

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – Minutes

Tuesday – March 21, 2023

Attendees:

Justin Benfield, Jimmy Capps, Jim Donahoo, Jeff Field, Dr. David O'Shields, Brown Patterson, Naomi Reed – Fountain Inn, Dr. Hope Rivers, Dr. Ameca Thomas, David Tribble, Steve West, John Young

Guests:

Thomas Higgs (Laurens County Administrator)

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Sandy Cruickshanks

Press:

None

Chairman West called the meeting to order at 12:08

Minutes and Financials

Chairman West asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting's agenda. Jim Donahoo made the motion to approve the agenda and Justin Benfield seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Chairman West asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 11/15/22 meeting. Brown Patterson 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 December 2022, January and February 2023. The financials were accepted as information only.

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- In January ZF hosted a leadership delegation from the SC Department of Commerce and then the Lt. Governor joined them in early March for an eXPO World Tour which was focused on e-mobility and new ZF technology.

- The closure planned at Renfro in June has been reported on several times to the board. A job fair was held onsite February 15 with 13 participating companies. Renfro is currently in the middle of initial layoffs and another job fair will be planned closer to June, if they would still like that for their employees.

- The LCDC hosted the 1st quarter industry meeting on February 22 and covered three topics. There was a presentation from Commute with Enterprise about van pooling as an option for transportation to work. There was a presentation on mental health support opportunities with SC Vocational Rehabilitation and a presentation from SC Works about all other services offered beyond unemployment support.

- Blue Diamond Industries is having a grand opening event Wednesday, March 22 in Clinton.

- Fibertex Nonwovens is having an expansion ribbon cutting event next week on March 28 in Gray Court.

- The next job fairs being planned will be for graduating high school students. The event for Clinton HS will be on April 19 and the event for LDHS will be on April 26. The planning team has focused on hosting these job fairs onsite for students at their schools. This worked well for them when we used this model during Covid, so it was decided to try again. We don't have a community wide job fair planned right now but will do so if companies express a need for that. The Upper Savannah job fair in Greenwood was held on March 16.

- The Laurens County unemployment rate was last reported for January at 3.5% which was an increase from 3.0% in December 2022.

- The LCDC will be hosting the annual Industry and Investor Appreciation Golf Tournament will be on March 31.

Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

- For additional information on the Renfro closing, the building has been purchased by a developer that plans to invest in some updating and backfilling it with someone to lease or buy. This group is out of Charlotte and have the intention to market it as soon as possible.

- To give the final wrap up on 2022 results, 491 jobs were announced and just over \$173 million in investment. As previously reported the number of RFIs for 2022 was the most ever received in overall activity. To date in 2023 the count is at the same pace at this time in 2022. January was slow but late February into March has been nonstop.

- Laurens County was featured in Site Selection Magazine a few weeks ago as the “site of the week” with a promotion of the Connexial Center and Laurens County as a whole. This ran for a week on the Site Selection Magazine’s website and the material they send to corporate CEO types and site selection consultants.

- In conjunction with assistance from the SC Power Team the LCDC will be working with Laurens Electric in spending just over \$4 million doing an expansion at the Connexial Center completing the road and the water and sewer to open up what has grown to over 600 acres. That work has already started and will be ongoing over the year.

Palmetto Sites – Jonathan Coleman:

- Palmetto Sites is the new term the SC DOC is using for site certification. The LCDC will be putting through two sites this year for certification. Clinton 26 Commerce Park and Powers South in Gray Court. Two years ago the Northside site, which is near Hunter Industrial Park in Laurens, was put through the process. The Connexial Center is also one so this will give the county four certified sites to promote which cover different areas of the county. The certification process is an in-depth study on the sites and the SC DOC contracts with Site Selection Group, which is a large site selection firm, to come in and do the work. They hold a mock prospect visit, review marketing materials and how the sites are presented in person. An evaluation is provided at the end with suggested improvements with prioritization along with any needed due diligence. This is a multiple month process and results will be shared when they are received.

Strategic Plan Update – Staff

-Since the last meeting the LCDC has been notified of a \$15.5 million earmark appropriation by Senator Lindsey Graham in the federal budget. It is for improvements to the Highway 14 / Highway 101 area in and around Gray Court. This appropriation is supposed to go toward the first phase of a project focused on safety and traffic control. These funds will flow through the DOT to Laurens County to oversee.

-Work has begun on the appropriation announced last year in the state budget that Representative Willis assisted with for an interchange justification report. This will either justify a new interchange at Exit 19 or make suggestions of modifications needed.

-Partnership continues with the county school districts and state delegation working on a plan for a countywide career and technology facility. That seems to be progressing somewhat.

Executive Session:

None

With no other business, a motion was made for the meeting to adjourn at 12:43 p.m. by Brown Patterson and seconded by Jim Donahoo.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley