

**ECONOMIC RESOURCE ALLIANCE (ERA)**  
**July 8, 2019 9:30 a.m.**  
**SmartZone – 2345 Meridian St., Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783**

**Meeting Summary**

Attendees: Jeff Holt (Sault EDC), Tracey Laitinen (Sault EDC), Don Gerrie (USDARD/City of SSM), Chris Olson (CCEDC), Tony Haller (Sault Chamber of Commerce), Justin Knepper (DDA), Mark VanDoren (Smith & Co.), Josh Billington (SBDC), Allan Watson (Norpro), Denise Hillier (MIWorks), Mari Schupp (Tipping Point Solutions), Kelly Freeman (City of SSM Community Development), Joel Schultz (Sault Tribe), Megan Kinney (Bayliss Library), and Rebecca Fegan (After All This Time)

**1. Call to order 9:35am**

Holt welcomed attendees and led introductions.

**2. Review past meeting summary and area media**

Holt briefly went over last month's meeting.

**3. Featured Speaker – Rebecca Fegan – Owner of After All This Time**

Rebecca kicked off the meeting with a YouTube video of her submission to Chipstarter.com for Chip & Joanna Gaines. <https://youtu.be/t6nYIRqMF2Q> Also review the PPT attached.

Working out of a 200 square foot space in her home, Rebecca was shipping over a thousand pieces in her first year alone. In June 2018 she opened a 800 square foot storefront in under 13 days on Ashmun. Until she was in the thick of things she did not realize there were agencies such as the DDA and SBDC that could assist, adding she was self-financed and did most of the renovations herself. Within just one year of being open she has now expanded again and moved to the previous Oh Crepe storefront at 341 W. Portage Avenue, just across from the Soo Locks. She added that it was quick move, just 36 hours.

Her items include private labels with many Michigan based companies, a children's line, Local is the New Black and Michi-bits run by her two son's ages 7 and 14. She also has a 906 line that will be launching soon. Rebecca's children, along with her mother, are all heavily invested in the business.

Rebecca highlighted the disconnect between the flow on Portage vs. the shoppers on Ashmun. Discussion was had on how to get folks 'around the corner' as well as the barriers including an anchor store, services on the first floor vs. second. Rebecca shared some statistics of having 28 walk-ins per week vs. 335 before noon at her new location. With the recent Engineers Day and 4<sup>th</sup> of July that brought in 8,000 and 6,000 visitors respectively. She thought long and hard before choosing to move to Portage, but then quadrupled her sales. Discussion moved to "Community over Competition" and Rebecca added that it is important to work together to attract a variety of shoppers so everyone can succeed. Solely relying on local shoppers is not sustainable. VanDoren brought up the housing developments occurring downtown and the population that will assist in growing the downtown. Knepper is working with MEDC, and once the Sault becomes a Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC), options are available to assist with vacant lots such as the

Templeton lot between The Palace and 1668 Winery, that decrease the flow of traffic. Kinney brought up the idea of Pop Up Shops or a flea market to gain traffic.

When asked how to get the word out in a more effective way as far as agencies that are here to assist entrepreneurs several options were discussed including packaging them differently, having options at Bayliss, and starting a women in entrepreneurship coaching group. Watson recapped the way that Sault Ontario is relaunching its brand and how several companies he previously worked with were hyper focused on social media and responding to the public and how that turned their business around. Gerrie added that we need to figure out a better way to reach the audience that the information needs to get to.

Fegan wrapped by adding that she attributes her success to sharing her story well through social media platforms. After All This Time has become a destination to visit when folks are in the Sault area. Recapping what her naysayers told her when she wanted to open up her first store she says she will continue to push ahead. Her 5 year goal is to open up her family's barn into a wedding venue, but that may happen sooner than later as she has a history of quick turnarounds. With the current storefront open seasonally, she hopes that it will become a year round destination.

Discussion was had regarding vacant buildings downtown, costs to renovate, packaging properties to attract larger developers, rehab vs. demo, return on investment, economic gardening, available contractors, assisting entrepreneurs, and working better together.

Schultz suggested tapping into LSSU and their Product Development Center the way that NMU has with their Invent@NMU. Kinney added that they just submitted a grant for a kiosk at Bayliss. <https://invent.nmu.edu/press-spotlight>

Holt recapped the secret shopping that was done by Superior Hospitality Partners in 2018 as part of a CVB project noting that locals felt negatively about the Sault, but visitors gave positive reviews. Too often we share the negative and don't celebrate our successes.

#### **4. Individual Sharing:**

Holt reviewed the updated Soo Locks construction timeline in the packet.

Kinney shared her library card program which she will be speaking about to the group in September. This program will incentivize the public to get their library card to and receive discounts at local businesses.

Haller shared a program they are working on after Delta County's "Keys to Success". This program is a type of discount that Chamber members will receive and hopes to have it roll out this fall.

Several partners are hosting an Internship Fair in August – flyer attached.

The DDA was the recipient of an \$836,000 grant to rehab 6 apartments.

October 2<sup>nd</sup> Manufacturing Day Summit – Smithers Test Track 11:30am to 1:30pm. [Register here.](#)

Schultz shared the upcoming Sault Tribe Business Alliance of member owned business leaders taking place at Kewadin on August 8<sup>th</sup> from 10am to 3pm. Flyer is forthcoming. Later that same day Billington will be hosting an Export and Cyber Security workshop at the Smartzone from 3-5pm.

The meeting ended at approx. 11:00 a.m.

*\*Please note that ERA meetings are the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of each month at 9:30am.*

*\*\*Our next meeting will be August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019*

*TGL*