

Town of Richlands
Industrial/Economic Development Authority
May 6, 2024

The Richlands IEDA held its regular monthly meeting at 6 p.m. with the following present:

Dr. Brandon Buskill	Joseph Vance
Dillon Smith	Lynna Mitchell
Cody Harman	Craig Earls

Members Absent: Jeff Casey

Town Representatives: Jason May

Guests:

Brandon Buskill called the meeting to order. Joseph Vance opened the meeting with prayer.

Lynna Mitchell made a motion to approve the agenda. Dillon Smith seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the agenda was unanimously approved.

The minutes from the April 1st meeting were presented for approval. Craig Earls made a motion to approve the minutes and Dillon Smith seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the agenda was unanimously approved.

New Business – General Discussion

Brandon Buskill: I requested the team to bring back some potential sites that may be of interest for economic development. Some members provided these to the town manager directly, but he has some hard copies for us to review.

Jason May: Advised that the town has budget approvals coming up, and the sewer rate is up for discussion. Once we have an approved budget we can focus more on economic development.

Brandon Buskill: Do we have any additional sites that are available? No additional sites discussed.

Jason May: The governor is coming back on May 23rd to visit the town. Cornado requested and will need additional water services from the town. The salmon farm project is moving ahead, and they are getting the bonds for the work to begin. During excavation, they had a lot of ground settlement issues, and they are packing the ground to make sure the foundation can hold the weight. They advised that they need about double the amount of water from the town. This will cause us to draw from the river, which will require a lot of additional permits. We have a regional water supply, and the upgrades are 25-28 million dollars. He advised that they should look at where to put the water plant in the existing area in town or move it to the land at the wastewater treatment plant.

The governor will be visiting the water treatment facilities. The state requires us to have a plan if the water plant is going to exceed 90% capacity. We can supply as-is, but it will be at 95% capacity.

Joseph Vance: The good news is the permitting process is cheap, but it does take a long time.

Jason May: Yes, we are looking for a consultant to help get us through the permitting process. Our current contracts are 25 years old, and we want to look at how we contract with Tazewell County PSA and Cedar Bluff. The price that we sell the water for is way less than other areas. In looking at the electricity rates, we are looking at the generator project so that we can try and eliminate the transmission costs from AEP. Those are very expensive, and we may be able to save a lot of money for the town in the long run. The group discussed.

Cody Harman: We have some new restaurants coming in, right?

Jason May: Yes, we have Liv-Y-Licious, LouLou's Icecream Parlor and potentially some Japanese restaurants coming in.

Lynna Mitchell: How about the walking trail for tourism?

Jason May: We have looked at this, and we have a lot of infrastructure needs for this. We do not have local short-term rentals, or hotels. Those people are staying outside of town, which is a challenge for us.

Craig Earls: Where are we with the allowing side-by-sides in town for the Spearhead Trails?

Jason May: We are still looking into this. We do have some concerns about them being downtown and where they are allowed to travel. We want to make sure to do this the right way and to use this to grow economically. These tourists travel from far away and they spend a lot of money on rooms, eating, entertainment etc.

Cody Harman: Does the governor have any money for senior housing?

Jason May: That is not something we have looked at. However, they are looking at housing in general in SWVA.

Lynna Mitchell: They have talked about affordable housing and some programs to help. They also provide planning grants to help communities with this. The group discussed.

Craig Earls: The rails-to-trails program is a great idea for economic development.

Jason May: Yes, we are looking into this. The railroad does not use the line between Richlands and Jewell Ridge. This could make a great bike trail system like the Creeper Trail and bring tourists into town. The group discussed it and agreed that it is a great idea.

Jason May: We are applying for a lot of grants for power generation, housing and other areas of focus. The key is bringing in tourism and industry. We are also looking at the old swinging bridge and a grant to help replace it. This will be a great resource to connect parts of town for tourism. We have a lot in the works.

Craig Earls made a motion to adjourn. Joseph Vance seconded the motion. It was unanimously approved, and the meeting adjourned.

Next Meeting: June 3rd, at 6 p.m.