

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – **Minutes**

Tuesday – May 19, 2020

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield, Stan Bryson, Dan Blakely, Jeff Field, Randy Garrett, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Amanda Munyan, Steve West, John Young

Guests:

John Lummus (Upstate SC Alliance)

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange, Sandy Cruickshanks

Press:

Vic MacDonald (Chronicle), Emil Finley (WLBG)

Chairman Garrett called the meeting to order at 12:02 and gave the invocation.

Minutes and Financials

Chairman Garrett asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting's agenda. Stan Bryson made the motion to approve and Steve West seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Chairman Garrett then asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 11/19/19 meeting. Steve West 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 yearend 2019, and March & April 2020. The financials were accepted as information only.

COVID-19 Impact on Laurens County & Economic Development – Jon Coleman

Chairman Garrett asked each board member in attendance to take a few moments to update the group on COVID-19 impacts and adjustments made at their respective businesses.

Mr. Coleman went on to share that as a result of the pandemic the way the LCDC conducts business is different but the team is making adjustments and adapting to this new normal. The team primarily worked from home from late March to early May but was in the office periodically as needed. Staff hosted a prospect visit in early May which came back for a follow up visit the following week. The process was different and involved talking by conference call and following along in separate cars to tour the sites.

As an update on employment during COVID: There have been 4,958 initial unemployment claims filed by Laurens County residents over the past 8 weeks. It is not known how many of those people have gone back to work or are still drawing unemployment. At this point the weekly numbers are trending downward. This number equates to about 15% of the county's workforce and the county's current unemployment rate is 14.7%. The manufacturing sector in Laurens County has primarily remained opened. The companies that seem to be most impacted have been in the automotive sector.

Northern Laurens County Emergency Services Facility – Jon Coleman

Continuing the discussion of support from the Laurens County emergency support teams, Jon Coleman shifted to the topic of the unfinished emergency services facility in Northern Laurens County which is located on N. Old Laurens Rd in Gray Court. About 2 years ago the county received a grant of about \$900,000 through Representative Mike Pitts to build a new emergency services facility. The intention was that it should serve

the entire northern industrial corridor and residential portion of the county. It was designed to house a Sheriff's office precinct, EMS and fire but the funding was not sufficient to complete the entire facility. During a challenging time as this with the COVID-19 pandemic, a strong emergency services presence is more important than ever. Mr. Coleman stated that finishing this facility is a good investment for the LCDC and recommends using appropriate funds to assist the county in finishing the facility. Dale Satterfield, Public Works Director with Laurens County, provided a quote of the needed funds to complete as originally planned. The total cost is \$607,000. Mr. Coleman asked the LCDC Board to consider discussing and making a motion to allow the LCDC to contribute 80% of this amount from the Octagon Park Reinvestment Fund if the county would pay the remaining 20% from their economic special projects account. After a time of discussion, Stan Bryson made the motion to allow the LCDC to spend up to \$485,000 or 80% (whichever is less) of the cost to complete the building from the Octagon Park Funds providing Laurens County contributes the remaining 20%. John Young seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved the motion.

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- The Northern Laurens County Safety Council has met twice since the last board meeting. Topics covered the need for public transportation in rural areas and in March a presentation from DHEC concerning COVID-19 with an update from Jeff Duncan.
- A group from ZF Transmissions gave a presentation to other industry leaders in the Upper Savannah region on their Teacher Link initiative. This initiative focuses on involving K-12 teachers and guidance counselors with hands on experience and learning about manufacturing to help in promoting careers to students.
- The LCDC hosted an HR anti-discrimination law presentation in early March for existing industry leaders. This presentation was given by a labor law attorney with Burr Forman McNair and was well received and attended.
- The Laurens County job fair planned for April 29 was canceled as was the Upper Savannah fair planned for March. These will be rescheduled when public health conditions allow.
- Had the final reading for an existing industry expansion in February. Project St. Barbara was Alupress in Hunter Industrial Park and they announced a \$19.3 million investment with 79 jobs over the next 5 years.
- Laurens County has seen several manufacturers shift some levels of production to support COVID-19 PPE efforts. They are: Fibertex in Gray Court, Josten's in Laurens, Ware Shoals Plastics in Ware Shoals, Renfro in Clinton and Richloom in Clinton. Marketing spotlights recognizing these efforts were released on each company to the media.
- There are already several existing industries in Laurens County that produce items that contribute to the needs of PPE and / or medical community. Those are: PL Developments in Clinton, MPF Products in Gray Court, NICCA Chemicals in Fountain Inn, ISO Flex Packaging in Gray Court and Teknor Apex in Fountain Inn (which assumed work of a sister plant allowing the other to transition to 100% medical production).
- The downside of this report is reporting about some of the employers that have felt a greater negative impact from the COVID-19 virus. Most of the manufacturers have been able to stay open this entire time and have not needed to furlough employees and several have seen increases in demand for their product. These following companies all felt negative impacts with furloughs, shutdowns and/or abbreviated schedules: Alupress in Laurens, Fukoku in Laurens, Muffin Mam in Laurens, Norbord in Joanna, Rich Products in Fountain Inn, Yanfeng in Fountain Inn, and ZF in Gray Court.

Economic Development Activity – Jon Coleman

- Along with the expansion announcement for Alupress, a new company has announced location in Owings Industrial Park Phase II called Meiden America Switchgear. This is a Japanese company that makes switchgears and circuit breakers for power substations. Meiden announced an investment of \$8 million and 41 new jobs.
- The LCDC is currently working on 3 different infrastructure grants either through the EDA or the SC Department of Commerce.

Marketing / Outreach Update – Whitney Lagrange

- The COVID outbreak has made the use of technology even more critical in communicating messages to industry and the community. Routine email updates were compiled and sent to the LCDC board as well as media and industry groups. Online forum/discussion boards were implemented for both the LCDC board and

industries to ask questions or share best practices with peers. It was also a positive opportunity to highlight and feature different companies providing support in manufacturing needed supplies in fighting the COVID virus.

-With more usage of social media channels, web analytic data show an increase of views to the LCDC website by 275% over 2019. The audience is primarily from the US but also from China, Japan, and India. It is exciting to also see that the LCDC Facebook page now has over 1,000 likes.

-A new social media initiative being developed will include individual spotlights on each of the LCDC board members. Whitney Lagrange will reach out to each board member about desires to participate and to gather information.

-Beginning early 2020 the LCDC committed to advertising with Upstate Advertising out of Clinton. They have digital message boards placed across the county in high traffic public entities running advertisements and custom messages. This has been a very flexible channel for the LCDC to place messages in the community.

-Another message the LCDC is supporting in the community is the importance of completing the 2020 Census and ask that LCDC board members remember to highlight with their own employees and patrons.

Strategic Plan Update – Jon Coleman

Due to the COVID virus the LCDC strategic planning process has been on hold with the inability to pull teams back together in person. The expectation is to start moving back to finishing that process but meeting by phone or with online meetings. As plans begin to finalize around that staff will notify all the individuals that have been involved.

Other Reports:

None

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley