

## ECONOMIC RESOURCE ALLIANCE (ERA)

May 10, 2021 9:30 a.m.

Via Zoom

### Meeting Summary

Attendees: Jeff Holt (Sault EDC), Tracey Laitinen (Sault EDC), Jason Venema (Michigan Works), Allie Brawley (Cloverland), Tony Haller (Sault Chamber), Don Gerrie (USDA and Mayor SSM), Jake Brown (Cloverland Electric Cooperative), Rob Landis (Central Savings Bank), Jeff Hagan (EUP Regional Planning), and Kelly Freeman (City of SSM Community Development)

**1. Call to order 9:30am**

Holt welcomed attendees and proceeded with introductions

**2. Review of past meeting summary**

Please let Laitinen know if there are any corrections.

**3. Marketing Strategy Committee – Brown/Gerrie/Hoath/Haller/Schultz /Venema**

Hoath was not available to attend so we will move Soo Today to the next meeting.

The idea of a joint calendar was discussed at length. The group agreed that the best organization to host would be the CVB as they are already hosting a large, well promoted community calendar and each organization can submit one time or recurring events: <https://www.saultstemarie.com/events-calendar/> Capacity and staff time were discussed and each organization would upload their events and then need to drive the community and visitors to this site. Brown encouraged each entity to determine if their social media and web traffic were true visitors or community members to better gauge our efforts. Brawley noted it would be a win for the CVB and win for all of us and the community as the CVB has the top Google search. Haller will follow up with Hoath and report back at the June meeting.

**4. Events/Training/Workforce Development/Individual Sharing**

Venema shared a program called Young Professionals Program and explained that most of this funding is geared towards placing high school youth. There are no upfront fees for employers to participate in this program.

Holt gave an update on the Return North UP Wide virtual employment event coming May 20<sup>th</sup> in partnership with other UP Smartzones. <https://return-north.com/> No cost to job seekers. Fee for companies is \$200 each and there are still openings.

Holt shared several flyers for Sanderson Field including the NEW Ground School and upcoming Young Eagles flights for children.

Hagan gave an update on the \$37 million dollar broadband grant through the Intermediate School District. Hagan shared the award map and explained that there will be an upcoming stakeholder meeting on June 14<sup>th</sup> and encouraged those not involved to reach out to Angie McArthur at the EUPISD. Brawley explained Cloverland application and that they were not awarded but costs looked to be \$120 million. Hagan explained the new contracts have claw backs so he is optimistic that this plan will make a difference. Challenges that AEG could face in the U.P. are the seasonal construction in our region, workforce challenges, and Michigan permitting.

Gerrie reviewed the Downtown Place making construction projects and that the contractor will start and complete each project before moving on to the next. Engineering meetings have already been taking place

with affected parties. Gerrie explained that the original scope was paired down due to bids come in higher than expected.

Haller explained that Engineer's Day is being re-engineered and that more information will be available soon. Haller did not think that a bridge walk would be able to happen this year either.

Brawley asked the group what they have heard regarding staff shortages and businesses having to cut services and hours due to lack of help. Venema noted that folks are blaming unemployment but that may not be the answer. Haller reported that the Chamber gets 3+ calls a day regarding help wanted. Venema reported that MIWorks is seeing all types of companies suffering. Landis reported that it isn't just our area but that there are help wanted signs up everywhere you go and explained Wendy's latest hiring effort included a signing bonus. Everyone agreed to continue to share the open positions, Haller will group them in his eblasts. Brawley noted that Cloverland is hiring for summer mechanic: <https://cloverland.applicantpro.com/jobs/1781479.html>

Holt gave an update on the housing redevelopment in the Air Industrial Park and that the sale is still being negotiated but it will be exciting to see construction, new hires, and return the property to the tax rolls.

Holt gave an update on the Mac Building Project at 411 W. Portage Avenue and then recent award of \$850,000 Brownfield Grant through EGLE.

Holt reported that the former Tech Optics building in the Industrial Park has sold and will be converted to a grow facility. Brown asked Holt to share the purchaser information to assist in the electrical set up and Brawley added that there are energy optimization incentives.

Haller inquired about the Kmart building and Holt explained that the building is under contract, but still a lot of work to do. The team now has 60 days to lock up financing. Holt has been working with the development group now for almost a year and the redevelopment includes several redevelopment options; housing, retail, self-storage, secondary customs, and a fulfilment center. Last Saturday Holt took Damoose and Bergman through the property. Asking was \$2 million with an estimated \$7-8 million to renovate.

8. The next meeting will be **June 14<sup>th</sup> via Zoom**.
9. The meeting ended at approx. 10:35 a.m.

*TGL*