

Mackinac Economic Alliance

Background

Mackinac Economic Alliance was incorporated as a Michigan non-profit organization in November 2012. Its stated mission is to foster economic growth through a public and private partnership dedicated to providing innovative leadership, vision, education and promotion of economic development. MEA's primary objective is to design and implement strategies to create new business and employment opportunities, and to provide entrepreneurial encouragement throughout Mackinac County.

As a 501(3)(c) organization MEA can accept tax deductible contributions from donors, and apply for a multitude of grants available only to IRS recognized 501(3)(c) entities.

Current members of the Mackinac Economic Alliance Board of Directors are:

John Kling, Chairman-Financial Advisor, Edward R. Jones-St. Ignace
Mary Swiderski, Vice Chairman-Mackinac County Commissioner, Realtor-Mackinac Properties
Gary Reid, Treasurer-Supervisor, Clark Township
Amy Polk-Secretary-Director, Les Cheneaux Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Council
Diane Patrick- Mackinac County Commissioner, Principal, Land N' Sea Sales
Cheryl Schlehuder- Principal, Mackinac Properties
Deb Evarshevski-Director, St. Ignace Downtown Development Authority
Wes Maurer-President, St. Ignace News
Mary Dufina-Business Owner, Mackinac Island and St. Ignace
Ken Drenth, President Les Cheneaux Community Foundation
Dean Reid, Mackinac County Planning Commission
Jim Clapperton, Coordinator, MI Works, St. Ignace
Richard Sterk, Independent Businessman

Anne Ottaway serves as the Executive Director of Mackinac Economic Alliance. For the past 10 years Anne has worked as an international economic development consultant creating strategies and implementing programs to improve livelihoods in developing countries. With extensive experience in writing grant proposals, preparing budgets and working closely with government agencies and the private sector, she has been effective in crafting sustainable initiatives to increase employment and encourage entrepreneurial opportunities. Anne draws insight and knowledge from years of experience as the owner of a successful small business she launched and operated in East Lansing, Michigan.

Taking guidance from the assessments of Northern Lakes Economic Alliance contained in their Mackinac County Economic Development Strategy prepared in 2011 for the Mackinac County Board of Commissioners, MEA has undertaken the following series of initiatives, and forged strategic partnerships with the organizations listed below.

2013 Accomplishments

Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

Mackinac Economic Alliance spearheaded the establishment of a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority in Mackinac County. A fundamental economic development tool to address the repurposing of blighted, contaminated, obsolete and historic properties in our communities, this is a critical first step in the reconstruction process.

Post Secondary Vocational and Trade School Education

The Alliance successfully negotiated with Liberty Truck Driving School to conduct a program in St. Ignace.

In partnership with EUP College Access Network MEA developed a program for Mackinac County High Schools and North Central Michigan College (NCMC) to offer high school students concurrent and dual enrollment classes that will apply toward the attainment of specific job certifications sought by area employers. This is a first step toward the development of a NCMC satellite campus in St. Ignace providing vocational education that is aligned to job demands in Mackinac County.

Revolving Loan Funds

As a way to address the gap in needed financing for new and existing businesses Mackinac Economic Alliance identified and has begun the process of completing a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant. Once the prerequisites for grant funding are met and the grant is approved, MEA will have the necessary funding required to operate a Revolving Micro Loan Program in Mackinac County.

Community Improvement and Economic Development

With funding from the Les Cheneaux Community Foundation Clark Township contracted the services of Mackinac Economic Alliance to procure Safe Routes to School grant funding for needed sidewalks, signage and other infrastructure improvements around the Les Cheneaux Schools. The Alliance is actively coordinating redevelopment efforts in Downtown Cedarville as well as ecotourism initiatives throughout the Township. MEA secured \$5K of grant funding for Clark Township under the Sault Tribe Community Transformation Grant. Mackinac Economic Alliance is poised to offer similar services to other Mackinac County units of government and will initiate outreach efforts in the coming months

2013-14 Initiatives

In addition to advancing the aforementioned accomplishments MEA has identified the following initiatives for inclusion in their 2014 workplan.

Website Development

Mackinac Economic Alliance has begun the process of creating a website for the purpose of establishing an online presence to:

- Communicate information about the organization and its mission
- Set forth Mackinac County demographics and facts
- Describe workforce training and educational opportunities
- Present up to date listings of available sites and buildings for lease or sale
- List business resources (services and small business assistance)
- Provide information regarding financing opportunities and state tax incentives
- Chronicle articles and newsletters
- Identify point of contact for information and assistance

Develop Inventory of all potential Brownfield properties in Mackinac County to be listed on both the Mackinac County and MEA websites

In order to maximize brownfield redevelopment opportunities in Mackinac County an inventory of brownfield properties needs to be compiled. Since this is one of the many vital roles performed by effective economic development organizations MEA will begin in earnest to develop and maintain this inventory

Real estate marketing of Old County Hospital

MEA has identified a prospective developer of the old MC Hospital who will be touring the property on 10/7/13. Depending on the outcome of this visit MEA will continue with its efforts to market and/or facilitate the sale and re-development of this county owned property.

Father Marquette Park

MEA has been asked to participate as a member of the Committee to plan the development the Father Marquette Park. Based on discussions and research MEA has recommended the re-introduction of House Bill 5415 that was defeated last year. The Bill was written to create the Fr. Marquette National Memorial and Straits Area Museum Advisory Board within the Department of Natural Resources. The Bill would establish an 11-member board appointed by the governor and speakers of the house and senate. MEA board members John Kling and Mary Swiderski are working closely with other Father Marquette Committee members to support the development of this important landmark.

Sault Tribe Call Center

Through discussions with the Chairman of the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians regarding specific ways to enhance employment opportunities in Mackinac County MEA learned about a specific property suitable to operate a Call Center. With potential to create approximately 40 full time jobs MEA has toured the available lease space at the Lambert Health Center in St. Ignace and will be working with MI Works to further explore development of this business model.

Partnerships

Since its inception in November, 2012 Mackinac Economic Alliance has reached out to local units of government within the county, and is working in partnership with the following organizations to develop coordinated strategies for attaining mutual economic development goals:

MI Works

EUP Planning and Development

St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce

Curtis Chamber of Commerce

Les Cheneaux Community Foundation

Mackinac County Commissioners

Les Cheneaux Chamber of Commerce

SBTDC

EUP College Access Network

Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians

Michigan Economic Development Corp. (MEDC)

Clark Township

North Central MI College

From EUP Regional Planning and Development Commission to Michigan Economic Development Corporation the widely held view is there is a critical need in Mackinac County for an entity charged specifically with responsibility to promote economic development. According to Jeff Hagan: "Without a county economic development corporation, at least partially funded by government, Mackinac County has no one to answer the door or pick up the phone" to develop employment opportunities and improve business vitality.

In reviewing the Revised 2013 Master Plan prepared by the Mackinac County Planning Commission providing for economic growth is a stated goal. The first objective under that goal is to support the continuance and expansion of the functions of the Mackinac Economic Alliance. Attached to this report is the 2014 Budget for Mackinac Economic Alliance Budget. As it reflected MEA intends to raise \$50K of funds, or approximately one half of its budget, from private business, foundation and government grants, and other community organizations. MEA is requesting that Mackinac County match this amount in providing its financial support.