

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

### **Board Meeting – Minutes**

Tuesday – July 15, 2025

#### Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Matthew Brownlee, Jimmy Capps, Jim Donahoo, Jeff Field, Brown Patterson, Dr. Jody Penland, Steve West, John Young

#### Guests:

Melissa Ferqueron – Laurens County, Matt Phillips – Phillips CPAs & Advisors

#### Staff:

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

#### Press:

Brenda Stewart, Laurens County Buzz

Chairman Patterson called the meeting to order at 12:16 and gave the invocation.

#### Minutes and Financials

Chairman Patterson asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting's agenda. Shawn Bell made the motion to approve the agenda and Steve West seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Chairman Patterson asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 05/20/25 meeting. Jimmy Capps 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 May and June 2025. The financials were accepted as information only.

#### 2024 Audit Review – Matt Phillips

Matt Phillips provided a detailed review of the 2024 audit results and answered questions from the board. He reported that Phillips CPA's and Advisors provided a "clean and unmodified" opinion of the LCDC financial position as of December 31, 2024, with no material weaknesses and no items of note to report. He stated this is the best opinion the LCDC can receive.

#### Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

\* It was reported that Elizabeth's Food Company (out of California) has officially taken over the Rich Products facility July 1 in Fountain Inn. They are a food manufacturer specializing in croutons and bread sticks. It is also good to note that they have retained some of the Rich's employees. Jonathan and Lynn have a meeting planned with their leadership team later this month.

\* On June 10 LCDC partnered 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 while learning more about working in the food and hospitality industry. The experience was designed for a small group and the registration was full with 12 participants.

\* Lynn attended the Regional Education Advisory Board meeting last week in Greenwood and the presentation was by a marketing professional on the topic of how AI is transforming business and workforce. They shared about an in-demand career opportunity called AI Prompt Engineer which is an expert in creating text-based prompts that is bridging human language to AI.

\* In June Lynn attended a session of Advanced Symposium provided through SCEDA for the renewal of her Certified Economic Developer designation.

\* The date has been set for this year's 8<sup>th</sup> grade career showcase which will be November 6.

- \* The South Carolina Department of Education has unveiled a new statewide framework for stackable career credentials at the high school level to begin in the 2025 -2026 school year. Dr. Jody Penland added additional information about how District 55 is preparing for this implementation. This effort will provide a clear path to a good job, college, or training opportunity after graduation.
- \* The Laurens County unemployment rate was last reported for May and was at 4.2% compared to the state rate of 4.1%. This is similar to the last several months. [www.dew.sc.gov](http://www.dew.sc.gov)

#### Marketing Update – Whitney Lagrange

- \* There was a great turnout in June for the co-hosted Small Group Gathering with Upstate Alliance. It was held at Tap & Table which was a great setting for everybody to move about and network. There was a great mix of investors, community partners, friends and leaders. We gained another investor from the event, someone who had been meaning to do but then got some face time with us and moved that forward.
- \* LCDC will continue to be a PC Athletics corporate sponsor this year. We're looking to plan a couple of events maybe a basketball game or some other type of game. PSAs are broadcasted at various games, and information regarding our sponsorship as well as our mission.
- \* The website and social media analytics show about 3,000 new web visitors since reported at the last board meeting. The top three pages in order of popularity are the homepage, workforce and training, and property search. For the last year or more, the second most popular page has been our “Things to Do in Laurens County” or visit Laurens County story map page. There are around 2,200 followers on Facebook and 700 on Instagram. The LinkedIn page views have increased about 520% and then 174 people searched the LCDC page just in the last week.
- \* June has been a busy month. On the Monday before the small group gathering we hosted an LCDC lunch and learn. It was for county council members as well as any county administration staff and provided a deep dive into key tools like FILOT agreements, multi county industrial parks, special source revenue credits and strategies that help attract and grow industry here. We are grateful to Brandon Norris and Mike Burns with the Burr Forman team for coming and breaking that down. It's very complex information and it was made into clear, understandable terms. The discussion was recorded and a video has been made including the corresponding slides. It is posted as an unlisted link on the LCDC YouTube page, but a link can be shared to anyone interested.
- \* We plan to host our Stew and Brew event again this fall. The date and location has not been decided yet but it is something we want to keep up. The last small gathering in June had about 30 attendees and we anticipate Stew and Brew to have around 50 to 55. We usually have a lot of industry people attend and lots of meetings and other things stem from that. Be on the lookout for anything coming with a save the date the next few weeks.

#### Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

- \* Beginning with great news, Brawo in Hunter Industrial Park (HIP) is announcing an expansion today. It was referred to as Project Armor and is an investment of \$23.25 million with 24 new jobs. County Council had third reading on their FILOT agreement last night. Brawo has two facilities in HIP and plan to add on to both. They have an aluminum forging operation in one and brass forging in the other. Brawo is a long-time company in Laurens County and we are excited about their growth.
- \* County Council also had third reading last night on Project Wolf. This is a German automotive supplier called Noralem. They will be locating in Woodfield Industrial Park and building a new facility of approximately 100,000 square feet. Their announcement will come later from the SC Department of Commerce but not until probably sometime in August. Obviously, this is public information with it being at the council meeting last night. We don't expect them to be online for at least 18 months but their investment is \$9.5 million with 22 new jobs. These two announcements bring our numbers this year to \$90 million in new capital investment and 46 new jobs to date.
- \* From the RFI standpoint, we have been busy over the last month and a half. Forty RFIs have been received for the year compared to 34 at this point last year. There are two prospective companies visiting over the next week, one tomorrow and then one next week. Activity seems to be picking up, which is good. Usually summertime is slower, but it seems to have been busy the last month or two.

\* One other item of note pertaining to SCEDA. SCEDA is having their Institute August 7th and 8<sup>th</sup> at Presbyterian College in Clinton. There will be about 75 leaders from all over the state including elected officials, city and county officials, individuals working in economic development along with other sectors. They invited Jonathan to give a presentation on how economic development is done in Laurens County. We will also give the attendees a small gift to take home from Laurens County that showcases one of our local artisans.

Economic Impact Study – Jonathan Coleman

\* As mentioned at the last board meeting the LCDC has contracted with Joey Von Nessen with the USC Darla Moore School of Business to do an economic impact study for our organization. This study will illustrate the economic impact LCDC has had in the County since its inception, but also on an annual basis. Mr. Von Nessen is their research economist. Once they get started it should be about a six-month process. We expect to have some data by January and may be able to present some data at the annual meeting.

VisionSC – Jonathan Coleman

\*The SC Department of Commerce piloted a new recruitment tool with Sumter County and they have now invited a limited number of other counties to participate. LCDC has committed to implement this tool along with Orangeburg County and two regional alliances. It is called VisionSC and it was unveiled at the SCEDA annual meeting held in May. It will require some upfront investment but most will be reimbursed at the completion of the buildout. They are using virtual reality headsets to showcase a community and its assets when they are promoting the state through their recruitment efforts all over the world. The Board was then shown a promotional video explaining and demonstrating the tool. Additional information will be provided as staff learn more about the tool and required commitment.

Site Enhancement & Palmetto Sites – Jonathan Coleman

\*Each year the SC Department of Commerce offers a grant program to assist counties in site enhancement and conducting the required due diligence for designating product as a certified Palmetto Site. In the past the State has allotted \$3 million for site enhancement purposes in the annual state budget. This year they allotted \$80 million. Jonathan has been meeting and discussing possible projects in Laurens County and they are excited about a lot of our projects and needs. Multiple needs were identified and shared with SCDOC for review based on their survey of all the counties in the state and needs.

These are the four projects that were highlighted to target and pursue. Staff will be submitting all four for consideration and awards should be announced in December.

- 1- Enhancement at Powers South. Possibly building a road and clearing the property and doing a rough grade of the entire property.
- 2- Possibly expanding Connexial Center and exploring property for future interchange in that area.
- 3- Sewer upgrades in the area of the county that benefits Powers South and the Connexial Center.
- 4- Completing the Palmetto Site Certification for Hunter Industrial Park and then looking at the possibility of expanding the boundaries.

Executive Session:

None

Other Business:

None

With no other business the meeting to adjourn at 12:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lynn S. Finley