 August.
- President Champion: The harsh winter greatly harmed the existing railroad, so the CSX project has been both welcomed and mesmerizing to watch. Someone from CSX remarked to the president that they would like nothing more than to see industrial grow north of Fratco. The company has been extraordinarily busy, and the new injection-molding machine has been a great boon to production.

Old Business

PC-CARE engineering study: Territorial Engineering would be making a presentation on the first two study sites at the June PCED meeting; the director expected to receive documents in advance of that. Director Origer had recently met with the owner of property south of Francesville; the individual expressed willingness to work with PCED. The director would follow up with one other landowner before reaching a decision on the third study site. The south-of-town property offers the benefit of being in an already developed area, but also would require significantly higher utility-construction costs.

CAGIT-rate issue: Director Origer noted that Senator Charbonneau had expressed support for addressing the language in the Indiana Code pertaining to this issue, but suggested that holding off until 2015 would be wise. With that in mind, the director said that he would address the issue individually with County Commissioners and Councilors to build support for this, and he asked that the matter be tabled until he had held such discussions.

Motion: Mr. Plowman; second: Mr. Fritz; no discussion; approval: all.

Pulaski County Young Professionals Network: The committee would be scheduling a second meeting to discuss the information that Director Origer had received from leaders and founders of

Lafayette/Tippecanoe County's TippyConnect group. Locally, the director had received mixed responses from potential members, with a number of questions satisfactory answers to which he hoped would increase interest.

Pulaski Online: Director Origer had met with Crane + Grey in the previous week; the Website would be live by mid-June, and what the director had seen so far had impressed him greatly. They would be setting up a meeting with Jacki Frain to discuss Pulaski County Human Services' needs. Mrs. Anspach enquired as to whether the director would be able to maintain and to update the Website locally, and he replied in the affirmative.

Hotel project: Noting that securing investors has been a struggle, Director Origer presented two alternative-financing options for consideration. In the first, Cobblestone/BriMark would retain ownership of the property, at least short-term, and a local unit of government would pledge annually enough funds to pay for debt service; if hotel revenues would suffice to cover annual debt payments, then the locality would owe no money, but if revenues were to fall short of the necessary total, then tax money would pay for part of the debt. The director praised the creativity of this solution, but expressed doubts about the feasibility of it in Pulaski County, particular given current budgetary concerns; the members agreed with Director Origer's observation.

The second option involves a crowd-funding mechanism, specifically through Localstake, a small-business-investment organization out of Indianapolis. The director was awaiting a reply from John Seibert of Cobblestone/BriMark regarding the possibility of using this non-equity, revenue-sharing mechanism to supplement investments from equity partners. Further discussion ensued, with the director reiterating previous information, and Mr. Plowman noting that Delphi is proceeding with a Cobblestone hotel, the director mentioning a few other communities moving forward, and Mr. Bales enquiring about the use of small-business loans for the project.

Revolving Loan Fund cash injection: In light of necessary changes to the application process and of County fiscal sensitivities, Director Origer had judged it prudent to delay the PCED-supported request for County funds to expand lending opportunities; he would continue to consider outside sources, such as United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development.

Director Origer requested that discussion of the hotel project and the Revolving Loan Fund be tabled until such time as new information had become available.

Motion: Mr. Bales; second: Mr. Comoglio; no discussion; approval: all.

2014 Summit: Having expressed his pleasure with the Summit, Director Origer then asked, "What next?" — how do PCED and the community at-large address the concerns raised by Dick Heupel's keynote address regarding the importance of quality of life to economic growth and sustainability? Lengthy discussion ensued regarding amplified marketing of existing amenities, types of amenities that would improve resident-attraction efforts, the relationship between resident attraction and job creation, the possible need for a hotel in order to keep visitors in the area for longer, local-company employee-attraction struggles — particularly pertaining to management —, obvious deficits — and positive attributes — in the community, struggles that start-up restaurants face, members' own preferences, and other topics.

Mrs. Anspach suggested that a significant number of small-group community conversations should be conducted, with a focus on aspirations, rather than issues, to gauge residents' insights on what Pulaski County's vision should be and self-image is; what quality-of-life improvements should be made; and how progress should occur. President Champion seconded this notion. Director Origer opined that starting with a non-profit summit, which he would be discussing with a staffer from the Purdue Center for Regional Development who recently had spoken at one in Boone County; Mrs. Anspach and Mrs. Hinkle followed up on this with insights on the Cass County Resource Network.

Director Origer expressed his desire to continue this conversation in the future, emphasizing that PCED needs not merely to focus on individual economic-growth projects, but to build capacity for long-term economic and community health.

New Business

Proposed changes to By-laws: The director presented a list of changes to the CDC by-laws that he had proposed to the executive board, which had approved them for full-Commission consideration; he explained that the changes could not be approved at this meeting, but that he wanted to have them reviewed prior to a special session after the June meeting. Director Origer explained the rationale for each change and asked for questions and comments; none were offered.

2015-budget proposal: Director Origer presented the executive-board–approved proposal for the 2015 budget, noting a decrease of nearly \$40,000 in operational costs from 2014, but also an increase of \$42,444 in personnel costs, to the end of upgrading the assistant position to full-time, pending County Council approval; he explained the rationale for his desire to make Mr. Howard a full-time employee. Brief discussion ensued regarding Director Origer’s status as a non-exempt, hourly employee. Mrs. Anspach asked that a job description and list of duties for the assistant position be developed and provided to the members for consideration. Mrs. Hinkle emphasized the need for having a full-time assistant. Mrs. Anspach enquired as to whether the Equipment line item would suffice, and the director suggested that it typically has been adequate. The members decided to vote on the budget proposal in June, after having reviewed the requested job description for the assistant position.

Other Pertinent Business

Indiana’s Technology Corridor meeting: The director asked if any member present could be available to represent him at the meeting on the following day; President Champion would check his schedule and notify the director in the morning.

Membership: Noting that one at-large vacancy remained, Director Origer asked if he should pursue finding a new member aggressively or not; he explained that he had met with two potential candidates from the West Central School Corporation, both of whom had expressed interest but were unable to commit at this time. The director and Mrs. Hinkle agreed to discuss the matter further.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Motion: Mr. Comoglio; second: Mr. Fritz; no discussion; approval: all. 8:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Fritz, acting secretary