***Laurens County Development Corporation***

Board Meeting – **Minutes**

Tuesday – May 18, 2021

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield, Dan Blakely, Jeff Field, Randy Garrett, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Amanda Munyan, Dr. David O’Shields, Brown Patterson, Dr. Hope Rivers, David Tribble, Steve West

Guests:

Dale Satterfield (Laurens County), Perrin Tribble (Presbyterian College)

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange, Sandy Cruickshanks, Susan Tallman

Press:

Vic MacDonald (Chronicle), Emil Finley (WLBG)

Vice Chairman West called the meeting to order at 12:07. Jonathan welcomed Perrin Tribble, guest of David Tribble, along with Susan Tallman who is leading the strategic plan implementation.

*Minutes and Financials*

Vice Chairman West asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting’s agenda. Brown Patterson made the motion to approve and Shawn Bell seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Vice Chairman West then asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 03/16/21 meeting. Dan Blakley made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and Justin Benfield seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

Lynn Finley provided a recap of expenses for March and April 2021. The financials were accepted as information only.

*Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley*

-Lynn Finley began by sharing that the LCDC had the annual onsite audit, conducted by McKinley Cooper, in early April. There are no updates to share except that a report will be presented at the July board meeting.

- The annual Industry and Investor Golf Tournament was held on April 1 and was very successful. Musgrove Mill is a wonderful location to host and there was great participation and support. Thanks was offered again to board members who sponsored and played in the tournament.

- Workforce continues to be a concerning topic of discussion with employers. Ms. Finley reported collecting and sharing resources with Laurens County industries along with pulling regional wage data as requested to help in wage comparisons and planning. The LCDC focus has primarily been on manufacturing but have participated in a meeting with the Chamber where they are exploring how to support the hospitality/restaurant industry needs.

- On April 20, the LCDC partnered with the Burr Forman attorneys’ team out of Greenville to host a virtual HR roundtable discussion on employee recruitment and retention. There were about 45 attendees online for this with about 15 from Laurens County. The presentation was recorded and later shared with all industries in county as a reference.

- The LCDC is currently partnering with Matt Wiggins of SC DOC and both school districts to have onsite recruitment events for their graduating seniors and possibly summer employment opportunities. The event at LDHS is May 25 and the event at Clinton High is planned for June 15. Registrations are being accepted now for companies and we hope to have about 15 to 20 companies at each job fair. It will be a great opportunity for those students graduating with certifications in CNA, mechatronics, welding, and auto technology.

*Economic Development Activity – Jon Coleman*

- Mr. Coleman began with a report of overall project activity. To date, there have been 22 RFIs received compared to 21 at the same point in 2020. A noticed difference has been more projects and inquiries received are not through the traditional RFI process. Mr. Coleman is very encouraged by the amount of new industrial project interest coming into the county. Some of this non-traditional interest is attributed to the strategic product development over the past few years which positions the county well to take advantage of new growth.

- There is a new company coming to the county currently called Project Tec. First reading on their incentive ordinance was held at the last county council meeting. It is a $8.2 million investment and 82 jobs. They are a tier 1 automotive supplier going into the former Emitec building in Fountain Inn. They should be making a formal announcement on June 8. There is also a project beginning the process of council review called Project Sleepy. This project is a $45 million investment with 240 jobs. Since the last board meeting the LCDC announced the Fibertex expansion at their Gray Court facility. It was $49.5 million and 39 new jobs. One last project to mention is Project Best. They are looking at the back portion of Owings Industrial Park Phase II and want 10 acres. There is a total of 35 acres owned by Hollingsworth in the park and they prefer to deal with the LCDC. There is a strip in front of ZF and some is not developable. The LCDC plans to buy all the property and sell what is needed to Project Best. There will be some acreage left over but there may be other ways the LCDC can utilize it in the park. There is a sales contract in place right now but the project is still in the 180 day due diligence stage. The LCDC has put down $10,000 earnest money as deposit with Hollingsworth and the company has put down the same with the LCDC.

*Marketing / Outreach Update – Whitney Lagrange*

- Whitney Lagrange began by providing an update on the LCDC strategic plan progress. The section of the website dedicated to the plan has been in place providing documents and describing the process and stages. It is now being updated frequently to reflect updates from the implementation teams. It is located on the “About” tab of the LCDC website and provides descriptions of the teams, team members, summaries and meetings notes.

- A focused effort was made in April to strengthen the LCDC Google presence online. This was done to help get better search results and more views. Over 150 photos were added and the company description was improved. Data shows this revamp made a difference. Since April 29, photos have been viewed over 10,000 times. 56% of searches over the past quarter where from direct searches where the individual typed in the company name. The discovery search made up 40% of searches which come up from other generic key word searches. Almost 3,000 views came from Google Maps. High traffic from Maps usually means searchers are using their mobile devices. A lot of work has also been done on the LCDC YouTube channel. Property and Higher Opportunity videos have been uploaded making the total now 36 with 7 playlists. About 30% of the views on YouTube came from LCDC postings to Facebook. 5% came from the playlists and 43% came from a basic YouTube search.

- On the website, the LCDC hit a new monthly record for users. There was an increase of about 100 new visitors since February / March and almost doubled since January. Facebook views increased by 13% over the past 2 months and post engagement was up 17%.

*Strategic Plan Implementation Update – Susan Tallman*

- Susan Tallman was introduce as joining the LCDC team on a contract basis to take the lead of managing the implementation of the LCDC strategic plan.

- In her report, Ms. Tallman shared that all implementation teams have meet virtually twice and several common themes have surfaced. 1 – A desire that Laurens County entities and organizations could somehow communicate and disseminate general information, events, and resources in a centralize location. 2 – Team members expressed a desire for citizens and leadership at all levels to work together better to move the entire county forward.

- There are two committees that are very active and engaged at present which are Livability Solutions and Infrastructure. The Livability Team has begun work on creating an asset map of the county and applied for a grant through the SC American Planning Association (SCAPA) which has already been approved. The Infrastructure Team is developing a priority list of major infrastructure needs in the county with plans to request federal and state funding over the coming year.

- Another active team is Marketing which has divided up to attend all other team meetings to stay in the know and to tell the story to the community.

- If anyone is not already on a committee and would like to join, please let Susan know. The more participation and mix of viewpoints will lead to more successful outcomes. Her email address follows the others at the LCDC and is stallman@growlaurenscounty.com.

*Product Development Update – Jon Coleman*

-At the last LCDC board meeting the Powers South industrial site in Gray Court was discussed in an executive session. As a follow up, Mr. Coleman shared an update in open session. The LCDC has had a long-standing relationship and option with the owner who recently passed away. The site is now in probate so there are questions about moving forward to preserve this industrial asset. While under option this location has had a tremendous amount of investment in bringing utilities to the site. With the assistance of attorney Sandy Cruickshanks, a line of communicate has been established with the heir and they have expressed interest in working with and continuing a partnership with the LCDC. One option discussed is the LCDC purchasing the site with owner financing over a set number of years. That option is currently being considered by the owner. Updates will be provided as these discussions continue. This is a prime industrial site of 160 acres on rail just south of ZF Transmissions on Old Laurens Rd.

*Other Reports:*

None

*Executive Session (if needed):*

None

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn S. Finley