

ECONOMIC RESOURCE ALLIANCE (ERA)
April 8, 2019 9:30 a.m.
Smartzone - 2345 Meridian St., Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783

Meeting Summary

Jeff Holt (Sault EDC), Tracey Laitinen (Sault EDC), Tony Haller (Chamber of Commerce), Chris Olson (Chippewa County EDC), Linda Hoath (Sault CVB), Joel Schultz (Sault Tribe), Justin Knepper (DDA), Lana Forrest (Chippewa Co. Health Dept.), Don Gerrie (City SSM/USDA Rural Dev.), Josh Billington (SBDC), Dan Reattoir (EUPISD), Allan Watson (Norpro), and Jill Ann Rambo (The Little Gift Shop)

1. Call to order 9:35am

Holt welcomed our guests and prompted introductions.

2. Featured Speaker – Jill Ann Rambo/[The Little Gift Shop](#)

Rambo gave some history on her family's businesses and her career path to open up a shop downtown after being inspired by the Sanderson's opening up Phat Boutique. Rambo had a PowerPoint showing some before and after photos as well as décor and events she has hosted. Her mind was made up after meeting with the owner of a concept store in Traverse City. From start to finish she was open in just 51 days as the interior only needed minor renovations. Rambo has 80% of the store filled with artisan, Michigan Made, products and then 20% filler from other vendors. She continues to be able to expand with community support and also offers art classes which get folks in the shop. Some goals moving forward are to hire more staff, add a web presence for online sales and work with the DDA on a grant to redo the entire building. When asked to explain the process of opening her own business and any struggles that she encountered, Rambo explained her struggles with her store awning and then the delays with service providers. Moving forward, if the renovation grant does come through, parking will be an issue as the alley was turned into a walking alley so Rambo cannot access their parking area. Rambo wrapped by adding her best surprise for the year was seeing that her shop was listed as the 10 Best Things to do in the Sault for 2019. Watson recapped his Christmas shopping experience at Rambo's store adding that he was blown away by the customer service. Reattoir asked if we can all say the same at our workplace (do we offer great customer service?).

The discussion of permits, how owners are notified via mail/phone calls, and the process of code enforcement ensued with the overarching theme being customer service. Start up resources/education for folks that have entrepreneurial enthusiasm seemed to be lacking. Rambo added that she was now aware of all the resources out there, but in the beginning she didn't know about the ERA, SBDC, etc... Moving forward Rambo is looking to install an exterior sign and will be going through the permitting process again.

Reattoir is working through the CTE program with SBDC to visit all EUP schools 2x per year and mentor students on what it takes to start and or run a business including accounting, codes, etc...so they are better informed as adults and about to tap into our resources.

Ideas discussed:

- More education to current business owners on what departments can offer/where to ask for help (Concierge materials). Lowest hanging fruit is our current businesses – Economic Gardening
- Common sense exemptions
- Continue to review ordinances
- Utilize resources currently on SaultCity.com – [how to start a business](#)
- How can we enforce codes under the Citizen Service Philosophy
- New hires trained with the expectation that their role is just as much economic development
- How will the City handle the growing influx of clients with limited staff/resources if the Soo Locks Project goes
- Struggles of building new vs rehabs
- CVB PR will assist in highlighting businesses
- How do we engage the business community? Do we over interpret?
- Rationale is enormous – start with the WHY. Ex: “are you enjoying xyz?” then leads into “did you know you are no parking zone?”
- Peer support

3. Soo Locks Planning

Holt updated the group on the USACE event for prime contractors taking place on May 1st at the Corps at 9am. This event will consist of a walk through and Q&A. The EDC is planning to partner on a follow up event, possibly in the Fall, to showcase City assets and share information about housing, education, etc...to ensure their needs are met. Discussion was had on also assisting the 2 new housing projects in finding subcontractors. A [recent USACE project](#) was brought up as we may be able to glean information from that project on workforce, boom and bust, to learn more about how things may actually work. Billington will look into the possibility of an EDA grant to fund a study. Schultz recommended leveraging job opportunities as the mines did on the western end i.e. political pressure to hire local. The group agreed that we need to support local contractors. Gerrie revisited Congressman Bergman’s point of have a plan because the project is still not guaranteed. Watson asked to revisit the Amazon packet for data and discuss at next month’s meeting.

<https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=ee150fcd849462bc9706043b2cd23558&tab=core&cvview=1>

4. New, Expanding, Struggling Businesses

- New motorized bike rental business will be on Portage Ave this year.
- McDonald’s will be renovating
- Supervalu has been sold and will now be Pat’s Foods (owner of several stores in the western UP)
- I-75 Construction starts up April 22

5. Upcoming Events/ Trainings

- Hospitality Training April 23rd – FULL

- National Register Historic District Information [meeting April 23](#)
- [Chamber Economic Luncheon](#) May 2
- Grubstake May 7th – [register here](#)
- *Operation Northern Strike is on hold per Olson*

Billington recapped Regional Planning's Land Bank workshop offered in St. Ignace last Friday noting that it also worked with Brownfields.

6. Sharing

Olson updated the group on the [potential aerospace project for Kincheloe](#) with the [Michigan Aerospace Manufacturers Association](#). A future meeting is being planned with the CCEDC Board and Director of MAMA Gavin Brown for a site visit in Kincheloe. The site is ideally suited to match their sizeable land and transportation needs. The privately funded project could bring a 50-75 million dollar investment to the region in order to launch up to 7,000 satellites over the next 10 years. Olson added that Governor Whitmer did have [\\$2.5 million](#) in the budget but that it was pulled out for additional specifics. Traverse City is now home to 3 more aerospace companies.

Schultz asked about the self-score for the Malcolm Loft Project. Billington gave an update that their self-score came in at 122 and would now be reassessed by MSHDA.

The meeting ended at approx. 11:30am.

**Please note that ERA meetings are the 2nd Monday of each month.*

***Our next meeting will be May 13th at 9:30am.*