

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – **Minutes**

Tuesday – November 16, 2021

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Dan Blakely, Jimmy Capps, Randy Garrett, Joey Meadors, Amanda Munyan, Brown Patterson, Dr. Hope Rivers, David Tribble, Steve West, John Young

Guests:

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 gave the invocation.

Minutes and Financials

Chairman Young asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting's agenda. Brown Patterson made the motion to approve the agenda and Randy Garrett seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Chairman Young then asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 09/21/21 meeting. Brown Patterson made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and Steve West seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

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

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- On Monday, November 8, Muffin Mam provided notice to all their employees of their intention to close the facility on 1/7/22. On Tuesday, November 9, it escalated to permanent closure that afternoon with all employees having to leave the facility. All 215 employees were terminated. A notice posted on the door stated it was due to bankruptcy and all their accounts and assets were frozen. The area representative with the state's Rapid Response team was engaged on Monday so they were activated immediately to work with the displaced employees. The SC Works team is also always a tremendous support. This team is accepting unemployment filings online, by phone, or in person at the local SC Works office on W. Main St. in Laurens. The LCDC was already planning a Greater Laurens County job fair with SC Works, Piedmont Tech and DSS which will be held on Thursday, November 18 at the CAM center. The plans were to originally accommodate 24 employers but that has now been expanded to 35. Muffin Mam employees are being invited to attend beginning at 3:00 and the other job seekers at 4:00 until 7:00. Employers are from all sectors: Manufacturing, Education, healthcare, and public safety just to name the major ones. Twenty two of the 35 are Laurens County employers. We have taken many calls from employers interested in connecting with these employees. One as far as Charlotte. Many are interested in the maintenance technicians and floor managers. Laurens County and the State are also in the process of implementing claw back provisions to regain tax and grant incentives provided to Muffin Mam.

- In other Industry news: It is time to close out the industry wage survey link. Twenty-five submissions have been received which is considered a strong response rate. Once the data has been compiled the results will be emailed to everyone by early December.

- The unemployment numbers are out for September. The current rate for Laurens County is down again and is at 3.4% for September. The State is at 4.1% for September.
- For an Investor Update: One investor has decided not to renew their commitment since the last board meeting taking the overall investor commitment level to a total of 36. The company is Carlisle Associates out of Columbia and was at the Supporter Level of \$500 annually.

Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

- Piedmont Tech had a fantastic press release announcing no tuition costs in 2022. Requirements are a minimum of six credit hours and to be a SC resident. It will be available for those working toward certificates, diplomas, and degrees. Dr. Rivers expressed how excited PTC leadership is to offer this to the residents in their seven-county region.
- For activity: There are 59 RFIs to date for this year (41 at this point in 2020 and 49 total in 2020). Have announced \$307.4 million in investments and 861 jobs. A project that has recently been covered in the paper called Project Blue will have the 3rd reading on January 11 to be announced on January 12. This company is purchasing the spec building at the Connexial Center. Another project that has been in the local media and working its way through County Council is a group out of Charlotte that is looking to purchase a site in Woodfield Industrial Park to build a 300,000 sq ft spec building. This is the first private developer spec building for Laurens County in at least more than a decade. The LCDC has already started getting Muffin Mam building inquires. This building has 30,000 sq ft of cold storage space which makes it very unique and attractive in the food processing industry.
- The Upstate Alliance had their fall site consultant event in late October. Lynn, Jonathan, and Brown Patterson were able to attend different components of the day. They had 15 consultants from across the US to visit the Upstate. They hosted the 2020 event virtually, so it was great to be able to have these decisionmakers in person this year.
- Launch Laurens County is the official name of the new LCDC landing pad initiative and the logo has been designed and a new sign has been ordered. It will take the place of the existing LCDC sign mounted on the side of the current building.

Marketing / Outreach Update / Strategic Plan Implementation Update – Whitney Lagrange

- The 2nd STEAM Festival took place on October 16 in Greenwood which had been postponed from the original date in April of 2020. There was a huge turnout--larger than the first event in 2019. The FRC/Robotz Garage team from Laurens High School and ZF Transmissions Gray Court both participated as exhibitors and were pleased with the event.
- Strategic Plan Update:
 - Livability Team: The CPAT, the SC chapter of a national association of planners, presented the story map project and recommendations report for Laurens County at the Livability team meeting on November 15. The LCDC Livability team assisted in applying for help from the pro bono planners for county asset mapping. Our county was selected to be the planning committee's annual project, which was announced officially in July. The LCDC hosted two visits to Laurens County, after which Whitney worked with the team to provide specific location photography and more information. The idea is for the story map to be hosted either by the county or on the LCDC page, but linked to by all county and municipality websites, so that there is cohesive and unified information for anyone looking to visit Laurens County or looking for County assets in the interest of moving their company and/or family to Laurens County. The team member who designed the story map is from Hilton Head and has offered to come and train LCDC staff one-on-one in building the story map. After gaining the new skills to do so, the story map they created will be tweaked and added to and the LCDC will have a roll-out/announcement of the project and new online County asset collection. It will be shared with everyone at that time.
 - Infrastructure Team: This team will meet November 18 to discuss the list of seven major projects narrowed down in previous meetings. The next step is to determine final cost information on these projects and the team will proceed on finding funding opportunities for these as well as sharing the project list.

- In late September, Dr. Penland, Dr. O'Shields, and Dr. Rivers, along with members of their teams and the LCDC team, visited the Woolard Technology Center in Camden at the Central Carolina Tech campus. Dr. Tim Hardee, along with a fantastic group of staff, hosted this Laurens County group and provided tours of their CATE center model. The center is located on the technical college campus, with the school district running the program and supplying the teachers for the center. The team was able to tour their awesome facility, learn more about their extensive program offerings, hear how the center formed and how funding was raised, as well as have a delicious lunch cooked by students in their culinary program. The hope in visiting the tech center was to begin conversation and spark ideas with our local school districts and Piedmont Tech for a CATE center in Laurens County. This is also a potential future project for our Talent & Workforce and Industry implementation teams.
- Understanding the Economic Development Process: On Friday, December 10th, the LCDC will partner with Laurens Electric Cooperative and the South Carolina Power Team for a workshop called "Understanding the Economic Development Process". This workshop is for community leaders and representatives involved with the economic development process to learn more or to be refreshed on the role of economic development and its importance in the future of Laurens County. The LCDC sent the invitation out earlier in November, encouraging recipients to extend it to their Board of Directors and Councils. A reminder will go out in another week or two to the same group of recipients.
- Drone: As a reminder, the LCDC has an office drone if anyone wants or needs any flyovers done for photos or videos. If anyone has any ideas or suggestions for a cool flyover for the LCDC social media #FlyoverFriday, please let Whitney know. On the screen you can see a recent flyover post of the Fibertex Nonwovens expansion site.

2022 Budget Approval – Shawn Bell, Treasurer

- Finance Committee Chairman, Shawn Bell, directed everyone's attention to the proposed 2022 budget previously provided by email and included in the information packets. He reported that the finance committee met in October to work on the budget with staff. The changes between the 2021 and 2022 budgets are highlighted. He mentioned that there is an increase in revenue which is being accounted for because of the new FILOT agreement. Mr. Coleman made several comments and answered questions. The proposed budget is coming as a unanimous recommendation from the finance committee and does not require a motion. After discussion, Chairman Young called for a vote and the 2022 budget was approved unanimously.

Annual Meeting – Jonathan Coleman

The annual meeting is planned for January 18, 2022. This is the day of the normal schedule board meeting but will be held at 4:00 at Musgrove Mill as in the past. An invitation will be sent by email in the next month.

Other Reports:

None

Executive Session:

None

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley