

**The Economic Alliance**  
**Board Meeting**  
February 25, 2009

**Attending Board Members:**

Jim Martin, Chairman	Andy Lampe	Pam Leslie
John Andrist, Past Chairman	Tom Gehring	Coleen Couch
Bob Risinger, Treasurer	George Brady	Mary Watson
Hank Raymond, 1st Vice Chair	Michael Blake	
Lael Duncan, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair	Rich Watson	
Nan Kallunki, Secretary	Gail Howe	

**Absent Board Members:**

Kary Nichols	Jerome Thiel	Kate Jones
Nespelem/Coulee Dam Area #1 & #2 Vacant	Susan Cooksey	

**Staff & Guests:**

Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director	Craig Carroll, WorkSource
Carolyn Davis, Admin. Assistant	Steve Brown, Okanogan PUD
Jamie Myxter, Omak Chamber	Debbie Peters, Okanogan PUD
Arnie Marchand, Oroville, LM Energy LLC	Kanee St. Paul, CCT Human Resource Mgr, Gaming Division

Chairman, Jim Martin called the meeting to order and introductions were made. The agenda was approved, with the deletion of Pam Kelly, addition Tom Gehring, Twisp PDA and Steve Brown & Debbie Peters, Okanogan County PUD.

Approval of Minutes: Bob Risinger made a motion to approve minutes from January 28, 2009 meeting as emailed, Lael Duncan seconded. Motion passed

**Guest Speaker:** Tom Gehring with the Twisp Public Development Authority spoke about how and why the PDA was formed. They are looking at purchasing the Forest Service property in Twisp. A group of citizens did a feasibility study and decided to move forward with the creation of the PDA and a Board was appointed by the Twisp City Council. The PDA is a government authority, but doesn't create any liability for the town and has no taxing authority. As of yesterday the auction of the property is moving forward once again and the PDA has submitted a \$1 million bid. Intended use of the facility will be public use and their vision to provide lifelong education and occupational skills. They have applied for some of the economic stimulus funds through the town of Twisp. It was questioned what becomes of the PDA's debts if they dissolve. Tom will look into this. Roni Holder-Diefenbach also received a PowerPoint presentation from Pam Kelly about PDAs and she will send it out to anyone interested.

Bob Risinger, Omak School District Superintendent, spoke about his retirement and the process of hiring a new Superintendent. They have narrowed the field down to three people and will be holding public forums in the next few days. Mr. Risinger also spoke about the state budget and how it will impact the Omak School District, as well as all schools. The Initiative 732 is suspended. This is a cost of living increase for all school employees across the state. Initiative 728 is projected to get a 25% cut. This is for dollars to reduce class size and monies to get students over the hurdles. LEA (Local Effort Assistance) could be reduced by 30%. The LEA is the states attempt to equalize between the "richer" districts and the "poorer" districts. At Omak this would be a huge impact, but it will not affect each district the same. The state budget deficit is currently \$8.3 million and the Governor's budget has the

smallest cut for K-12, but it will probably change. Stimulus monies are a one time thing and intended to reduce number of people laid off.

Lael Duncan, Okanogan Community Action Council, stated that they have funds from the first stimulus package for Low Income Home Energy Assistance. If anyone is interested they should contact the OCCAC at 422-4041 or 877 641-0101.

Lael also spoke about the recent homeless count. The number of homeless has nearly doubled from last year. The study conducted the last week of January, found 573 homeless individuals, more than one-third under the age of 18. The total represents 278 households. This is a significant increase over 2008, which the same count found 326 homeless and 220 households. Most of the homeless reported that they had become homeless because they could not pay their rent or mortgage. Most were receiving public assistance. Most people (415) reported that they were temporarily living with family or friends, with 78 living out-of-doors or in a vehicle.

Steve Brown and Debbie Peters with the Okanogan County PUD Conservation Programs gave a brief overview of the program and stated that they are looking for partnerships with private or public entities. The PUD has several conservation program that are available, such as weatherization loans, energy star appliance rebates, free energy audits, commercial lighting upgrade, and sustainable natural alternative power. You can contact the PUD at 422-8427 or look at their web site at [www.okanoganpud.org](http://www.okanoganpud.org).

### **Executive Director Reports:**

Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Executive Director, reported that staff recently met with insurance broker regarding our medical and dental insurance. Our current provider is Premera Blue Cross, which again raised their rates. After discussion and recommendation from broker, we decided to go with Asuris NW Health Embark program. The main difference between the two programs was that Premera had 4<sup>th</sup> quarter carryover and the new program will not. This will result in a savings to the Economic Alliance of about \$1,800 annually.

Roni spoke about the recent VIA 97 meeting which was held in Oroville. Mike Ortega with Rail America attended and after the meeting they toured industrial property along the rail line. He is willing to help market these industrial properties and wanted a first hand look at some of the properties. He will be coming back out to Okanogan County in late March or early April.

Community Trade and Economic Alliance (CTED) has a new website and as part of our Associate Organization (ADO) contract we need to update this site in regards to industrial properties. CTED has found that some of the smaller ADOs have not been able to do this because of time constraints of a one or two person office. They now offer real estate people the chance to update the information themselves. This site is searched by site selectors who are looking for industrial properties for new business location. Roni will be contacting the real estate people in the county to make them aware of this program.

The Economic Alliance received a letter from CTED that each county was asked to re-designate their county's economic development organization. The county commissioners have consistently designated the Economic Alliance as this organization.

Roni attended the Washington Economic Development Association meeting in Olympia on Monday and Tuesday. Topic of discussion was the prospective budget cuts to the ADO program for the next two years. It was originally thought that the cuts would be about 20%, but now it looks like that this

cut will be larger. While in Olympia, she met with Senator Morton and Representatives Kretz and Short. They are all aware of the issues. The formula for allocations is being refigured and we should know more in March. There is also talk of changing CTED to the Department of Commerce and they are looking to see which programs would fit under this department.

The state is also looking at eliminating 150+ commissions and boards. One of which is the Economic Development Commission. This commission recently came to Okanogan County and wanted to schedule another meeting in the area. She spoke with Egils Milbergs, Executive Director with this commission, and suggested that they needed someone from Eastern Washington and also someone from small business on this commission. Currently they have someone from Walla Walla and one from Spokane. She also put Okanogan County's name in the mix for the next WEDA conference and they are considering holding a conference either at Sun Mountain Lodge or Freestone Inn in the Methow.

Roni reported on the Northwest Native American Fund. This is a fund similar to the NCW Business Loan Fund, but they will be making loans to Native Americans entrepreneurs in the Northwest. They are looking at receiving approval for an annual allocation of approximately \$250,000 for the next four years. They are looking at funds from the Community Development Financial Institute (CDFI). She is currently serving on the Board for this fund and feels that this is another great resource in our area.

Roni recently participated in the interviews for the new Omak School Superintendent position. She thanked Bob Risinger for the opportunity and feels that the committee narrowed down the applicants to three very qualified people.

### **Standing Committee Reports:**

**Treasurers Report:** A monthly cash flow was distributed to Board members. Bob Risinger reported that the budget is still inline with projections. Because of Bob's retirement, Coleen Couch has volunteered to take over the Treasurers position. Bob Risinger made a motion to nominate Coleen Couch as Treasurer. Lael Duncan seconded. Motion passed. Coleen will take over next month as Treasurer of the Board. Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she has received notice that Kinross Gold will continue their financial commitment to the Economic Alliance. Jim Martin stated that the line of credit has been paid off. There is still and \$250 line item cost on the cash flow, which would be a cost to keep the line of credit open if we chose to. Coleen Couch suggested that we might want to keep this open as it might be a lot more paper work to re-establish a new line of credit.

**Communication Committee:** John Andrist stated he had no report. Jim Martin reported that he is still working on PSAs and hopes to get something out for approval soon. He is looking at success stories and other ideas that were suggested during the last meeting.

**Infrastructure Committee:** Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the committee will be holding a meeting on March 4, 10:00 to Noon, at the Omak City Hall. The committee will discuss the process and how the projects that were approved are progressing.

**Business Education Committee:** Mary Watson reported that they are still working on developing classes and training. Roni Holder-Diefenbach stated that the next L&I workshop is not scheduled yet. She is working with Washington Cash to put on a workshop on Surviving in Today's Tough Economic Times. She hopes that this workshop will be in several parts of the county. She is working with Stewart Walton on this workshop. Government contracting, SBA 8a Certification, and Millwright Certification are all training classes that they are working on developing. Craig Carroll with WorkSource stated that they are still having computer classes. Craig Carroll also stated that

WorkSource is sponsoring another Job Fair on April 2 at the Omak High School Multi Purpose Room. Set up is from 8 – 9:30 and the event is from 10 – 3. If you want to reserve a table, contact Robert Adams at 826-7541.

**Board Business:** Code of Ethics – A few Board members still has not signed these form and were encouraged to do so. Carolyn Davis has the forms if you need another one.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the Business Incubator Committee will be meeting on Wednesday, March 4, 1:00 – 3:00, at the Omak City Hall. They will be looking at the whole project and see if it is still feasible. Money is on the table that needs to be used. Need to look at updating the feasibility study that was done several years ago and is now outdated. She is trying to get more information from Jim Deffenbaugh, with the Pan Handle Area Council, on an Economic Development Administration grant. We need to have an in depth conversation on this project.

**Old Business:**

**New Business:**

**2009 Workplan Development:** A copy of the 2008 plan with accomplishments was emailed out and also distributed during the meeting. The Executive Committee will look at 2009 Workplan and then present a draft at the next meeting. Jim Martin encouraged Board members to look at the Workplan and present their suggestions to either Roni or Carolyn.

Meeting Adjourned 12:35 p.m.

**Next Meeting: March 25, 2009 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at the Koala Street Grill.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Carolyn Davis, Administrative Assistant