

MACKINAC ECONOMIC ALLIANCE
Directors Report
January 31, 2015

On November 10, 2014 Anne Ottaway met with Lake Superior State University President Thomas C. Pleger Ph.D. to discuss areas of mutual interest concerning career and vocational educational opportunities in the UP. With a focus on the recent launch of the Fab Lab in the northern lower peninsula, the benefits of a mobile learning lab to provide high tech manufacturing training was acknowledged to be relevant to the need for skilled training opportunities in the UP. Dr. Pleger offered ideas for taking next steps to explore such opportunities and provided names of prospective stakeholders to study them. MEA will be reaching out to representatives of the other universities and colleges in the UP, as well as ISD leadership and secondary school superintendents and business leaders to study the potential of developing a mobile lab, as well as to entertain other ideas to address this critical need. On behalf of Lake Superior State University Dr. Pleger is eager to be involved in supporting economic development advances in Mackinac County. He shares MEA's philosophy that education is the foundation for economic development.

MEA organized the third and final focus group meeting of stakeholders for Walther Farms on November 3, 2014 at the St. Ignace Quality Inn. Since then the company studied focus group feedback in the context of their business plan and determined that before submitting a proposal to the DNR they wanted to finalize all details of their proposal. This entails finding a suitable rotation partner. As the company explained, they can only farm potatoes on 1/3 of the land per year, and need another agribusiness partner to come in and farm something else. Of utmost importance to Walther Farms is identifying a partner that shares their values and standards and who farms a crop compatible with potatoes. This would also be a partner to help provide a boost to the local economy through job creation. Once a partner has been secured Walther will move ahead with a full proposal to the DNR. No timeline has been given. Walther Farms has made clear that they want to take the time necessary to create a sustainable partnership. MEA has offered support and assistance through this process.

On December 5, 2014 Anne Ottaway and Rebecca Bolen spent an afternoon at the offices of Northern Lakes Economic Alliance. Andy Hayes and his NLEA team were generous in sharing best practices for the reporting and tracking of MEA's economic development activities. MEA was given templates and models to utilize in setting forth quantitative and qualitative data, as well as metric methodologies to employ in measuring results. NLEA reviewed MEA's 2014 projects and offered their support and help in accomplishing our objectives for 2015.

Les Cheneaux Community Foundation has engaged the services of MEA to assist the community in launching the Aldo Leopold Preserve and Park. Rebecca Bolen will help organize events for the June 2015 celebration. She will have responsibility for developing the program, securing advertising, implementing the promotional and marketing campaign and making long term recommendations for the Aldo Leopold Preserve.

In lieu of the January Board meeting MEA sponsored a presentation by Cloverland CEO Dan Dasho to discuss recent developments surrounding proposed utility rate surcharges in the UP. MEA invited Mackinac County Commissioners, Township Supervisors, City Officials, School Principals/Superintendents, SBDC and EUP Regional Planning to the Village Inn at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 20, 2015. Dan was able to shed light on the January 13, 2015 announcement from Governor Snyder's office regarding a series of agreements intended to lay the groundwork for eliminating the increases. Dan also elaborated on long term strategies to address energy generation and transmission deficiencies. MEA hosted Dan Dasho and Todd Chapman at a dinner following the meeting. Board members communicated their interest in working with Cloverland Electric and other UP energy stakeholders to identify solutions to energy and transmission challenges, and facilitate efforts to advance them.

On Thursday, January 22, 2015 Rebecca and Anne, together with several MEA Board members, attended a Mackinac County Commissioners meeting to hear a status report regarding the Brownfield Plan for the Old County Hospital. A timeline was offered for all steps in the approval process beginning with the Mackinac County Redevelopment Board Authority on February 5, 2015.

MEA has been working closely with Graymont to demonstrate support for their Rexton Project. In addition to the letter writing campaign MEA has been instrumental in organizing spokespeople at DNR meetings. Dean Reid has worked tirelessly in writing and calling officials at DNR, as well as communicating with elected officials in the State of Michigan. In December, when it became clear that letters written to the DNR in support of Graymont were not reflected in the DNR file, MEA decided to launch a Petition Drive. Signatures were obtained from residents of Mackinac, Chippewa and Luce counties and circulated by MEA Board members and other concerned citizens. At the DNR public meeting on January 28, 2015 supporters were present to approve the project by over a 2 to 1 margin. In addition, MEA presented the DNR Petitions with 305 signatures supporting the Rexton Project. Present at the meeting were a number of State Senators and Congressman who flew together from Lansing to voice their support. Among them were: Senator Wayne Schmidt, Senator Tom Casperson, Senator Pavlov and State Congressmen Chatfield, Mc Broom, LaFontaine and Kivela. MEA continues to support Graymont's efforts in establishing a Community Foundation in Mackinac County and to support their involvement in the Mackinac County Winter Carnival. Dean Reid and Bruce Gustafson will join Graymont officials at the DNR meeting on February 12, 2015 in East Lansing. MEA will be reaching out to Board members and others to attend the DNR meeting in Roscommon on March 19, 2015 when it is expected that approval of the Rexton Project will be granted.

MEA launched its Facebook page on September 16, 2014.

https://www.facebook.com/MackinacEconomicAllianceOfficial?ref=aymt_homepage_panel

And on January 30, 2015 the MEA website went live.

https://www.facebook.com/MackinacEconomicAllianceOfficial?ref=aymt_homepage_panel

Thanks to Rebecca Bolen's herculean efforts and social media skills MEA now has a professional web presence. Rebecca will be responsible for maintaining and updating the website and regularly posting information on Facebook. Board members should feel free to reach out to her with ideas, input, photos and feedback.

Since the November 6, 2014 meeting with proposed members of the MEA Curtis Task Force MEA forwarded meeting notes and suggested next steps to those in attendance. Portage Township Supervisor Tom Hoogterp followed up with community priorities and MEA has studied grant opportunities relating to them. MEA also invited Sue Pann, Principal of Great Lakes Academy Charter School, to join the Task Force. The Curtis Task Force will convene again in March to develop a work plan for the coming year.

Since January 1st MEA has been working to complete its application to USDA for a Rural Business Enterprise Grant in order to establish a Micro Revolving Loan Fund in Mackinac County. This grant requires matching funds from the community. In order to make the application as competitive as possible MEA is earnestly fundraising to obtain 50% of the proposed \$80K fund. MEA hopes to pair generous commitments from Mackinac Island Community Foundation and Graymont with contributions from several local banks, businesses as well as the Les Cheneaux Community Foundation. Both Jim Klarich, Director of Target Alpena, and his economic development staff have been generous in offering their expertise to guide MEA in the process of creating a sustainable program. This includes assembling a Loan Committee consisting of trained lenders to evaluate loan applications. Representatives from First National Bank, SBDC and Northern Initiatives have already given their agreement to serve. MEA has also been working in earnest to obtain support letters from businesses across Mackinac County that can speak to the benefits of this program in creating employment. The grant will be filed on February 28, 2015.

In October, 2014, Clark Township Supervisor, Gray Reid reached out to MEA for assistance in determining the brownfield implications of a proposed purchase of the Bon Air building in Cedarville. A local business owner, interested in eliminating blight along the Cedarville waterfront, wanted to determine if demolition of the building would qualify. MEA contacted Mac McClelland at Otwell, Mawby to arrange for a meeting with the purchaser and Clark Township. Additionally, in an effort to support the sale of this property, MEA provided assistance to the purchaser, supplying valuable background information on the building, and exploring various options to purchase it. On January 27, 2015 the sale was consummated. The new owners are Dan and Sally Carmichael. They plan to raze the deteriorating building and create a green space, landscaping the lot with trees and plantings. These improvements are consistent with the Downtown Cedarville Visioning Plan MEA recently facilitated on behalf of Clark Township. And according to Gary Reid, the removal of this blighted property will serve a catalyst in spurring revitalization efforts along the Cedarville waterfront.

MEA has signed a new contract with Mackinac County to continue its economic development efforts on behalf of the County for 2015. A Report reflecting specific

economic development objectives to be undertaken by MEA in 2015 will be filed pursuant to the contract on February 15, 2015.

As of January 1, 2015 Rebecca Bolen is the full time Assistant Director of MEA. In addition to her administrative and Internet technology responsibilities to the organization Rebecca will represent MEA at meetings and events. She will also work to leverage opportunities for broad based economic development among MEA's existing and prospective partners. A suitable business office space for MEA has been identified in Les Cheneaux Community Schools. MEA intends to sign a one-year lease beginning April 1, 2015.