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The Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren met in Special Session in conjunction with the Warren County Economic Development Committee in its offices in the Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building, Belvidere, New Jersey on October 13, 2016 at 8:00 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by Director Sarnoski and upon roll call, the following members were present: Freeholder Edward Smith, Freeholder Richard Gardner and Freeholder Jason Sarnoski. Also attending were County Administrator Steve Marvin and from the WCEDC were Scott Anderson, Eve Azar, Mitchell Jones, Andrea Kirchuk, John Kruk, Stan Prater, Herman Shoemaker, Linda Stettler and Todd Tersigni. Chair Betty Schultheis would arrive a few minutes later.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Director Sarnoski.

Director Sarnoski read the following statement: **“ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING OF OCTOBER 13, 2016 WAS GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT BY FORWARDING A SCHEDULE OF REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS TO THE WARREN COUNTY CLERK, THE STAR-LEDGER, AND DAILY RECORD AND BY POSTING A COPY THEREOF ON THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS. FORMAL ACTION MAY BE TAKEN BY THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS AT THIS MEETING. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IS ENCOURAGED. IN ORDER TO ASSURE FULL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, THOSE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO WISH TO ATTEND THE MEETING SHOULD SUBMIT ANY REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE.”**

Mr. Sarnoski welcomed everyone, particularly Gina Behnfeldt of Tetra Tech and Jim Damicis of Camoin Associates, Economic Development Advisors to whom the contract was awarded. He said this is a work session to review the action plan in development to be implemented over the remainder of the contract. Stakeholder Meetings were held with a number of individuals and entities that have a vested interest in Warren County.

Ms. Behnfeldt said six months remain on the contract and today's presentation is not the final draft of the action plan. It is still being developed with the final version to be formed today. She then turned it over to Mr. Damicis.

After brief introductory remarks, Mr. Damicis began by going over the following Vision Statement: “Warren County is well-known as New Jersey's Highlands Region, recognized regionally and nationally for its natural resources, abundant agriculture, many active recreation options and a high quality of life for residents, workers and businesses. People travel to Warren County from across the Northeast to attend farm and art tours while also exploring wineries, theater productions and boundless hiking trails through the Delaware Water Gap. The County works proactively to create a business-friendly environment, communicating their success stories through multiple channels and are actively engaged for the well-being of residents. As a result, the County's small downtowns, villages and cultural centers continue to thrive. While building a strong tourism industry, the County's tax base is diversified with opportunities for small

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businesses, ensuring a stabilized economy. The County capitalizes on their niche assets to appeal to existing residents and attract new generations of Warren County residents. Collaboration among education and business partners supports a system of lifelong learning and a well-trained workforce for tomorrow's economy. Regional collaboration across municipalities has led to a coordination and consistent process for economic development."

Feedback on this statement included Mr. Smith questioning why industrial growth was not mentioned, noting Phillipsburg and industrial properties like the Ingersoll-Rand site have the potential of being developed and becoming large job-producing entities.

Mr. Gardner said agri-tourism is fine; it's a niche, but he thought much more potential could be found in agricultural value-added product industry. He gave an example of a Kansan entrepreneur that utilized wheat by burning off the residue to develop straw logs and turned it into a multimillion dollar business. He said the problem here is being hampered by the Highlands Legislation and there has to be some commercial aspect to growth.

Mr. Damicis then began presenting the Action Plan Matrix, saying the goal of this meeting was to solidify the five major strategies, each with a set of objectives that are of the highest priority to the County and then move on to discuss the rationale and catalyzing actions (which still need more detail) to isolate information that will be critical for the implementation phase of the process.

Strategy: Redefine what it means to do business in Warren County. Develop and maintain an environment that demonstrates Warren County is "Open for Business":

It was generally agreed that the majority of the objectives outlined would fall under the purview of a Chamber of Commerce which no longer exists on the County level. These things are critical and are either not being done at all or not being done well. If not being done by the County, then who? A public/private partnership?

Eve Azar pointed out that the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce was looking to expand into Warren County and she thought that was a critical connection. Mr. Sarnoski was glad she brought that up. He said it's great to understand what needs to be done, but we need to determine the mechanism to actually get it done. Perhaps partnering is the answer. Mr. Smith said he has trouble with the concept of Lehigh Valley doing our bidding.

The final objective under this strategy was to "take advantage of areas in the Highlands that are targeted for Economic Development Revitalization and Brownfield Development." It was noted that municipal governments need to be charged with that responsibility as planning and land use is done on a local level. It would be fruitless to promote plans and ideas if the municipalities don't want them. Mr. Sarnoski said we can help clear the way for plans to move forward through our Engineering, Health and Planning Departments. Mr. Smith also pointed out that Washington Borough was missing and should be listed under Brownfield Redevelopment.

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Strategy: Create and maintain a streamlined and consistent development process:

It was acknowledged that New Jersey is big on home rule and is known for a lot of red tape. Further clarification of standards such as permitting processes is required. Mr. Sarnoski said this area was one of the higher priorities as far as he was concerned. If we're consistent and have a consistent process and utilize current technology to present that process, hopefully with the help of Tetra Tech and Camoin, we can pass it along to the municipalities to help make things more streamlined. September inspections were an example of a process that is not always easy. Mr. Gardner cautioned that there are State regulations and standards you can't get away from.

Mr. Sarnoski repeated that technology was important here; an on-line application process could really be beneficial. Mr. Damicis said advancements are available. Adobe has some good products.

Regarding development, Mr. Smith said the feedback he gets from the public is that some municipalities are more stringent than others and it's a long, arduous process fraught with micromanagement. An example was approval required for a specific species of plants for landscaping. He thought municipalities needed to engage in self-analysis to move forward.

Scott Anderson added that while he was not a big fan of the Lehigh Valley Chamber; why not ask them to approach municipalities on these matters? He thought they might have a certain amount of leverage and perhaps, municipal officials would be more honest with the Chamber than with the Freeholders. Ms. Behnfeldt said the resources the County has procured through shared services could be made available to municipalities.

Strategy: Clarify and revamp internal and external identity for Warren County:

Mr. Sarnoski thought this strategy should be moved to the end. How we progress in other areas will form this. Mr. Damicis agreed, saying marketing is really hard to do until other things are complete.

Andrea Kirchuk said she understood that perspective, but thought a top-down as opposed to bottom-up approach was preferable. She thought we should know where we're going and think about our identity first. Mr. Smith's response was that different interests might fight over what our brand is. For example, if we focus heavily on agri-tourism, Phillipsburg wouldn't buy into that.

Kenesha Reynolds-Allie said why not formulate a marketing strategy for what we already have before moving on to this other stuff? Mr. Damicis said it's a parallel process. Stan Prater thought instead of pigeon-holing, we should convey that we're a diverse community. Scott Anderson noted that money goes further here than in other areas of New Jersey and the quality of life is richer.

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Strategy: Build off existing tourism assets and work to maintain quality visitor experiences within the County:

Mr. Damicis thought this was a training and workforce issue. The bar should be raised to stand out and provide quality customer service. His example was making sure people have a good experience during a hotel stay with information provided to patrons on other areas attractions. Mr. Sarnoski said we need to do a better job of marketing our current assets. Mr. Smith thought there could be a case made for Warren County being a destination; to visit, live, work and retire; perhaps create a demand for seniors and opportunities for business may follow that population. Speaking for himself, Mr. Damicis didn't like the idea of going to a place known for its high population of senior citizens.

Charlie Fineran said each destination should encourage patronage of other destinations and not view it as a competition. An unidentified woman thought the customer(s) needed to be identified. Who are these activities targeted to? How about timelines and setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound) goals? Mr. Sarnoski said those should be the result of this meeting.

Strategy: Leverage existing assets in natural resources and agriculture to support industry:

Regarding the objectives listed here, Mr. Gardner thought Warren County was doing fairly well in terms of local produces and farm products distribution, but thought Rutgers "dropped the ball" on the objective of developing a pilot agricultural sciences program with the goal of making this an education and industry collaboration. It was noted that Farmland Preservation Director Corey Tierney was working on a farm incubator and the new Phillipsburg High School has an impressive agriculture lab. Mr. Gardner said the public has spent a lot of money on Farmland Preservation. We need to work on this in earnest to create these value-added products. Mr. Smith noted that people receive training and then leave. We don't have some type of an overriding picture where they're going to stay and get involved in Warren County agriculture. Mr. Gardner concurred that young graduates are being lured away to other countries such as Brazil.

Mr. Damicis said he had been impressed with the high level of knowledge he encountered when interviewing agriculture stakeholders. "I wouldn't pretend to know how to fix this one... you've got to leverage the industry to come up with the right strategy," he said.

Sam Race said it should be noted in the plan that we have a problem due to inappropriate regulations imposed by the Highlands Legislation. This should be adjusted, but it's a political factor. Mr. Smith said efforts have certainly been made, but it's the hand we've been dealt and we need to accept it and move on with the presumption that it isn't going to change.

Mr. Sarnoski said he tended to agree. We can put some focus on once again making recommendations to the Highlands Council about what changes would assist our economic development goals, but they fall on deaf ears. We're still struggling against septic density rules and that's the biggest change we've seen in ten years. I don't know what value we could add by continuing to press on these issues.

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Backtracking a bit, Todd Tersigni said he thought the biggest natural resource for his area was the Delaware River. We were prepared to welcome a housing development on the river complete with tax abatements for the developer, but here was some opposition that felt the existing quality of life was threatened. He thought development along the river would bring working people into the county and activities held there would attract people willing to spend money. There was no disagreement, with some discussion regarding the draw of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. Mr. Damicis said water is a powerful draw.

Mitchell Jones asserted that there was a vibrant FFA Program in Warren County.

Dan Hirshberg of Hackettstown said there's only one full-service hotel in Warren County, but there are plenty in Morris. That information should be provided to prospective travelers; and along Route 80, there are very few signs promoting what restaurants, etc. can be found off of which exits. He said he knew such signs are very expensive, but maybe the County could negotiate with the State on the details.

Mary Jo Harris of Washington Borough spoke of a California diverse ad campaign as an example to emulate and thought people passing through Warren County on Route 80 heading to Pennsylvania to ski in the winter could be lured to local eateries and so forth if the signage was there.

Regarding agriculture, Kenesha Reynolds-Allie said, "I think we know what we have and what we need, but at some point, we need to start doing the marketing." Regarding a farm incubator program, the Foodshed Alliance is interested in that as well, but several meetings have been held and the farmers are not looking for that.

Further discussion ensued regarding details on how to implement this strategy with all participants not necessarily in agreement. Mr. Damicis said he didn't want to overlay stuff that the industry knows better than he. He thought this should continue to be worked on within the agriculture community itself, then figure out how the County can support it. Mr. Sarnoski agreed, saying it doesn't seem as if including this strategy in the action plan will not have an increased benefit other than what we're already doing in many channels.

Herman Shoemaker said the Economic Development Committee had discussed in earlier sessions the potential of industrial food distribution centers. Could Warren County attract a Hunt's or similar company? Mitchell Jones thought this possibility was being addressed elsewhere in the presentation. Mr. Sarnoski agreed the concept could be folded in under another strategy, but he thought as an overall strategic goal, he wanted to eliminate this strategy for now and stick with the top four presented earlier with the comments heard today incorporated in those.

Mr. Smith said we've got a lot of different players and we need to solicit those individual groups. The County can then facilitate what comes from the self-assessment of the agriculture community. "I don't think we can do it top-down... it's going to be a case of everybody bringing to the table what they want to see happen."

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In an effort to bring the meeting to its conclusion, Mr. Sarnoski summarized that Camoin and Tetra Tech were now to incorporate the comments from this meeting, select the partners we are going to work with and provide the County with timelines and achievable goals. We have six months left on this contract during which time, some of these action items will be implemented. Depending on how far things progress and the kind of results realized will help determine the direction and manner in which the Freeholders will invest in economic development the following year.

All parties seemed to be “on the same page” with the expectation of a work plan from the contractors at the end of the contract period working in concert with the Freeholders, leaders and staff of Warren County. Ms. Behnfeldt said it will be essential for the County to proceed with economic development; that they welcomed the challenge.

“So prove it... let’s see some progress,” said Mr. Sarnoski. He hoped to get the kind of successful results that could be presented as a model for other counties to emulate.

County Planner Dave Dech belatedly pointed out that he thought missing from the tourism component was the Route 57 Scenic Byway (also known as the Warren Heritage Byway).

Mr. Damicis appreciated all the openness and help.

On motion by Mr. Smith, seconded by Mr. Gardner, and there being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Recorded Vote: Mr. Smith yes, Mr. Gardner yes, Mr. Sarnoski yes

ATTESTED TO:**Steve Marvin, Clerk of the Board**