

MACKINAC ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

Director's Report

August 22, 2016

Our "Bridge the Tech Divide" broadband project is enjoying slow but steady progress. The involvement of community champions has proved vital to achieving the goal of obtaining completed surveys from a majority of residents. The tally to date has Clark Township in the lead for surveys returned. Brevort has recently developed a strategy for going face to face with township residents. And MEA is hoping that Portage Township will take steps necessary to promote the initiative to encourage completion of their surveys. On August 12th MEA had a lengthy meeting with Steve Mason at Lighthouse.net to discuss ways in which to ramp up efforts to obtain the necessary results in all communities. He offered some specific ideas for the champions in each Township to implement. MEA has circled back with each community to review their plans for reaching their goals. Mr. Mason encouraged MEA to allow enough time to accomplish our goal and to continue the project through the fall.

On August 13, 2016 the Newberry News printed an article written by Stephen King regarding the recent Graymont Community and Economic Development Fund grant awards. Containing numerous inaccuracies and misrepresentations of facts surrounding the grant award payment process the article served to discredit MEA. After numerous conversations and meeting with Graymont it was decided that MEA would write a letter to each of the five (5) 2016 awardees to provide an explanation and timeline of the Graymont Fund Committee's decision regarding the payment process to individual awardees. MEA also reached out to Newberry News Publisher, Jim Diem, together with Stephen King. It was agreed that upon delivery of the facts to prove the falsities contained in the article the paper would print a retraction. The Publisher has since requested that MEA submit a Letter to the Editor to set the record straight. As Chairman of MEA and a member of the Graymont Community and Economic Development Fund a letter has been written for Dean Reid's signature. A copy of it will be sent to each MEA Board member.

It has been a rocky road processing the first loan of the MEA Micro Revolving Loan Fund. SBDC leadership in the UP has created major obstacles compromising the program. Specifically, following the first meeting of Loan Committee in June RLF Fund members raised a number of questions regarding the financials prepared by SBDC on behalf of the borrower. To date they have gone unanswered. In the interim MEA has been working to facilitate the loan process by making some needed adjustments going forward. This has included the development of a Loan Policy Guide for the Committee and the addition of information about the RLF on MEA's website. At this time MEA has engaged the services of Carl Bourdelais who provides business services to RLF borrowers in Alpena County. MEA is also reaching out to SCORE to determine how they may assist in helping borrowers prepare their business plans and financial materials. MEA has received a second loan application from a small business owner in Naubinway.

On July 19th Dean Reid, Anne Ottaway and Caroline Crecelius met CEO Darcy McLean and loan officers Dan Litzner, Debra Brandstrom and Jennifer Sayles at UP State Credit Union in St. Ignace. MEA presented information about the USDA Micro Revolving Loan Fund Program and furnished lenders with the recently completed MEA RLF Policy Guide. MEA shared the shortcomings of SBDC services to support the program and Debra Brandstrom

offered to join the RLF Committee to assist with the facilitation of loan applications. Debra and Bob Richardson will vet loan applications received by MEA before they are sent to the RLF Committee for review.

On July 22nd MEA met with Jen Tucker of MI DEQ to discuss the development of an inventory of Brownfield properties in Mackinac County. Jen and DEQ Project Manager Scott Shafer will be working with MEA to develop this inventory at a meeting scheduled for August 30th.

Taking into account recent real estate developments St. Ignace to address lack of housing for seasonal workers as well as impending ordinances to prevent future property sales of a similar nature, it is important for MEA to establish affordable housing priorities that conform to the desires of the community and prospective local ordinances. MEA board members will be asked to discuss this issue and provide feedback at our August board meeting.

On August 18th Anne Ottaway and Caroline Crecelius met with Mackinac Island Community Foundation Executive Director, Robin Dorman and Assistant Director Stephanie McGreavy to discuss economic development priorities on Mackinac Island. They went into detail to describe the critical need for year round affordable housing on Mackinac Island and the long-range projects underway to address it. MEA offered their support and assistance in that effort. MEA also asked for their input regarding any small businesses on the Island who might utilize funding from the MEA Micro RLF.