

Brainstorming Session for Old Banner Elk School

Written by Annie Rutenberg
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Avery Commissioners and their new economic development director brainstormed in a special Avery County Commissioners meeting Thursday, trying to plan for use of the old Banner Elk School. Avery will soon take possession of the school, and new Economic Development Director, Brett Gardella,

presented a proposal that was met with great enthusiasm by the Commissioners and attendees. While no final decisions were made, the proposal is to create the "Avery County Professional & Retail Incubator Development Enterprise," or A.C.P.R.I.D.E. The new center would support entrepreneurship and small business and demonstrate support for new enterprise. In addition, creating the center will establish a powerful economic development tool for the newly established Office Of Economic Development.

It will look to partner with Mayland Community College and Lees-McRae to create an "idea factory," helping Avery residents who want to start businesses and help make their business a success. Commissioners pointed out that this would benefit residents and improve consumer spending in Avery County, bringing new tax revenues to the County. One idea came from John Boyd Mayland, who wants to bring a culinary school to the facility. David Burleson of the school board says this will impact young people and create jobs that will allow them to stay and work in Avery County. Tommy Burleson, planning commission said he thinks this is a great idea and thanked Brett for bringing all forces together to make this happen. County Manager Robert Wiseman brought up the point that Avery County would be responsible for maintenance, insurance, security and other expenses for the building whether or not project goes forward. Commissioners Scott Heath wanted to know the time frame with Brett Gardella suggesting it could be open by spring 2012. Heath said he wants to see long term financial gain projections, the revenue stream the project could create. Commissioner Phyllis Forbes commented that this project represents the best community effort to bring all of Avery County together, calling it a collective effort that will bring better opportunities for Avery's young people, "We need to provide opportunity for young people and need to provide opportunities for them to stay in Avery County."