

Economic development groups hopeful for action in Olympia

By

ANGELICA RELENTE

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MOSES LAKE — As communities continue to face financial repercussions from COVID-19, one nonprofit organization outlined its priorities to pave a path for recovery, including providing grants.

The Washington Economic Development Association, in November released a 2021 legislative agenda for legislators to consider to help residents recover from the pandemic's impact. One of the priorities listed in the agenda is to offer more support for small businesses by providing short-term investments, technical assistance and initiatives, according to the agenda.

And, Brant Mayo, executive director of Grant County Economic Development Council, said his organization is aligned with WEDA's legislative agenda.

GCEDC assists small businesses in Grant County, Mayo said. The organization gave more than \$3 million in small-business grants, which they plan to continue doing if more funds are available.

"Any resources we can bring our small businesses who are hanging on right now is going to be very high in our list on things that we can get done," Mayo said. "There's only so much they can do, and we need to bring the resources to help them."

Mayo said GCEDC usually works with large industrial clients, not usually involved with small businesses. But that's changed.

"Through the pandemic it's been all hands on deck," Mayo said. "We've worked with all of the local chambers in the county, the municipalities and the county itself."

Suzanne Dale Estey, executive director of WEDA, said Washington is one of the states that does not prepare enough funds for economic development. This is another priority listed in WEDA's agenda.

"We need resources to play both defense and offense," Dale Estey said. "Right now, that's a significant amount of defense just in doing the work."

Dale Estey said there are not enough financial tools available in the state. However, GCEDC is using a tool that helps increase jobs and capital investment in the county.

The rural data center tax incentive waives the sales tax on servers and equipment placed into it, Mayo said. It helps the county be competitive in the data center world.

"For us to continue to grow, whether it's the current coverage expanding or new companies coming in, that rural data center tax incentive needs to be extended," Mayo said.

Dale Estey said because there is a heightened awareness of needing a healthy economy, she is hopeful for the upcoming legislative session.

"I'm very optimistic that the legislature will continue to address the needs of these particularly small businesses and crisis," Dale Estey said. "I'm also very optimistic that the legislature is going to ... step up and fund infrastructure that will catalyze job growth."