“Persistent pessimism.” That’s the comment surrounding a new poll that indicates 90 percent of Americans say economic conditions remain poor. A Michigan poll conducted last week among residents used the words “abysmal” and “hopeless.” Words that don’t make for much happy chat around the coffee machine at the office.

Iron County is no stranger to economic downturns, unemployment and various fiscal crises among business and government. For the past several decades, however, we’ve had an Economic Development Corporation that has tackled many of the challenges we face in keeping our local economy stable, by providing everything from business start-up advice, low-interest loans and financial and professional backing for larger projects.

The structure of the EDC has remained essentially unchanged from when it was organized as a board of directors, comprised of individuals representing business and industry in the county, operating through the county government—a board that was given the ability to attract new businesses, cultivate existing business and industry, consider requests for financial and professional assistance and encourage economic growth. This is a board that, thankfully, doesn’t listen to terms like “persistent pessimism.”

While the board’s structure has prevailed, its ability to fund an economic developer hasn’t always been easy. And now, the latest concern for the EDC and its goal of keeping our economy stable and even growing is maintaining the position of economic developer. Over the past several years, the board has been able to keep the position funded through a combination of a county contribution, an agreement with Michigan State University and, most recently, contributions from county municipalities. The agreement with MSU will end on Dec. 31. The EDC board is asking the county for its assistance in keeping an economic developer in the county. It’s not a question of why—but how can the County Board not step in with enthusiasm to keep the EDC moving forward? Our businesses and residents need to have a vote of confidence that they’re working for us.

--Marian Volek