

CHEROKEE COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

AGENDA

MEPB Board Room – Murphy, NC
April 24, 2025
9:00 am

If you wish to make a public comment, please sign in.

- Call meeting to Order (Chairman Brinke – at 9:10 AM)
- Confirmation of Quorum (Chairman Brinke – 5 voting members present)
- Approval of Agenda (By acclamation)
- Approval of previous minutes (No quorum - for information only)
- Economic Development Partner Updates
 - Mayor Radford for Town of Murphy
 - Dr. Woody for Cherokee Co. Schools
 - Cal Stiles / Randy Wiggins for Cherokee County
 - Larry Kernea for MEPB
 - Victoria Ivie for Cherokee Co. Chamber
 - Steve Dickey
 - Allison Ralph
 - Paul Worley & Aaron Patton for TCCC
- Director's Report (Aaron Patton & Paul Worley)
- Approval of Proposed EDC Meeting Calendar
 - Motion to Approve by Randy Wiggins, Seconded by Allison Ralph, approved unanimously
- Public Comment Period (No public comment)
 - Public comments and questions will be limited to 3 minutes per speaker; OR, if there are multiple persons wishing to speak on the SAME topic, a designated speaker should be chosen.
- Adjourn
 - Motion by Larry Kernea, Seconded by Randy Wiggins, approved unanimously

Cherokee County EDC Meeting Minutes
April 24, 2025
9:00 AM at Murphy Electric Power Board – Board Room

Present (Voting members in bold text): Paul Worley, Aaron Patton, **Erik Brinke, Randy Wiggins**, Victoria Ivie, Commissioner Cal Stiles, Mayor Tim Radford, **Larry Kernea, Allison Ralph**, Dr. Keevin Woody, **Steve Dickey**

Erik Brinke called the meeting to order at 9:10 AM, declared that a quorum of voting members exists, and confirmed the proper location and time of the meeting, as proposed. The agenda was approved by acclamation after no changes or additions were offered. There were no minutes to be approved as there was no quorum of voting members at the previous meeting. Brinke recognized each member present to provide an update.

Economic Development Partner Updates:

Mayor Radford: Water line project in downtown Murphy is complete, and they are working to acquire additional funds to extend new lines out toward the eastern part of town. He also announced the Grand Opening at the Valley River Apartments will be held tomorrow behind Wal-mart at 11:30 am, and asked all to attend.

Dr. Woody: They had a great Farm Day with 3rd graders which is held annually.

Cal Stiles / Randy Wiggins: Reported on Senior VA Project and the completion of the ADA-compliant bathroom project at the Rock Gym. Relative to the Industrial Park Property, they are working to put out bids for the timber clearing on the property. The old Building Inspector's office (Code Enforcement) in the old Post Office building across from Downton Pizza will soon be put up for sale as surplus. Randy suggested that this may be delayed a bit, as the Sheriff's office may have to use that building for a while longer as a secure site for storing evidence (due to the legal wrangling going on between the Sheriff's office & DA's office). Commissioner Stiles mentioned the TDA is now funding projects again such as the Chambers and Harshaw Chapel project. He is encouraged by the TDA's new leadership, and hopes to include her in future EDC meetings (possibly as an Ex Officio member if approved by the Commissioners).

Larry Kernea: Larry discussed MEPB's move to AMI meters and some of the benefits of this transition. He said work has been steady and that they are finishing up work at the Casino expansion. He stated that the Marble data center site is getting huge and is responsible for quite a bit of investment at the site. He closed with a discussion about the need to continue work on the old Wiggles building. Kernea mentioned that the time to work on lake-access and lake-related projects is now, given TVA's safety plans being implemented on Lake Chatuge. He stated that Cherokee County should take advantage of the expected increase in lake users in the coming years as a result. Several around the table agreed that we may need to appoint a special committee to work on these issues. Commissioner Stiles echoed this sentiment, and said that it

may be important to have a committee established solely to work on recreation projects around the lake during this time. Kernea followed that he thinks a public/private project for the Hanging Dog Campground area would be the best way to solve the problem of maintenance and upkeep in that area, and suggested that this model would be useful to re-opening access there. Commissioner Stiles stated that Rep. Gillespie is working on a plan to convert this to a NC Park, but mentioned that Commissioner Troxler is not cooperating with us on the plan.

Victoria Ivie: Tori stated that the Chamber held its Strategic Plan & Board Retreat yesterday which is designed to be a 3-year guide to their plan of work. She mentioned that they have several new members and that there are many new businesses in the community. She said she has now been with the Chamber 1.5 years. She promoted the Andrews Spring Fling planned for this coming weekend, as well as the Murphy Spring event in downtown planned for May 3. She concluded by mentioning the Forks & Corks event coming in June and that pricing changes have been made to the event.

Steve Dickey: Dickey stated he did not have any report, but mentioned that hotel traffic has been down about 20% recently.

Allison Ralph: She reported that the West End Plaza is under contract and will soon be closed. The new name will be Red Horse Plaza. She said commercial activity in the real estate market has been through the roof.

Paul Worley/Aaron Patton: Paul and Aaron reported on several issues facing the college, including a new push toward Apprenticeships, where a focused “Academy” is created to address a particular labor market need (the first being healthcare), and where grant money can be directed to support improvements to that sector. New sectors can be added to address other workforce needs over time. The TCCC housing initiative will be in full-swing soon (by summer). Worley stated that they have seen a relative slowdown in ED project activity, with many projects requiring natural gas and large employment numbers (beyond what we can provide). They are seeing more foods, timber-related and traditional types of projects and much fewer EV, AI/Crypto, and other recent “hot” projects. TCCC is moving forward on its planned cultural arts building. All agreed that the new facility is much needed. Paul shared occupancy and sales tax data with the group. Tori Ivie asked how to go about getting needed data, and she was told that we could provide all kinds of data, but that we do not usually generate it and leave said data out there to be “misinterpreted”. Paul stated that we keep data on local employment levels, and Aaron agreed it was time to update that information. Paul mentioned that local employers are slowing down some with some local manufacturers laying off. Randy asked the group their thoughts about the Scout article on the cost of local building materials. Consensus was that such information just thrown out to the public is not helpful to our economic development efforts.

Director’s Report: Paul had covered all of the information for the Director’s report in the TCCC update. There was a brief discussion held about the need to establish the EDC’s “top three” priorities again.

Worley stated that we have done this in the past, but that our goals need to be updated. Brinke mentioned that we should begin by using past information and goals to help guide us. Worley suggested that one of our previous goals, the need for workforce housing, remains a high priority, as does the need for workforce child care. Brinke stated that he and Aaron would send out a solicitation to all EDC members so they can each weigh in with their thoughts. Discussion ensued about the need to update the recent housing study, and Randy Wiggins suggested that we may have some grant money in that budget remaining that would allow us to pay for an update.

The Board discussed the proposed EDC Meeting calendar for the coming year provided by Brinke. A motion was made by Randy Wiggins, seconded by Allison Ralph, and approved unanimously to adopt the proposed calendar for the coming year.

There was no public comment

There being no further business to come before the Board, a motion was made by Larry Kernea, seconded by Randy Wiggins to adjourn. Motion carried unanimously.