

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – Minutes

Tuesday – September 21, 2021

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Dan Blakely, Jeff Field, Randy Garrett, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Joey Meadors, Amanda Munyan, Dr. David O’Shields, Brown Patterson, Dr. Hope Rivers, Mayor Nathan Senn, Dr. Ameca Thomas, David Tribble, Steve West, John Young

Guests:

John Lummus (Upstate SC Alliance), Sam Leaman (Upper Savannah COG), Thomas Higgs (Laurens County Administrator)

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange, Sandy Cruickshanks

Press:

Vic MacDonald (Chronicle)

Chairman Young called the meeting to order at 12:09 and Randy Garrett gave the invocation.

Minutes and Financials

Chairman Young asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting’s agenda. Dan Blakely made the motion to approve, and Dr. David O’Shields seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Chairman Young then asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 07/20/21 meeting. Randy Garrett made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and Shawn Bell seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

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

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- Along with normal visits and support, resources are being provided for companies exploring wage data and current workforce and hiring trends with other manufacturers. The challenge with finding and keeping a steady workforce continues to be a concern for some of the industries. Covid also continues to be a concern with local industries. Many have gone back to masking for all, temperature checks and a refocus on preventative measures in the workplace.
- In August Lynn promoted a webinar hosted by the SC DOC featuring SC DHEC. The webinar provided a current report on Covid in SC for businesses and industries. Targeted approaches and best practices to combat Covid and the Delta variant in the workplace were covered. There is a recording of the webinar if anyone missed it and is interested in hearing the information presented.
- The annual SC Manufacturing Conference & Expo will be held in person this year in Greenville Nov 10 – 12.
- The unemployment numbers are out for August and the current rate for Laurens County is down a tenth of a point from July and is now at 4.5%. The state rate is at 4.2%.
- Work has begun on the LCDC 2022 budget process.
- For an Investor Update: Two new investors have added since the last board meeting taking the overall investor commitment to a total to 37 organizations. The new supporters are South State Bank at the Advocate Level and BE&K Building Group out of Greenville at the Partner Level.

Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

- The LCDC staff has been working with the finance committee to prepare a 2022 budget which will be presented at the November board meeting for a vote. A copy of the proposed budget will be sent to board members ahead of time for review.
- RFI activity report to date: 47 total RFIs in 2021 with 33 at this point in 2020.
- The total capital investment announced in 2020 was \$57 million and 200 new jobs. So far in 2021 capital investment announced is \$307.4 million and 861 new jobs. There are 2, possibly 3, active projects where Laurens County has been selected as a finalist. One of these projects is looking at a piece of property that the LCDC owns. If any decisions are made before the next board meeting, a special called meeting will need to be held to vote on the sale of the property. Another of these projects has signed a contract on the spec building in the Connexial Center. They are moving forward right now on the due diligence on the building and expect to start their incentive process in October.
- A private developer has a piece of property at the front of Woodfield Industrial Park under contract and intends to build a 300,000+ sq ft spec building. They haven't closed on the property as of this meeting, but they are working through the process.
- Jonathan shared that he traveled to New York City with the Upstate SC Alliance a few weeks ago for a site consultant meeting. They had the opportunity to meet with 12 consultants to promote Laurens County.
- Thanks to the support of Representative Mark Willis and the partnership with a consulting group, Laurens County was awarded a \$1.2 million earmark for an interchange justification report for the area that is near the Connexial Center along I-385. This is a direct appropriation from Mr. Willis through the DOT.

Marketing / Outreach Update – Whitney Lagrange

- The Stew & Brew Event is planned for October 5 at the Musgrove Mill cottages. It will be from 4-7pm for LCDC investors, industry representatives, board members, county leaders, and members of the strategic plan implementation teams. Jonathan also encouraged all board members to invite their board and council members.
- The SC Biz publication is highlighting Laurens County in the November issue. They have sent a questionnaire and will be requesting interviews with some local leaders- may be reaching out to some of you for this purpose. Advertising information for this issue was sent out.
- A new publishing tool in use at the LCDC is Bit.Ai. It is almost like a blog and story map format integrated. Whitney has created a collection of news/media stories that feature either LCDC or any other Laurens County economic development content- infrastructure, workforce, etc. all in one place.
- Displayed on the screen during the meeting are more photos from local industries that have been added to the LCDC collection since the last meeting. Asten Johnson, Fibertex, Flame Spray and Setterstix make up some of this rotation. These images are great for industry highlights and marketing local careers to Laurens County students.
- The iMagine Lakelands STEAM Festival will be held Saturday, October 16th in Greenwood. Whitney serves on the planning committee and will be working the event.
- The SC team of planners are steadily working on the story map project for Laurens County as part of the LCDC strategic plan initiative. The Livability Team assisted in applying for help from the pro bono planners for county asset mapping. Laurens County was selected as the planning committee's annual project, which was announced officially in July. They visited the county twice, hosted by the LCDC, and since that time have received several requests for specific location photography and more information, and they have been busy building the story map.
 - The Livability Team has been very active- Since the planners have taken off with the story map/asset map process, the team moved on to focus on land use planning. The team has met with Brown Patterson and Dale Satterfield to get more information on the county's plans and had Rick Green with Upper Savannah Council of Governments come and present on the topic.
 - The Infrastructure Team has finalized a list of seven major projects. The next step is to work to figure out final cost information on these and the team will proceed on finding funding opportunities.

- The Talent/Workforce Team & Education Team have not recently met, and we predict that they may merge into a combined effort as things progress and a clear mission/vision is determined. Next week, Dr. Thomas, Dr. O'Shields, and Dr. Rivers, along with our team, will be visiting with Dr. Hardee at Woolard Technology Center in Camden at the Central Carolina Tech campus. We will be exploring their model for a CATE center. The center is located on the technical school campus, with the school district running the program and supplying the teachers for the center.
- A "report card" of sorts, showing progress on the LCDC strategic plan implementation will be included as a section within this year's annual report.

New Office Space – Jonathan Coleman

- Everyone is aware that at the last LCDC board meeting it was discussed and voted on to move the LCDC office location to the Midtown Building on the Square in Laurens. Since then, Jonathan and Amanda have been working through the details of the agreement with the Chamber. The lease has been signed on the new space. The next step is to work on converting the current space into the planned landing pad / launch pad vision. Visiting companies have found it very interesting to learn about this concept and that the LCDC would be able to offer the space to them to assist in getting their business started. It could be used for job interviews, temporary office space for company leadership or however they need to be accommodated while partnering with Piedmont Technical College for training space in the flex room of the LCAM. The first day of occupancy at the Midtown Building is January 1, 2022.

- County Councilman David Tribble stated that he would like it recorded that Clinton is not happy about the relocation of the LCDC to the Midtown Building. He feels the organization should remain in the current location between Laurens and Clinton.

Other Reports:

John Lummus with the Upstate Alliance began by expressing his appreciation to Laurens County and other investors in the room for continuing to be active supporters of the Upstate Alliance. Brown Patterson is on the executive committee and Jon Coleman serves as the local developer chair. Jonathan mentioned the investment commitments for Laurens County this year which is about 30% of the total announced investments for the entire 10 county Upstate region. The Upstate Alliance sees Laurens County as one of the busiest counties in receiving RFIs and having available product to market. The Upstate Alliance is also seeing more and more companies hiring consultants to assist them with their location searches, which may be a result of the pandemic. The Upstate Alliance is hosting a consultant event in October to include local developers. There will be 15 site consultants attend from across the county.

Executive Session:

None

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley