

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – Minutes

Tuesday – November 18, 2025

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield, Jimmy Capps, Dabs Davis, Jim Donahoo, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Brown Patterson, Dr. Jody Penland, Dr. Hope Rivers, John Young

Guests:

Jerre Threat – Laurens County

Staff:

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

Press:

None

Chairman Patterson called the meeting to order at 12:18 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 Dr. Jody Penland seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Chairman Patterson asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 09/16/25 meeting. Justin Benfield made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and Jim Donahoo seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

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

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

* The Annual 8th grade Career Showcase was held on Thursday, November 6 at the Piedmont Tech Newberry campus. It was another successful event with 20 different entities showcasing careers to approximately 1200 students.

* Laurens High School hosted a career fair on campus in early November and had around 20 companies to participate.

* Lynn is part of the Upper Savannah Regional Education Center Advisory Board (RECAB) which met on November 13 at Saluda High School to tour their new CTE wing. Dr. Rebecca Battle-Bryant also joined the group. She is the Director of the Office of Statewide Workforce Development. It was reported to the group that the Upper Savannah Invitational Building Construction Competition was held in Greenwood in late October. Both Laurens County High Schools sent teams this year to compete, and Clinton High School finished in 2nd place.

* For other updates Lynn reported being invited to join the PTC Foundation Board beginning in October 2025. It is an honor to have this opportunity and excited to serve alongside Jeff Field and Justin Benfield from the LCDC Board.

* A date has been set for early December to have the kickoff planning meeting for the Spring Hire Summit event. This initiative connects workforce ready high school seniors with actively hiring companies. The team plans to use the same format as last year but hope to have even more students interested in participating.

* The industry wage survey is complete and out. LCDC Board members will also receive the report by email. Lynn is still working on the utility and government survey discussed at the last board meeting and it will be completed very soon.

* Lynn had several opportunities during the fall to interact with site consultants and recruitment along with attending the SCEDA mid-year meeting and an allied partner event with the Department of Commerce.

* The Laurens County unemployment rate, last reported for August, was 5.3% (compared to the state rate of 4.3%). The current SC labor participation rate is 57.6%. www.dew.sc.gov

Marketing Update – Whitney Lagrange

* Positive feedback has been received for the Laurens & Newberry Counties Career Showcase for 8th graders held in November. Photos are now posted to the website and can be viewed at lcnshowcase.com.

* At the last meeting, Whitney shared LCDC was considering hosting a holiday drop-in this year. However, given our recent successes, a fully committed schedule, and a desire to avoid overlapping with other community events, staff decided to forgo the event this year and instead plan for 2026.

* LCDC had another successful annual Stew & Brew on October 30th at The Lumberyard in Clinton. There were around 45 to 50 guests in attendance, who enjoyed networking and enjoying beverages and Lowcountry boil from Lee Brothers.

* Lynn and Whitney attended the Women in Economic Development conference a couple of weeks ago. It was a full, impactful two days with pages and pages of notes taken on topics ranging from shaping our economic development strategies for the year ahead, to insights from key site selectors on emerging trends and feedback on RFI submissions—both strengths and areas for improvement. Sessions also covered recruitment strategies and even emerging opportunities in hydrogen power.

* As part of shaping the LCDC's strategy for the next year and beyond and pending budget approval, we are exploring a possible year-long digital advertising initiative to strengthen our SEO reach. This is to include newer AI technology and to stay up with current and growing trends in this area. The proposed plan includes advanced analytics setup, creation and management of targeted Google search ads, a real-time performance dashboard, and quarterly reporting. The program would begin with one month of setup followed by eleven months of live search advertising, with ongoing optimization to maximize reach and results.

Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

* Jonathan reported 69 RFIs have been received so far. In 2024, 56 had been received at this same point and a total of 60 for all of 2024. The 2025 numbers are tracking just behind the totals in 2023 which had a total of 81 RFIs. Since September there have been 10 separate prospect visits. Whether it be a virtual visit or here to the county. The KIPP announcement went out last week which was Project Wolf. The company asked for a couple months before their announcement and that is why it just was formally announced. That was 22 jobs and \$12.2 million and brings the totals for 2025 to 250 total new jobs and \$125.2 million of investment. No additional announcements are expected for 2025 but at the October county council meeting the first reading for Project Floyd was held. This project is a \$63.8 million investment with 15 new jobs and is looking at building a new facility at Hunter Industrial Park. Additionally, Project IPE is a \$93 million investment with 126 new jobs which will locate in the former Michelin distribution center. The way that is set up now is the current company, Malouf, bought the building several years ago and is using only a portion for a warehouse. The total building is 1.4 million square feet. Malouf decided to sell the facility and lease back the space they need. Project IPE is a manufacturing project locating in the building and they will lease a portion of it to Malouf. Malouf is not closing. The two companies will operate in the same building. These two announcements will probably be in January because they each have a second reading planned in December and then third readings announcing in January. We also have Project Diamond which is a \$9 million investment with 70 jobs that haven't started the FILOT readings yet, but they are getting close. They are looking in the Clinton area.

* The Upstate Alliance has hired a consultant to work with the county economic development offices and others to do a series of short, simple videos explaining the benefits of economic development. These videos will be tools that can be shared with citizens to assist in explaining the role of economic development in a community and the benefits that can be realized. The initiative should be unveiled in the first quarter of 2026.

* The last requirement to complete the Clinton 26 Commerce Park Palmetto Site designation has been received so that work should be finalized over the next week or two.

* Several weeks ago, the lieutenant governor's office reached out to request a visit at LCDC to discuss economic development efforts in Laurens County. We were honored to host Lieutenant Governor Pamela Evette at the LCDC office on November 10. Along with a couple of LCDC executive committee members and the Upstate Alliance, the meeting lasted about an hour and covered multiple topics around needs of the county related to economic development and how she supports the LCDC team and citizens of Laurens County.

* The annual meeting will be held in February allowing additional time for the completion of the economic impact study being conducted by Dr. Joey Von Nessen and his team at University of South Carolina. Dr. Von Nessen will be the presenter at the meeting and will be sharing the findings of the study. Whitney will be sending out more information about that when the date is firmed up.

2026 Budget Approval – Jim Donahoo, Treasurer

* The Finance Committee met on October 29th with staff to go over the draft budget. That committee is made up of Jim Donahoo (Treasurer), Jeff Field, and Shawn Bell. Jim Donahoo reviewed several specific items in the proposed budget and then asked staff to cover any other recommendations and questions from the board. Coming as an approved recommendation from the Finance Committee no motion is required for a vote but received a recommendation from Mr. Young and Mr. Capps. A vote was then called by Chairman Patterson and the 2026 proposed budget was passed unanimously.

Executive Session:

None

Other Business:

None

With no other business the meeting to adjourn at 12:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley