

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – **Minutes**

Tuesday – March 16, 2021

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield, Dan Blakely, Jimmy Capps, Rusty Denning, Jeff Field, Randy Garrett, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Amanda Munyan, Brown Patterson, David Tribble, Steve West, John Young

Guests:

John Lummus (Upstate SC Alliance), Dr. Hope Rivers (Piedmont Tech)

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange, Sandy Cruickshanks

Press:

Vic MacDonald (Chronicle)

Chairman Young called the meeting to order at 12:10, gave the invocation and welcomed Dr. Hope Rivers to the meeting in her new role as President of Piedmont Technical College.

Minutes and Financials

Chairman Young asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting's agenda. Randy Garrett made the motion to approve and Justin Benfield seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Chairman Young then asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 11/17/20 meeting. Shawn Bell made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and Steve West seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

Lynn Finley provided a recap of expenses for December 2020, January and February 2021. The financials were accepted as information only.

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- Much of the current industry communication is Covid related. Phase 1b of the vaccination is open and there is a lot of information to share pertaining to that. The manufacturing sector is interested in having their employees vaccinated.
- General interaction has varied from assisting a company with resources on how to get machinery installers from Europe into the US with proper quarantining to working with Senator Lindsey Graham's office in helping a non-citizen employee at a local company get updates on their I-765 work permit. The recertifications are running much longer due to covid.
- The LCDC partnered with Piedmont Tech and SC Works to hold a drive-thru job fair in February. Additional support was given by the Chamber of Commerce supplying safety vest for volunteers, Laurens County provided traffic cones, and the Sheriff's office provided a deputy to assist. Turn out wasn't as large as expected but the numbers were good. Several job seekers were given job offers from the event. Due to space limitations only five companies were able to participate and they were: International Paper, FiberTex, Fukoku, Milliken and Walmart Distribution.
- Laurens County manufacturers are still experiencing a variety of impacts from the pandemic. Some companies continue to experience slowdowns in business demand and some are expanding. It all depends on the product they produce and customer base.
- The current unemployment rate for Laurens County is for January and is 5.8%. The State is at 5.3%.
- There is a small metal die casting facility in Woodfield Park closing in March. The company is Mumford Metal Casting (formally Callen Die Casting). The announcement was rather sudden but staff was able to get

Rapid Response in from the State to meet with their employees. All 8 employees will be displaced. This closure was not trade or Covid related. Mumford is a family owned company from out of state and they decided it wasn't a profitable fit in their business model. The business is being relocated to Iowa.

- Plans are being made to host another HR virtual roundtable in April which will focus on employee retention ideas and resources.
- There is an existing industry expansion project on 3rd reading with County Council at the next meeting. It is an investment of \$49 million with 39 new jobs and is being called Project Gray.
- There was a virtual career day held in late February for all 10th graders in the county. Featured in the virtual presentation were three young people already working successfully in their careers at ZF, West Fraser/Norbord, and PRISMA. This was an initiative of SC Department of Commerce Workforce Advisor, Matt Wiggins.
- The LCDC annual investor & industry golf tournament is planned for April 1. Currently have 22 teams registered and the LCDC staff expressed their appreciation to board member support and sponsorship of the tournament.

Economic Development Activity – Jon Coleman

- For a project activity update, staff have received 8 RFIs so far in 2021 (11 at this point in 2020). The projects that are being received seem to be more serious and on a quicker timeframe than what has been seen in the past.
- Project Impact is looking at an existing facility in the Clinton area which is a \$20.5 million investment and 68 jobs. There is also another project in the Fountain Inn area that has signed a lease. Work will now begin on their incentive process. It is a \$5+ million investment with 82 jobs. Project Gray is at final reading and is a \$49 million investment and 39 new jobs. These announcements already exceed the totals for 2020.
- County Council is having 3rd reading at the next meeting on an amendment to one of the main ordinances that governs FILOT funds for the county and what funds the LCDC. In the past the funding amount has been set at a fixed dollar amount and going forward it would be a percentage of the FILOT revenue that is generated by the work at the LCDC. This step puts the LCDC on a more performance type basis as far as funding is concerned.
- Other updates revolving around ordinances and FILOT revenue is the passing of the Connexial Center Multicounty Industrial Park agreement. This will set up a maintenance fund for the park of which 30% of the revenue from the park will go into a designate account to be used for park maintenance. This can include roads, landscaping, utilities and similar expenses. Another change is being made to the existing Hunter Industrial Park fund. This fund includes revenue generated out of Hunter Industrial Park as an economic development fund. County Council has amended the governance structure for that to be governed by a five-person committee consisting of the chairman or appointee from the Laurens Commission of Public Works, the Mayor of Laurens or appointee, and the three county council districts that touch the park. There will also be guidelines established of what the funds can be used for going forward.

Marketing / Outreach Update – Whitney Lagrange

- Work continues on the strategic plan in building and organizing the implementation teams. There are seven teams: Talent & Workforce Solutions, Infrastructure Priority Task Force, Small Business & Entrepreneurship Solutions, Marketing & Communications, Industry & Large Business Solutions, Livability Solutions, and Leadership. Emails were recently sent to over 100 people in the community inviting them to participate on one or more of these teams. As the teams begin to meet and ideas are developed the hope is to possibly build on ideas and initiatives already in place where possible. The teams will meet over the next year whereas the strategic plan is a 5-year time frame.
- As an analytics update on the website the top three most viewed pages since the beginning of the year are 1 – Existing Buildings, which is the 101 Michelin Dr building; 2 – Living Here and Recreation; 3 – the Staff page. When looking at the audience the largest category is age group 25 – 34 and almost 50/50 on male/female. The most hits were in February and that is when Jonathan was recognized by Consultants Connect as one of the top 50 economic developers in North America. The top 3 countries looking at the LCDC website are currently the US at about 88%, China, and India.

- A detailed social media calendar is being developed so that there is always something scheduled to come out. Other updates to the social media efforts are that more fun themed hashtags have been added. Data also shows there are more hits and engagement when people are featured such as the Board Member Monday posts.
- Partnering with the Chamber of Commerce on the next phase of the mask up campaign called Fight the Spread. Billboards are up and the City of Clinton donated some of their billboard space for that effort.
- The drone videos that have been mentioned as a grant opportunity through the SC Department of Commerce are complete and are posted on the LCDC YouTube channel for viewing. There are five different properties featured.

Strategic Plan Implementation Update – Jon Coleman

-The rollout has begun on the implementation teams. Four teams have already met virtually in March with the remainder meeting this week. There has been a lot of good idea exchange and sharing in the kickoff meetings. The goal is not to necessarily reinvent the wheel but to open lines of communication and have accountability. One recurring theme to surface from the initial team meetings is the need for better communication between different entities and to share that with the public and the business community.

Other Reports:

John Lummus with the Upstate SC Alliance shared that as everyone knows, 2020 was a very unusual year for economic development and as it ended the overall numbers in the Upstate were pretty good: \$1.25 billion in new investment, about 3,000 jobs and 59 projects (54% domestic / 46% international). What is being done in Laurens County really sets up well to be eligible to receive projects. Having available product and it being on the interstate is an asset. Having a strong economic development team is key and the public / private partnership funding model really works and puts Laurens County in a good position for growth. The Upstate SC Alliance team hopes to begin international travel again in June. Domestic travel is happening this spring within person visits in Florida.

Executive Session (if needed):

Chairman Young asked for a motion to enter executive session. Brown Patterson made a motion to go into executive session at 12:43 for an economic development matter and was seconded by Randy Garrett. The Board unanimously approved to enter executive session.

Chairman Young declared the board out of executive session at 1:02 with no action taken.

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley