

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – **Minutes**

Tuesday – July 21, 2020

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield (by Zoom), Stan Bryson, Dan Blakely, Randy Garrett, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Jim Lollis, Amanda Munyan, David Pitts, Steve West, John Young

Guests:

Brown Patterson (County Council), Matt Phillips (McKinley Cooper)

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange, Sandy Cruickshanks

Press:

Vic MacDonald (Chronicle), John Clayton (Advertiser)

Chairman Garrett called the meeting to order at 12:05 and gave the invocation.

Minutes and Financials

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

Chairman Garrett then asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 05/19/20 meeting. Steve West made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and John Young seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

Lynn Finley provided a recap of expenses for May & June 2020. The financials were accepted as information only.

2019 Audit Presentation – Matt Phillips, McKinley Cooper

Matt Phillips provided a detailed review of the 2019 audit results and answered questions from the board. He reported that McKinley Cooper provided a "clean and unmodified" opinion of the LCDC financial position as of December 31, 2019 and no major findings were reported.

COVID-19 Impact on Laurens County & Economic Development – Team

Justin Benfield of Prisma began with an update from the hospital. Mr. Benfield stated from a healthcare perspective the county is clearly in a surge and the infection / positive rate is between 18 – 20% with a recovery rate of 87%. They continue to be impacted by a nursing shortage and strongly support a campaign to help slow the spread of COVID. This can be done by mask utilization and social distancing. They are seeing the average age infected shifting from 51+ to 41.3 years of age.

Jon Coleman shared that from an economic development standpoint COVID has made work very different. Several industries have been in touch with strong concerns about the spread of COVID in the community which impacts the workforce and a company's ability to stay open. Several leaders connected to the LCDC Board have stepped forward to support a mask wearing campaign making public statements and filming short video clips that helped put a unified message out to our community.

Whitney Lagrange expanded on the participation of the Wear It SC marketing campaign. This was a partnership with the Laurens County and State Chambers. A media kit was sent by email to many partners and allies and copies of the images are included in the board packets. Please feel free to use with your own teams to promote this message. A press release has also been put together with support of local industry. Fukoku

and Inteplast provided quotes and photos of employees supporting the #WearItSC campaign. This was picked up by local media partners and placed on multiple social media channels.

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

The LCDC continues to support the local manufacturing community in much the same way as reported at the May board meeting. It continues to be similar needs and outreaches. We also continue to hear concerns related to the increasing spread of the virus in the surrounding communities which impacts employees being able to report to work.

-An update on the current unemployment numbers:

- Since the week of March 7, Laurens County has had a total of 7,437 initial unemployment claims.
- The highest unemployment rate for Laurens County was reported in May at 14.4% and is now down to 9.7% in June (The State was at 12.5% in May and 8.7% in June)

-In early June, Governor McMaster paid a visit to Fibertex Nonwovens in Gray Court to recognize them for their PPE manufacturing efforts as part of a tour through the upstate. He was accompanied by US Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross.

-Lt. Governor Evette is also planning a tour of manufacturers helping the COVID cause and she plans to make a stop in Laurens. We have not yet been given a date of the visit, but I will share that information as soon as we have it.

-Since the last board meeting, we have received an allocation of Non-contact Infrared Thermometers through the SC Department of Commerce. These are from FEMA to provide to businesses in the private sector that have a high degree of person-to-person interaction wishing to use this screening tool in their facility.

Economic Development Activity – Jon Coleman

-Even in this challenging environment the county is in a unique situation to have received confirmation of a new company selecting a building in the Fountain Inn area for location. The investment is \$12 million and 80 jobs. More can be shared about this project soon. This announcement will take the 2020 announcement numbers to \$52.3 million and 200 new jobs, which is very similar to the overall 2019 results.

-The Connexial Center spec building is nearing completion and grubbing of the large site beside the spec building will begin soon to clear up the front of the park.

Marketing / Outreach Update – Whitney Lagrange

-As mentioned at the previous board meeting, the LCDC has a new feature on social media called #BoardMemberMonday. Two spotlights have already been done and Whitney will be contacting more board members in upcoming weeks to participate.

-Additional information was provided on the Wear It SC campaign. Local leadership were thanked again for participating in the face mask initiative by helping to create videos and images for social media use. Signs have been created for printing and posting to keep momentum going with the mask movement. Whitney is currently editing together a leadership compilation video to post and share, encouraging the wearing of face masks.

-An update on the 2020 Census progress shows that Laurens County has reached a 50% or more participation rate in the Census. Whitney participates on the Complete Count Committee, so the LCDC is urging local citizens to complete the census. Multiple posts have been made encouraging participation and any additional support from board leadership is appreciated. The LCDC is also partnering with United Way to create a video with local faces to help push the participation even further.

Strategic Plan Update – Jon Coleman

Everyone is aware of the work that has been done so far on the new countywide strategic plan which was halted about mid-March. The LCDC team continues to partner with the consultants and together are working on the best path forward. The plan was created around a world before COVID and contained a lot of community collaboration and gatherings which is difficult to do right now. The current thoughts are to work from the LCDC portion of the strategy they have designed and hold the kickoff of the collaborative parts that include the community for later in 2021.

Other Reports:

David Pitts asked Amanda Munyan to give an update from the Chamber on microgrants being offered to small businesses. Ms. Munyan shared that Laurens County Council approved a one-time allocation of \$50,000 to the Chamber of Commerce to offer local small businesses microgrants. The Chamber of Commerce is leading the program and the application process is still open. There is a committee that will review the applications and make decisions based on a point system of which businesses will be awarded grant funds. At this time, the planned maximum amount a company can receive is \$1,500.

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley