

## ***Laurens County Development Corporation***

### **Board Meeting – Minutes**

Tuesday – May 20, 2025

#### Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield, Matthew Brownlee, Jimmy Capps, Dabs Davis, Jim Donahoo, Jeff Field, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Dr. Jody Penland, Dr. David Pitts, John Young

#### Guests:

Melissa Ferqueron – Laurens County

#### Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange, Brandon Norris – Burr Forman

#### Press:

None

Vice Chairman Bell called the meeting to order at 12:09 and Jeff Field gave the invocation.

#### Minutes and Financials

Vice Chairman Bell asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting's agenda. John Young made the motion to approve the agenda and Jim Donahoo seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Vice Chairman Bell asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 03/18/25 meeting. John Young made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and Jimmy Capps seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

Lynn Finley provided a recap of expenses for March and April 2025. The financials were accepted as information only.

#### Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- \* Industries have a big impact on our community with more than just providing jobs so we decided to ask. An online survey link was sent in early May polling employers about their charitable giving and support in Laurens County. There are currently 10 responses and staff will be pulling that information together soon.
- \* Nordson hosted a ribbon cutting on April 2
- \* Clinton High School hosted a career fair in April exposing students to a variety of career opportunities.
- \* Another workforce initiative recently supported was called Hire Summit. This was held on April 29 at the Ridge in Laurens for both county high schools. This new approach was to introduce the county's workforce-ready graduating seniors to hiring employers and was a partnership with the SC DEW team. There were 12 employers onsite and 31 students attended. Those numbers may sound small, but these students were well prepared and were ready to secure a job for after graduation. These initiatives couldn't happen without people like Catherine Smith at Clinton High School and Shakera Tribble at LDHS – they identify the right students and work to prepare them. The employers conducted 27 interviews onsite and extended multiple invitations for follow-up facility visits and tours. The employer sectors present were manufacturing & distribution, healthcare, public safety, local government and auto maintenance.
- \* In June, LCDC will be partnering again with SC DEW to host a small group of educators from the Upper Savannah region to Laurens County for a tour of Nucor and then for lunch at Arnold's with a spin on learning more about working in the food service and hospitality industry.
- \* Lynn attended an Upstate Alliance event hosting an international delegation on tour of the Upstate in April.
- \* The annual Golf Tournament was April 3. Twenty-six teams participated and it was a great day of networking as always.

- \* The onsite audit was held on April 17 and that team is planning a review of that report at the July board meeting.
- \* The Laurens County unemployment rate last reported for March was at 4.4% compared to the state rate of 4.1%. This is similar to the last several months. The state labor participation rate is also remaining consistent at 57.5%. [www.dew.sc.gov](http://www.dew.sc.gov)

#### Marketing Update – Whitney Lagrange

- \* RFI activity has really picked up a good bit in the last month or so where some of the most recent ones are very detailed and are due later this week.
- \* Whitney and Lynn have made several industry visits together as part of LCDC efforts to share the good news of Laurens County. Things we make here, what we do and successes. Part of this initiative is the process of updating the LCDC industry photo index. This was last done in 2021 but with the ever-changing workforce and company activities, it was time for another round. Earlier this month, we visited Nucor, Meiden America Switchgear and MPF Products. The photos are not only of the machinery, the interior and exterior, but also of employees. It was great to hear from the employees and learn more about what they do. They take great pride in their work and love their jobs. These interactions will be used on social media platforms highlighting local industry as well as accompanying other articles and posts, as well as kind of a bank for any media that needs accompanying photos.
- \* We're excited that Upstate Alliance has chosen Laurens as one of their locations for a June Small Group gathering. This is typically 20 people and under, so it's a more intimate networking event to get to know more about each other. This one will be a little bit bigger because LCDC will co-host. It will be Wednesday, June 25 at Tap & Table. Everyone here should have gotten the email invitation along with County Council.

#### Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

- \* Whitney mentioned that activity for the year has picked up in May. So far, the same number of RFIs have been received in May as were received in all of April and more than received in March. There have been 29 so far this year. There were 25 at this point last year and 16 at our last meeting. Numbers have definitely increased from the first three months. To go along with those, there have been seven different prospect visits to the county as well.
- \* Along with the Upstate Alliance event Whitney mentioned they also hosted their second quarter board meeting here in Laurens County at the CAM in April. Leaders from across the upstate attended.
- \* Jonathan has reached out to Joey Von Nessen at UofSC to inquire about the possibility of working on an economic impact study for LCDC and to get a good picture of the overall impact that LCDC has on Laurens County. The validation from a team of economists would serve as a powerful endorsement. Mr. Von Nessen shared that the data provided also assists in the recruitment of industry and can display the growth opportunities of not only what has been done but also what the future looks like. More will be shared about this at the July board meeting.
- \* There are two projects that will most likely be announced before the next board meeting. Project Armor is an existing industry expansion that is building a new building. It is a \$23 million investment and 24 jobs. Project Wolf is a German automotive supplier building a new facility in Fountain Inn in Woodfield Park. It is a \$12 million dollar investment and 22 new jobs.
- \* Jonathan attended the SCEDA annual meeting in May and they heard from the Secretary of Commerce. SC Department of Commerce unveiled a new virtual reality tool called VisionSC. A prospect can be taken on an interactive experience by wearing virtual reality goggles. This experience will bring a site, building, and community to life. The LocateSC team from Commerce will be at the next Upstate Alliance local developers meeting to provide a deeper dive into the capabilities and the financial aspect to participate.
- \* A group from Laurens traveled to Washington, DC in March to meet with the SC congressional delegation and specifically with Senator Graham and Senator Scott. The meetings were very productive, and it is always good to be in front of the delegation leadership. It was the first time Jonathan had the chance to meet Congresswoman Sheri Biggs.
- \* The Palmetto Sites Certification for Power South is now complete and has been an almost two-year process. Powers South is the second Palmetto Certified Site in the county. The process for Clinton 26 down on Highway 72 is still in the works and it is planned to have that wrapped up within the next month or two.

If a location is not a Palmetto Site, it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with it. This certification is just deeper due diligence speeding up the process for an interested company.

\* Upper Savannah COG reached out about hosting a meeting in the LCDC office space. They have grant funds available to do a public transportation feasibility study in three counties. The meeting is on June 12<sup>th</sup> and if anyone is interested we can let Rick Green know to include you.

\*Mr. Coleman welcomed and introduced Brandon Norris of Burr Forman as the new legal counsel for LCDC. He also welcomed Melissa Ferqueron, Laurens County Interim County Administrator, to the meeting. Mr. Coleman then acknowledged the passing of a longtime LCDC board member, Mayor John Carter.

*Bylaws Revisions – Jonathan Coleman*

\* Several months ago, LCDC staff began a process to look through the bylaws for any possible changes that needed to be made. Under Brandon's guidance proposed updates were redlined and sent to the full board for review. Mr. Norris led the board through all notations which were explained and discussed.

Vice Chairman Bell stated that coming from the executive committee it doesn't need a motion or a second. He asked for any further comments, questions or discussion and then called for a vote which passed unanimously.

*Executive Session:*

None

*Other Business:*

None

With no other business the meeting to adjourn at 12:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lynn S. Finley