

**CALHOUN COUNTY**  
**PROCEEDINGS OF THE**  
**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

August 11, 2005

The Calhoun County Board of Commissioners convened in Joint Session with the Calhoun County Economic Development Corporation at 6:00 p.m., Thursday, August 11, 2005 at Schuler's Restaurant and Pub, 115 South Eagle, Marshall, Michigan.

Roll call: Board Members Present: Comrs. Bolger, Miller, Moore, Segal and Solis. Excused: Comrs. Strowbridge and Todd.

Corporation Members Present: President Stoffer, Vice President Dehn and Members Frantz, Spicer and Baldwin. Excused: Members Borowitz, Folk and Petredean-DiSalvio.

Also Present: County Administrator/Controller Greg Purcell and Sheridan Township Economic Development Director Marilyn Hennon.

**INVOCATION:**

A Moment of Personal Prayer was observed.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

“Motion by Comr. Moore, supported by Comr. Bolger, adopt the following: Resolved by the Calhoun County Board of Commissioners approve the August 11, 2005 agenda as presented.”

Voice Vote: Motion CARRIED

**SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS:**

**Introductions**

All provided a brief introduction. Corporation President William Stoffer stated that the Corporation would like to entertain discussion regarding the directions that the Board believes the Corporation should pursue, to advise what the Corporation is capable of doing, and what the Corporation has done since its establishment.

**Board of Commissioners/  
Economic Development Corporation  
Joint Session - August 11, 2005**

Corporation's History

President Stoffer advised that in 1977 a Calhoun County Economic Development Commission was established to assist in the development of new jobs and retention of existing ones during a period of job losses and recessions. The County Board of Commissioners funded the Commission with \$50,000 per year for a number of years. The Commission was comprised with representatives from local economic development boards, work programs, politicians and community members. President Stoffer stated that the Commission became cumbersome and had difficulty in attaining quorums, also proposed some very grand plans for which the budgets were out of reach of the county.

President Stoffer continued that in the early 1980's new programs that dealt with state efforts to allow local entities to issue bonds at very low interest rates became law, and in order for the county to do this, the Commission had to re-form as a Corporation. Membership on the Corporation was restructured to a smaller, more manageable level with representatives of industry and banking. President Stoffer advised that in this period the Corporation hired bond counsel and issued eight or nine bond issues that assisted a number of businesses in the county enabling them to expand and add jobs. President Stoffer stated that as tax abatements and other incentives became available from the cities the Corporation issued fewer bonds. The Corporation's current funding is derived of the bond fees charged.

President Stoffer stated that after a recession in the early 1990's the Corporation was again looking for ways to bring in more jobs, and the Upjohn study on potential job losses through 2000 began an effort to determine a county-wide program to bring business, education, city and county governments, unions, chambers of commerce, etc. together for the purpose of creating 10,000 jobs by 2000. The Corporation created the Economic Development Forum and funding from the Kellogg Foundation and the Miller Foundation, businesses, all communities and their respective foundations, and individuals created the budget to achieve this goal. President Stoffer advised that more than 10,000 new jobs were created, however, that the loss of other jobs brought the county back close to a break-even situation.

President Stoffer stated that recently the Corporation has been meeting on various issues, reviewed a number of projects, conducted research for the Board regarding financing for some industries, and has contributed \$5,000 towards the Board's planning efforts.

County Administrator/Controller Greg Purcell added that the Corporation also assisted in the B.R.A.C. effort in St. Louis.

Comr. Bolger inquired whether the county still provides funding for the Corporation. President Stoffer responded "No, not for over twenty years." President Stoffer advised that the Corporation has just over \$20,000 remaining from previous bonding fees.

**Board of Commissioners/  
Economic Development Corporation  
Joint Session - August 11, 2005**

President Stoffer advised that the Corporation continues to look for projects and receives reports from the economic development directors of every community, and is available at the Board's beckoned call to review any issues the Board would like the Corporation to review, within the responsibilities of the Corporation's bylaws.

Vice President Karl Dehn added that one of the things that has impacted the Corporation's capability to issue bonds is because there are many different entities now that can provide financing, therefore, the need for the Corporation in that respect has substantially decreased. Vice President Dehn pointed out that the Corporation has been a platform for communicating with the townships and cities throughout the county that might not have otherwise been going on.

Member Joyce Spicer stated that one of the things that she has seen evolve since she has been on the Corporation is the networking between the various economic development directors.

Corporation's Future Interaction Discussion

Comr. Bolger stated that looking into the future, he believes the county must look at diversification, regionalization and globalization and inquired what the Corporation believes can be done to facilitate diversification, regionalization and globalization in Calhoun County. President Stoffer addressed regionalization, pointing out that there is the new effort for arts, music and theater, and the quality of life in Calhoun County, that contributes to that regionalization by bringing individuals into the area which is an atmosphere that new entrepreneurs like to thrive in. President Stoffer stated that perhaps Calhoun County can work with Kalamazoo County to do something along I-94, and that perhaps the Corporation could be a catalyst for a countywide discussion regarding the businesses in Calhoun County working together; i.e., sharing equipment, work, etc.

Comr. Bolger stated regarding diversification, that Marshall just lost State Farm Insurance with 500 employees, and he believes the county has opportunities which have not been explored yet. Comr. Bolger inquired what the Corporation believes the county can do to compete in the globalized market place. President Stoffer responded that perhaps the Corporation could sponsor a county town hall meeting, with a moderator to address health care, etc., what other business can be attracted, what are the county's assets to date, etc. or perhaps there should be a major advertising campaign promoting the county.

Comr. Moore addressed businesses being lost, and inquired whether there is an opportunity for the economic development corporations and the county to look at how competitive the county is in comparison to competing states or regions in Michigan, perhaps in concert with the Upjohn Institute. President Stoffer responded that the Upjohn Institute did such a study for the Corporation. Member Susan Baldwin advised that the report conducted in 2002 provided a comparison of Calhoun County with ten comparable counties in the mid-west that did not have major universities. Member Baldwin stated that perhaps the 2002 Upjohn Institute report should be reviewed and updated.

**Board of Commissioners/  
Economic Development Corporation  
Joint Session - August 11, 2005**

Comr. Moore stated that he would be interested in knowing if Calhoun County is losing like size businesses to comparable communities. Member Joyce Spicer advised that in Albion Guardian Insurance was looking at Texas because it was cheaper to do business, however, Guardian still located in Albion because of the workforce and some other components and because the Corporation worked with Guardian, and it made a difference. President Stoffer added that Guardian Insurance advised that they were sending people all over the country to train because the employees would not leave Albion.

Comr. Bolger inquired in what ways Texas is cheaper. President Stoffer responded that the salaries and energy costs are less. Controller Purcell stated that energy is a difficult hurdle in this state. Vice President Dehn stated that in Michigan high energy costs are encountered a lot and that mid-west Michigan is probably in the middle of the pack and has trouble competing in particular with the southern states. Comr. Bolger inquired whether there is anything the county can do to influence the rates. Vice President Dehn responded that the energy rates are a federal issue, and stated that Calhoun County may wish to consider a lobbyist. President Stoffer stated that all of the communities should be represented and contribute, and that perhaps the Upjohn Institute could conduct some research with the communities to determine their interest.

Member Baldwin encouraged Corporation and Board members to consider attending the Upjohn Institute's annual report in January which updates a lot of the information addressed. Ms. Baldwin stated that the meetings are well attended and very informative. Mr. Purcell advised that Board members receive an invitation, Commissioner Moore and he attend regularly, and that he always copies the information received for all Board members.

Comr. Moore stated that in particular he remembers attending one the meetings where they were advised that people are doing drive by tours of the schools and facilities in Calhoun County and get the impression that Calhoun County does not have high enough standards. Comr. Moore stated that the county is still seeing that; i.e., the Kellogg situation with 70 to 80 percent of their employees now residing in Kalamazoo County, which is unacceptable and is an area that Calhoun County must do better.

Comr. Segal inquired whether the county can help facilitate getting the various economic development organizations together to meet to get a conversation going regarding how the county's perception can be changed. Comr. Segal stated that she intends to go to Battle Creek Health Systems for her delivery and when she advised others they advised her that she should go to Bronson Hospital or at the least Oaklawn as the perception is that Battle Creek Health System is a terrible hospital, even though Battle Creek Health System is a cancer award winning hospital. Comr. Segal voiced concern that if people in Battle Creek cannot say good things about their community, how the perception can be changed.

Comr. Segal stated regarding the Kellogg situation, that from what she heard the executives only received realtor information regarding housing in the Portage area. President Stoffer stated that it is the word of mouth of the executives as well. President Stoffer stated that perhaps they should concentrate on changing the perception of the opinion makers.

**Board of Commissioners/  
Economic Development Corporation  
Joint Session - August 11, 2005**

Comr. Segal inquired what the County and the Corporation can actively do to make the county a more pleasant environment for businesses and people to live.

Comr. Moore inquired whether the Corporation model or the Forum model would be best to bring people together. President Stoffer responded that he believes there is need for the Corporation model because it can morph itself into what is needed at the time, however that for getting things done, the Forum was more effective because it had Bill LaMothe behind it and he got all the major businesses involved. President Stoffer pointed out that the Forum's success was due to Mr. LaMothe.

Member Richard Frantz stated that where executives are residing was addressed in another study by the Upjohn Institute. Calhoun County is competing with Kalamazoo County which has four universities, which is a distinct disadvantage. Mr. Frantz stated that he believes Calhoun County has to create something that the other communities do not have.

President Stoffer pointed out that Albion has an equestrian program which is unique. President Stoffer advised that the program was filled in its first year and people are offering funding to have the program expanded; further, there has been discussion regarding having a horse trailer business.

Comr. Moore inquired whether the Albion Economic Development Corporation discussed bringing in equestrian businesses. President Stoffer responded "Immediately." President Stoffer advised that there was discussion within the first week of a tack shop downtown and currently about having an espresso and bagel shop, and that different ideas are still floating around.

Sheridan Township Economic Development Director Marilyn Hennon advised that she taught at Kellogg Community College last year, and that she does not believe enough marketing of the College is being done.

Member Spicer advised that the Albion Economic Development Corporation is talking about purchasing property for the equestrian center to provide a place for the trailers to come in.

Comr. Bolger inquired whether the Albion Economic Development Corporation worked with the Visitor and Convention Bureau on the equestrian center. President Stoffer responded that he would have to find out, that presently the center is private, through the college; therefore, there has not been a lot of marketing yet. Chairman Miller stated that he believes the center should be included within Calhoun County's marketing by the Visitor and Convention Bureau.

Ms. Hennon advised that in Sheridan Township they have a center that is training the sulky riders and horses.

Comr. Moore inquired whether there has been communication regarding the equestrian center with the Calhoun County Agricultural and Industrial Society because he knows that part of the Society's strategic plan was to build a similar facility to allow for those large shows to come in to Calhoun County to pay for some of the

**Board of Commissioners/  
Economic Development Corporation  
Joint Session - August 11, 2005**

maintenance costs of the fairgrounds. Comr. Moore stated that, in terms of coordination amongst the agencies, both of whom are non-profit, perhaps there is an opportunity for the fairgrounds to coordinate with the college. President Stoffer stated that he believes that is a good idea which he shall pass along.

Comr. Segal inquired what the next step should be for the Corporation and the Board to move forward. President Stoffer responded that outside of a new project, he believes one thing the Corporation should do on an annual basis is provide an annual report to the Board.

Chairman Miller stated that he believes so much of what has been discussed is just a question of getting people from different perspectives to find some common projects, and that a twice a year report from the Corporation would be helpful. President Stoffer suggested that the Corporation/Board annually have a co-meeting and that the Corporation provide a full formal report at a Board of Commissioners meeting. Comr. Segal inquired whether it would be beneficial to have the other economic development directors attend a joint meeting. Controller Purcell stated that he believes it would be difficult to afford everyone an opportunity to speak. President Stoffer pointed out that the economic development directors attend the Corporation's meetings. President Stoffer suggested one annual joint meeting of the Board/Corporation, and another meeting of the Board/Corporation and the economic development directors.

Discussion continued regarding a deficit of leadership in the communities and lack of leadership training. Comr. Moore voiced concern that there is no one organization that brings all the "movers and shakers" together and speak with one voice for the entire county.

Chairman Miller suggested that the Corporation provide a recommendation to the Board regarding what "vehicle" should be used to move forward and bring people under an umbrella, whether it is a forum or an economic development club or whatever. Member Baldwin suggested that a list of ten to twenty names of leadership people in the community also be compiled in the process, and offered to pull the list of people that were involved in the Forum.

Comr. Bolger inquired whether the Corporation could provide a determination of the road blocks, cost of doing business and barriers for businesses. President Stoffer suggested perhaps a countywide business survey; and advised that he shall email and talk with members regarding how to disseminate the questions and bring the information back, however, that he believes a recommendation regarding a vehicle for speaking regarding economic development with clout shall take a little more time to think out.

Chairman Miller thanked Corporation members for the dinner.

Comr. Moore again addressed the need for leadership training. Vice President Dehn advised that there has been discussion with the Kellogg Foundation regarding leadership training, and the Foundation is studying some models. Ms. Hennon suggested a means of recognizing leaders at a young age; i.e., in the high schools. President Stoffer advised that Albion College is trying that. Comr. Segal advised that Battle Creek City and

**Board of Commissioners/  
Economic Development Corporation  
Joint Session - August 11, 2005**

the county have youth councils.

President Stoffer thanked Board members for attending and advised that the Corporation shall respond to the ideas shared tonight.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting adjourned at 8:17 p.m.

mlb