

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – Minutes

Tuesday – September 17, 2024

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Amanda Benfield, Justin Benfield, Tom Brooks, Jimmy Capps, Jim Donahoo, Jeff Field, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Brown Patterson, Dr. Hope Rivers, Dr. Joey Penland, David Tribble, Steve West

Guests:

Thomas Higgs – Laurens County, Wes Meetze – Laurens County, Sam Leaman – Upper Savannah, Chip Cooper – Cooper Motor Company

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange

Press:

Vic McDonald – Clinton Chronicle, Brenda Stewart – The Buzz

Chairman West called the meeting to order at 12:09.

Minutes and Financials

Chairman West asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting's agenda. Brown Patterson 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 07/16/24 meeting. Jimmy Capps made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and Dr. Jody Penland seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

Lynn Finley provided a recap of expenses for July and August 2024. The financials were accepted as information only.

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- * Lynn Finley reported that planning is on track for this year's 8th grader Industry Showcase which will be held in Newberry on November 7. Let us know if you would like to help this year.
- * Piedmont Tech hosted a Business & Industry Forum on August 13 at the CAM.
- * Submissions for the LCDC industry wage survey are still being accepted and when that is compiled staff will share the results with all industries and the full board.
- * The SC Works regional fall job fair will be in Greenwood at PTC on October 17 from 10-1.
- * The SC Works job fair that was hosted at the CAM on August 15 was well attended. There were 27 employers and 136 job seekers tracked. Of those job seekers 41 were currently working and 95 were unemployed.
- * There is a hiring event at the CAM planned for Nordson in mid-November. They will also be utilizing the flex space for training for a few months.
- * Lynn attended a site consultant event in August in Charlotte that was hosted by the Upstate Alliance for local developers to network with the consultants and centers of influence located in the Charlotte area.
- * The Laurens County unemployment rate was last reported for July at 5.2% compared to the state rate of 3.9%. Every county's rate in the state increased in the past 2 months. SC DEW hasn't published a specific explanation of why the unemployment rate is trending up unless it is tied to seasonal employment. The August report is expected soon. For comparison the highest rate in the state in July is 9.1% and the lowest is 3.9%. The national rate also increased in July to 4.3%. An upside is that the state labor participation rate is 57.5 which was a slight uptick from June. For more information go to www.dew.sc.gov.

* LCDC gained one new investor since the last board meeting. It is Garrard Construction Group from Greenville at the Supporter Level.

Marketing Update – Whitney Lagrange

*Stew & Brew- The LCDC will be hosting the annual Stew & Brew on Thursday, October 3rd this year at The Lumberyard in Clinton. There is no structured program around this event--simply networking. It will be from 4-6pm and open to you all, our investors, industry representatives, county leaders, and community supporters. We encourage all board members to invite your board and council members as well. The first round of invitations were emailed two weeks ago and already have 40 guests confirmed. Another round will be sent this Thursday, so be on the lookout to receive it and please forgive duplications if you've already RSVP'd.

*Holiday Drop-in- The LCDC will be hosting a holiday drop-in on Wednesday, December 4th at the new Harper Commons. Details are being ironed out, but it will likely be around the same time as most events: 4-6pm or so. A Save the Date will be sent out later next month to ensure that it gets on people's calendars.

*PC Athletics Partnership- LCDC continues to partner with PC Athletics this year.

*Business in Focus magazine will be featuring a 1500+ word article on Laurens County in its December issue. They may be reaching out to some of you and other local businesses very soon to see if there is interest in placing an ad alongside the article. There is no pressure, and the article does not hinge on an advertising goal. Jonathan and Whitney had an initial interview and will have a more thorough one to build the article content in the next couple of weeks.

*Lynn mentioned the Laurens & Newberry Counties Career Showcase for 8th graders that we're planning for November 7th. I'm in charge of maintaining the website for the event, so that will continue to be updated as information comes in for schools, as well as each company that registers. The site will give each company that participates their own information page, with fun facts and career clusters listed.

*Web analytics- www.growlaurenscounty.com has had over 8,600 new users since this time last year. That's 2,000 more than just two years ago, with the number of direct visitors vs. finding us through searches being almost the same. The top 3 pages by visit are the: Properties search, Staff, and Things to Do in Laurens County. Our top audience countries visiting are US, India, and China. The next most visited page was the Nordson announcement, which was made the day after our last board meeting.

Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

* For an activity update, Mr. Coleman mentioned that at the last board meeting he had shared overall activity was slower than in the past. Since then, activity has picked up. RFIs are currently at 45 for the year. Seven were received in August and three so far in September. At this point in 2023 it was about 60. There are a couple of larger projects planning to visit over the next several weeks for their first time.

*Nordson was announced the day after the last board meeting with a \$30 million investment and 135 new jobs in the Clinton 26 Commerce Park which is at Highway 72 and I-26. That takes the overall totals for the year to \$182.4 million in investment and 175 new jobs. Nordson plans to be up and running about the first of the year.

* McGuire Woods is both a law firm and a site selector group. Ford Graham heads up the site selection division for McGuire Woods and held a senior position at the SC Department of Commerce a number of years ago. They hosted an event with the Upstate Alliance in Greenville recently that Jonathan attended.

*LCDC recently signed an agreement to work with Terracon, an environmental engineering firm, on a brownfield grant process. This doesn't cost the LCDC anything and Terracon will be pursuing a county-wide community grant for remediation of chosen sites. That process has just begun so there will be more information coming. A good option would be the Timken site on Torrington Road in Clinton.

* The SC Secretary of Commerce will be visiting later in the month. He will be in town for lunch and a tour of the community along with discussing economic development topics.

* The initial draft of the Interchange Justification Report (IJR) being conducted on Exit 19 on I-385 has been received. It is going through the SC DOT channels now for their approval and edits.

* The Connexial Boulevard extension is complete. This now allows full access to go through the park from the entrance and come out on Friendship Church Road which opens up the remainder of the park.

* Senator Ross Turner, out of Greenville, is heading a new committee exploring childcare challenges the state's workforce is facing. The initial hearing will be on October 15 and Jonathan, John Lummus along with others have been invited to attend to speak to the real-world problems businesses are having.

Nominating Committee Appointment – Steve West

* Chairman West stated that the end of 2024 brings on the rotation of leadership on the LCDC board. A nominating committee needs to be formed to develop a new slate of officers beginning in 2025. He appointed Amanda Benfield, Justin Benfield and Dr. Hope Rivers to make up this committee and bring a slate of officers to present for vote at the next meeting in November.

Downtown Clinton Project – Tom Brooks, City of Clinton

* Tom Brooks began his presentation by sharing photos of the downtown fire that occurred on August 27 and described the overwhelming support from other agencies and community supporters. He added that the incident is still being investigated and is not sure when a report will be released with any findings. They are currently searching for funding opportunities to assist with the next steps. In light of this challenging situation, they want to be able to provide some good news.

* The presentation passed to Chip Cooper of Cooper Motor Company and a partner in a new residential development opportunity and owner of buildings being redeveloped in the downtown area called the Industrial Supply Complex. The concept plan is to have 21 apartments with 27 beds. The structure of the development will be higher end, and the drawings are all approved by the historic district. The space between the back of the warehouses and the rail line and to the sides will be designated for parking for the residents and the community. And as time goes on it will hopefully link up with the Swamp Rabbit Trail. Mr. Brooks joined in to add that the Clinton Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) has agreed to put in \$250,000 to provide public parking. The way the deal is structured right now is if the CEDC puts in \$250,000 there will be an ask to the LCDC to match that commitment. After all construction is completed, the City of Clinton plans to buy that lot as public parking spaces and would maintain it. No money would be going directly into a developer but would be for public infrastructure. The total project cost is a little north of \$500,000 as of a few months ago for the parking lot area. A time of questions and comments followed. A specific question was asked if all the setbacks had been cleared by the railroad and Mr. Brooks stated that it was all cleared. The actual number of parking spaces was not known at the time. There is no commercial space planned, and the apartments would be for lease. Mr. Cooper shared that he expected construction could begin by the first of the year 2025 and then the timeline should be 8 to 10 months. David Tribble asked to make a motion to support the request to get it on the floor for discussion. He then went on to make a formal motion that the LCDC match the contribution of the CEDC at \$250,000 to support the finishing of exterior portions of the model being presented that have to do with parking and that that be made available upon completion of the project by the developers. Chairman West called for a second. Jimmy Capps made a second which opened the motion for discussion. After a time of questions, concerns and discussion, Brown Patterson asked to make a superseding motion. Mr. Patterson's motion asked to postpone the initial motion until the Finance Committee can meet to review the funding source and provide a full report back to the Board with data answering the specific questions asked and to have that transpire by October 1 and allow the Chairman to call for a future meeting / vote electronically or in person. The motion was seconded by Dr. Jody Pendland and Chairman West called for a vote which was approved unanimously. The Finance Committee consists of Jeff Field as Treasurer, Shawn Bell and Brown Patterson.

Executive Session:

None

Other Business:

None

With no other reports the meeting was adjourned at 1:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley

Added Note:

On Tuesday, September 24, 2024, the below messages were emailed to the LCDC Board from Chairman Steve West:

We received notice earlier today that Councilman David Tribble would like to withdraw his motion from the Board meeting last week with regards to funding for a parking lot for an apartment development in Downtown Clinton. Please see his email below. The LCDC will continue to explore ways to assist the City of Clinton in cleanup and rebuild efforts in dealing with the horrible fire tragedy. Thanks to everyone for your time and support to this organization.

September 24, 2024

To Steven West and Jon Coleman, LCDC

Chairman West

I would like to withdraw my motion, from our meeting of September 17,2024, asking for financial help from the LCDC regarding the downtown residential apartments in Clinton.

David Tribble, Jr

Laurens County Council Representative to the LCDC