

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – Minutes

Tuesday – September 19, 2023

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield, Tom Brooks, Jeff Field, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Amanda Munyan, Dr. David O'Shields, Brown Patterson, David Tribble, Steve West

Guests:

None

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange, Sandy Cruickshanks

Press:

Terry Benjamin (GoLaurens.com)

Chairman West called the meeting to order at 1:16 and David Tribble gave the invocation.

Minutes and Financials

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

Chairman West asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 07/18/23 meeting. Justin Benfield made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and Jeff Field seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

Lynn Finley provided a recap of expenses for July and August 2023. The financials were accepted as information only.

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- The job fair previously mentioned at board meetings was held on July 19. It was exciting to hear afterwards that the SC Works team registered approximately 70 job seekers. Approximately 20 employers attended.
- The fall Upper Savannah job fair will be October 5 from 10:00 to 1:00 and hosted on the PTC Greenwood campus. They still have space for employers to register if anyone is interested.
- SC Works Upstate partners hosted a re-kickoff meeting at the LCDC office on September 15 for their Sectors Strategies initiative. They support multiple employment sector strategy groups, but manufacturing is a focus right now. They hope to get that group engaged again to identify continuing areas of challenge and work to uncover solutions to help.
- The Laurens / Newberry Counties Career Showcase event which the LCDC supports exposes 8th graders to future career opportunities. It is planned for November 8th in Laurens at the PTC Center for Advanced Manufacturing. There are currently 13 companies registered to participate and are looking for at least 10 more.
- MPF Products in Gray Court has announced growth plans and are planning to host a groundbreaking in early October. The LCDC Board is on the invitation list and will receive an email invitation with that information. They currently employ about 60 and will be hiring an additional 13 with this expansion project.
- A review of the LCDC insurance policies is underway. The organization has recently made some changes so a review is in order to make sure coverage is correct.
- The Laurens County unemployment rate was last reported for July at 3.7% compared to the state rate of 3.1%.

Marketing Update – Whitney Lagrange

- A date has been set for LCDC's Stew & Brew event this fall for industry, investors and supporters. It will be held on Tuesday, October 24th from 4-6pm at Musgrove Mill. A printed invitation is included in the board packets today, but an email also went out a couple of weeks ago. There are around 30 people who have already RSVP'd to come and staff will be following up with another email invite again in a couple of weeks.
- Work continues on numerous RFIs coming in regularly.
- Website analytics:
 - The LCDC website has had almost 4,000 new users since the beginning of this year
 - The top pages in order of popularity are the properties search page, news and media page, staff page, and the story map tour page.
- As Lynn mentioned, we are working with other Newberry and Laurens County partners on the Career Showcase. My main task is to update and maintain the event website. So far, we have 15 businesses that have signed up to participate on November 8th at the CAM. If you want to visit the showcase website and see photos from prior events, what the event is all about, and a company profile with career clusters identified for each, visit lcncshowcase.com.
- It is about time to update property aerials based on their progress. I flew the drone over Woodfield Park in late June after construction was complete and got a video update on the new Hunter Industrial spec building.
- Jonathan and Whitney will be meeting with a prospective video production company in October

Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

- RFI update: Have 64 to date compared to 63 at the same point in 2022. There have been 23 this year where there has been no appropriate product to submit. This is due to several factors such as infrastructure and size requirements.
- Jonathan traveled with the Upstate Alliance to New York City to meet with consultants. They had visits with about 20 different site consultants over several days. There continues to be a lot of interest in the Southeast and specifically the Upstate. It was noted that project interest has not declined but it seems the construction of spec buildings by private developers has slowed down and may be due to the rise in construction costs and financing. With 2024 a presidential election year, it is possible to see fewer RFIs from companies.
- The LCDC hosted, on two different occasions, the real estate and research teams with the Upstate Alliance and the SC DOC to tour the county. It's always good to have these teams in the county so they are aware of the assets available.
- The Upstate Alliance also hosted an international delegate lunch in Greenville which included representatives from 13 different countries which Jonathan attended. It included consulate generals and trade officials.

Product Development – Jonathan Coleman

- Earlier this year County Council voted on an ordinance to transfer some county owned property designated for economic development to the LCDC. This was done to streamline project flow and so the LCDC can facilitate the transfer of deed to establishing companies in the future. This includes the parcels identified as the Northside Industrial site along Hwy 221 outside of Laurens and some property in Owings next to ZF Transmissions.
- The LCDC learned that the Clinton 26 Corporate Park needs \$164,000 in additional due diligence on the site to reach the Palmetto Site designation. The LCDC received a grant from the SC DOC for \$127,000 to assist in completing this along with a match from LCDC project funds of \$37,000. In conjunction with that the LCDC also received a grant of \$300,000 from the SC DOC to go toward extending the road into the south side of Highway 72 working with the City of Clinton at Clinton 26 Corporate Park.
- The SC DOC awarded the same grant funds for Powers South in Owings but that site is in a holding place due to a company's current interest.
- Grading began two weeks ago at the Hunter spec building in Hunter Industrial Park. It will be 650,000 SF. The Woodfield spec building in Fountain Inn is complete and available at 320,000 SF.

Executive Session:

Chairman West asked for a motion to enter executive session. Tom Brooks made a motion to go into executive session at 1:40 for an economic development matter related to Project Zebra and was seconded by Shawn Bell. The Board unanimously approved entering executive session by a show of hands.

Chairman West declared the board out of executive session at 1:58 with no action taken during session.

Brown Patterson made a motion to authorize LCDC President and staff to move forward on a loan with United Community Bank (UCBI) to assist Project Zebra with funding pending final LCDC Board approval on the master agreement. Tom Brooks seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion by a show of hands.

Project Zebra will invest \$620 million and create 400 new jobs.

Other Business

None

Chairman West adjourned the meeting 2:05 p.m.

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An email from Jonathan Coleman was sent to all board members on November 3, 2023, at 9:12 AM to cover a voting item.

I have attached the discussed Project Zebra grant agreement for approval as well as a resolution to accompany the grant agreement. Please reply with your vote before COB Wednesday, November 8 for both. And as always, please let us know if you have any questions.

- Project Zebra Grant Agreement & Resolution to Accompany the Grant Agreement (Attached)

Results of voting:

Yes – 13 / No – 0 / Did not vote – 3

Respectfully submitted,  
Lynn S. Finley