

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – **Minutes**

Tuesday – September 15, 2020

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield, Dan Blakely, Jeff Field, Randy Garrett, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Amanda Munyan, David O'Shields, David Pitts

Guests:

John Lummus (Upstate Alliance)

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange, Sandy Cruickshanks

Press:

Vic MacDonald (Chronicle)

Chairman Garrett called the meeting to order at 12:06 and gave the invocation.

Minutes and Financials

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

Chairman Garrett then asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 07/21/20 meeting. David Pitts 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 July & August 2020. The financials were accepted as information only.

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

-Ms. Finley reported that the LCDC continues to support the local manufacturing community in much the same way as previously reported with a high focus on workforce.

-In early September, the LCDC hosted a virtual industry round table. There was a lot of positive interaction and sharing of best practices and resources between the participants.

-Unemployment update: Since the week of March 7 Laurens County has had a total of 8,275 initial unemployment claims. The latest unemployment rate through July for Laurens County has dropped slightly to 9.4% - SC was at 8.6% in July

-It was shared at the last board meeting that Lt. Governor Evette was planning a tour of manufacturers that were focused on maintaining their workforce during the initial COVID virus outbreak. The Lt. Governor chose Jostens in Laurens County on August 3 as one of her planned visits. We were honored to participate along with a county council member as she publicly recognized their efforts and team.

-The SC Department of Commerce recently asked local developers to promote some limited grant funding they were making available for website enhancements to manufacturers interested in building their exporting efforts. Laurens County had a company to express interest and they are going through that approval process.

-We are partnering with SC Works on a joint job fair for northern Laurens and southern Greenville Counties to be held in Fountain Inn in Mid-October.

-The LCDC Industry and Investor Appreciation golf tournament (which was planned for March) is being held Oct 7.

-The LCDC will be sending out the 2020 wage survey to manufacturers later in October. And as in the past, data results will be shared with the board before year end.

Economic Development Activity – Jon Coleman

-Mr. Coleman began with an update on new recruitment activity. Year to date RFIs are 35 where at the same point in 2019 it was 40. County Council recently passed the first reading on Project Sugar Rush which is a manufacturer going into Woodfield Park in Fountain Inn. It is \$11.8 million in investment and 80 new jobs. This announcement takes 2020 numbers to 200 jobs and \$57 million in investment which surpasses 2019 results.

-The LCDC has also recently worked with BMW on a fee in lieu tax agreement on property located in partner suppliers in Laurens County. Even though BMW isn't located physically in Laurens County they are one of the top taxpayers due to equipment partnerships such as this.

-Have received a \$25,000 grant from the SC Department of Commerce for a drone video project. It will cover five industrial parks and available buildings across the county.

-Mr. Coleman shared that he had recently participated in an Upstate SC Alliance video project promoting the region's quality of life features with a sense of place awareness. This video will be shown in a virtual site selectors meeting in place of the typical inbound gathering.

-The Connexial Center spec building is slated to be completed within the month or next 3 to 4 weeks. Laurens Electric has already committed to have the site next to it grubbed which is 30 acres and is also visible from the interstate.

Marketing / Outreach Update – Whitney Lagrange

-Ms. Lagrange stated that the focus of LCDC marketing has shifted somewhat. Promotion of wearing masks continues with the #WearItSC campaign.

- We are heavily pushing the 2020 Census count. The LCDC has partnered with United Way of Laurens County to develop videos encouraging participation and includes messages from the mayors and other local leaders. The results provide information crucial to our County, and certainly to LCDC as it is used regularly to answer RFIs, provide data to industry and other projects. Not to mention funding for education, and much-needed programs and projects.

-We are currently working on a RFI (request for information) to submit to the SC Department of Commerce for a Palmetto Site readiness designation. This request is for the Northside Industrial Park which is also called the ATW site.

-Ms. Lagrange is invited to attend the Lunchplate Marketing training and meeting in October to assist Main St. Laurens with small businesses and developing individual marketing programs. This initiative will help with their online footprint.

-The LCDC was asked by Jon Caime, with the County, to promote and forward their online survey polling community preferences of new welcome to Laurens County interstate signage. To date, we have received 530 voting responses from that effort. It is to run for three to four weeks, total. The poll was also covered by the local media channels in print and online.

Strategic Plan Update – Jon Coleman

Mr. Coleman provided an update on the LCDC strategic plan. Avalanche Consulting was bought by Ernst & Young during this process, but the support team has remained the same. The initial plan was designed to be more community driven and with the challenges of COVID the team asked Ernst & Young to develop a stand-alone staff/organization plan for the next year. When health concerns allow, work will begin on the implantation of the full community plan. The abbreviated document will be shared with the board at the next meeting.

Other Reports:

John Lummus with Upstate SC Alliance reported that staff were back working from the office in September. They utilized this time of restrictions to update the organization's research data, marketing collateral and websites. On the "Move Up" talent attraction website, a section was added called "Skill Up" focusing on

individuals who have lost jobs and connecting them with training opportunities and new employment options. Upstate Alliance is also partnering with the area technical colleges on new initiatives and working on a new website which will be rolled out mid-October. Additional focus has been put in place on targeting the life sciences sector. A new research tool is being utilized in targeting global sectors called Oxford Economics. The recruitment team is still working diligently with partners in Ireland and Wales. A new lead generator has been hired to assist with new prospect leads for planning conference calls and Zoom meetings. To keep investors connected locally, the Upstate Alliance team has been regularly hosting virtual events with different formats on various topics.

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley