

# Economic Development, Tourism, Housing, Planning & Transit Committee

## Regular Meeting Minutes

**DATE & TIME:** January 7, 2015, Immediately Following Organizational Meeting

**LOCATION:** Karen L. Binder Library, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, COB, Kingston, NY

**PRESIDING OFFICER:** Chair Thomas J. Briggs

**LEGISLATIVE STAFF:** Krista J. Barringer, Deputy Clerk

**PRESENT:** Legislators Chris Allen, Lynn Archer, Herbert Litts, III, James F. Maloney, Mary Beth Maio (arrived 9:07 PM) and Kenneth Wishnick

**EXCUSED:** None

**QUORUM PRESENT:** Yes

**OTHER ATTENDEES:** FOCUS Media Owner Josh Sommers, FOCUS Media Representatives Whitney Bowers and Tony Morino, Town of Ulster Resident Craig Oliver, Economic Development Alliance President Suzanne Holt, and Deputy County Executive Ken Crannell

Chair Briggs called the meeting to order at 9:05 PM.

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**Guest Presenter: Suzanne Holt, President, Economic Development Alliance & Josh Sommers, President, FOCUS Media**

[Handouts Provided:

<http://issuu.com/ulstereconomicdevelopment/docs/uceda.ulsterofficeed.brochure/0>]

Mr. Sommers presented an overview of FOCUS Media. He noted the company has been servicing Ulster County Tourism since 2010 with a new comprehensive program with digital search and retargeting initiatives. He noted the booking software and online transactions, the enhanced online experience with video, and the social media content and audience with 7,000 people liking the Facebook Page (the largest of all the Hudson Valley Tourism agencies).

Legislator Wishnick requested the list of purchased key word searched to which Mr. Sommers agreed to provide.

Mr. Sommers highlighted the increased bed tax revenue of 6.1% in 2013 and the 6.6% increase in tourism spending (also the largest increase in the Catskill tourism region). He stated tourism was a \$500 million industry for Ulster County.

Mr. Wishnick asked about figures related to AirB&B. Deputy County Executive Crannell indicated this was a question for the Director of Finance. He discussed the

confidentiality of the information. Legislator Archer noted it would be interested to know the impact of this industry in Ulster County.

Mr. Sommers noted FOCUS Media applied for its first Catskill Consolidated Funding Application on behalf of the region's tourism. He noted the print and web national awards FOCUS Media received on behalf of Ulster County tourism projects.

Mr. Sommers highlighted their company's experience with economic development. He noted their work with SUNY New Paltz's 3D Printing Center and being designated as the marketing agency for the Hudson Valley Center for Development. He stated they received 27 awards from the New York State Economic Development Council.

In regards to the Ulster County Economic Development Alliance contract with FOCUS Media for 2014, Mr. Sommers noted they were not brought in to write strategy as that was done in 2007 with the Ulster Tomorrow plan. He stated their role was to develop economic development messages for Ulster County. He noted the SWOTs initiative was to engage stakeholders and inform the process versus developing messaging in a silo.

Legislator Wishnick asked how the stakeholders were identified. Mr. Sommers replied his company identified categories of stakeholders to which Economic Development Alliance President Holt provided names. He noted there were three SWOT sessions held with approximately 35 individuals from throughout the County participating. Deputy County Executive Crannell stated he would provide a list of the participating stakeholders to the Committee.

Mr. Sommers stated as part of their 2014 work, they identified message hierarchy, new outreach and educational programs. In response to questioning from Legislator Archer, he noted it would be preferable to speak to potential companies considering location to Ulster County. He highlighted the programming developed for the retention and development of current businesses based on the SWOT activity.

Mr. Sommers stated the messaging identified in the SWOT included being open for business and it has been harder to get programs through the development process, it was important for government to say "we want you here." He stated the strengths were the proximity to markets and quality of life. He noted the difficulty in doing business in New York State and that most existing businesses identify a connection or reason for being here. He highlighted the ten top tier economic development messages.

Mr. Sommers stated in 2014 the focus was on building assets.

Legislator Archer inquired as to 2014 being the baseline for performance indicators. Ms. Holt replied they did establish the baseline in 2014 and they were currently figuring out the baseline. Mr. Sommers indicated the process takes time and that they believe in the methodology.

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Legislator Wishnick inquired if they were looking at industries that went elsewhere. Mr. Sommers indicated Ms. Holt is considering those strategies for 2015. He felt chasing clusters could be elusive and suggested promoting industry.

Legislator Wishnick noted, in his review of the Site Selector magazine to which the County's ad has been placed, it reported New York State as the 23<sup>rd</sup> best place to do business and that 49 other areas has competing business ads. He stated the Ulster County ad did not show proximity location or quality of life messaging.

Mr. Sommers provided a summary of the 2014 activities, which included the SWOT sessions, updating agency brands, adopting key marketing messages, identifying key economic development marketing opportunities and implementing program, electronic outreach, and "Building Ulster County Together" events for expansion and retention that included a seminar for Spanish speaking entrepreneurs, breakfast networking and building marketing assets.

Legislator Wishnick inquired about the use of stock photos instead of County specific photos in the print and web brand marketing materials.

Legislator Maloney suggested including the economic development benefits in the economic development materials. He noted there was enough to grab the attention of site selectors.

Legislators Wishnick and Maloney discussed the quality of life and location messages should include the "what are you going to give me" message.

Legislator Allen suggested an economic strategy that targets specific local communities and encouraged including more local officials speaking on the benefits of the individual municipalities and locations. He asked what type of interactions the Economic Development Alliance was having with the local municipal leaders and planning boards regarding messaging. Ms. Holt replied these were good points that would be taken into consideration moving into the next phase in 2015. She noted 2014 was spent developing collateral. Deputy County Executive Crannell noted the message from the SWOTs indicated there were too many agencies and they needed a one door gateway for economic development. Mr. Morino noted future assets can include testimonials. Ms. Holt highlighted the plan for future videos to target the messaging. Mr. Sommers noted there was a lot of raw video that can be edited.

Legislator Archer suggested targeted marketing campaigns. Ms. Holt indicated she would like to do both targeted and micro campaigns.

Ms. Holt noted she is working toward a certificate in economic development and is attending various trainings and conferences. She noted FOCUS Media is an enormous resource and partnership but that the local leadership team is figuring it out.

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Legislator Wishnick inquired as to FOCUS Media's role in determining the County's strategy as well as the top tier messages. Ms. Holt replied the County Executive and his leadership team developed the strategy and decided on the top tier messages. Deputy County Executive Crannell noted the collaborative group of Ms. Holt, Department of Planning Director Doyle, and FOCUS Media would present options to which the County Executive would make the final decision.

Ms. Holt indicated there were a lot of ideas for 2015 and she would have a plan for presentation to the Committee in February.

Legislator Maloney discussed the ultimate goal of making the phone ring. In highlighting Legislator Archer's comment regarding infrastructure development, Legislator Maloney noted the County Planning Department's relationship with economic development.

Legislator Archer noted the Ulster Tomorrow plan was from 2007 and as a plan, it evolves based on testing, design and research. Deputy County Executive Crannell noted in the last year and a half, the County has gotten it's act together. He noted the work of FOCUS Media being the baseline work and that they need help, including help to expand the shovel ready program. He suggested if the Legislature decided it was time to update Ulster Tomorrow, the Executive's office was supportive.

Mr. Sommers highlighted their recommendation that the County enhance the State and Regional economic development marketing efforts with a focus on site transactions. He summarized the 2015 opportunities of continuing the retention and expansion education programs, increasing internal communications with a monthly newsletter, more publicity, building the social media audience, more videos, building equity and awareness with site selectors, site selection events and tours, national Google AdWords campaign, broadcast advertising, and campaign microsites.

Ms. Holt stated they would discuss with the Committee after the approval of the 2015 contract, what the EDA would do with the funding.

### **Adjournment**

**Motion Made By:** Legislator Maio  
**Motion Seconded By:** Legislator Allen  
**No. of Votes in Favor:** 7  
**No. of Votes Against:** 0

**TIME:** 10:26 PM

**Dated the 12<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2015**  
**Krista Barringer, Deputy Clerk**  
**Minutes Approved on: February 3, 2015**