

# ***Laurens County Development Corporation***

## **Board Meeting – Minutes**

Tuesday – November 21, 2023

### Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield, Jimmy Capps, Charles Dixon (PTC), Jim Donahoo, Jeff Field, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Amanda Munyan, Dr. David O'Shields, Brown Patterson, Steve West

### Guests:

Thomas Higgs (Laurens County Administrator)

### Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange

### Press:

Terry Benjamin (GoLaurens.com)

Chairman West called the meeting to order at 12:11 and Brown Patterson 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 Brown Patterson seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Chairman West asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 09/19/23 meeting. Justin Benfield 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 September and October 2023. The financials were accepted as information only.

### Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- It was mentioned in September that MPF Products in Gray Court had announced growth plans. The investment is \$2.5 million with 13 new jobs. They held a groundbreaking on October 10 and had a great event that morning. Jonathan Coleman, Mayor Stellartean Jones and Mark Willis were invited to participate in the program. They currently employ about 60 and have a second facility in VA.
- The 2023 industrial wage survey results were released this week. There was a 37% response rate, which is a good representation and provides great information to be of use in planning.
- Whitney and Lynn have both mentioned the Laurens / Newberry Counties Career Showcase held this fall. The planning team is very appreciative of the companies that participated. It would not be possible without that support, and it is definitely a commitment to participate. There were approximately 1,200 8<sup>th</sup> graders attending from Laurens, Newberry, and Union Counties.
- Lynn had the opportunity to interact with site consultants twice recently. She attended the Women in Economic Development conference in early October and participated in an inbound consultant event in Anderson County with the Upstate Alliance.
- The LCDC gained one new investor in October. It is Edcon out of Peak, SC. They are a general contractor that specializes in school construction.
- The Laurens County unemployment rate was last reported for September at 2.8% compared to the state rate of 2.6%. Labor participation rates are sometimes asked for as well. The Laurens County rate is currently 56.1% compared to SC at 57%. This is the highest reported participation rate since October 2016 which was 57%.

### Marketing Update – Whitney Lagrange

- The Career Showcase was a success, and this flex space looked a lot smaller on November 8th. Whitney's main task was event photographer and marketing for the Showcase. There were over 1,200 students to come through and they were able to visit several companies indoors, but also talk with organizations and businesses outdoors that included stopping by a National Guard helicopter, an ambulance, the Laurens County Sheriff Department drone, and utility bucket trucks. If you would like to visit the showcase website and see photos from the event, visit [lcnshowcase.com](http://lcnshowcase.com).

-Stew & Brew was a great success. Fifty-six were in attendance and forged many new connections from the event.

-Earlier this month, Whitney attended the SC American Planners Association conference where she was asked to participate on a panel regarding the story map project. The CPAT team that came to Laurens County and did an asset mapping analysis in 2021 as part of the LCDC strategic planning process was presenting two of their top projects during a session at the conference. Whitney gave background on how the CPAT team became involved with Laurens County and then shared some of their findings, with the help of one of the team members. The team then showed what we were able to do with their initial project and showed the final guided map tour that is now live on the LCDC site. It was an honor to be highlighted.

-There is a "save the date" included in the board packets for next year's annual meeting on Tuesday, January 16<sup>th</sup> again at Musgrove Mill.

### Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

- The big news from this month is the announcement of ZF Transmissions for a \$500 million investment and 400 new jobs. The Plant Manager, Tobias Brugger, will be the featured speaker and the LCDC annual meeting to be held in January. He will speak on this project and the ZF expansion into electric mobility and its impacts. This is the single largest investment commitment ever made in Laurens County.

- Along with ZF and MPF, Alupress had a third reading on a project that is \$26 million and 64 new jobs. After the December County Council meeting there will be an announcement for Project Tomahawk which is \$5.1 million and 26 new jobs. This will bring the annual investment total for the year to \$ 648.6 million and 503 new jobs.

- RFI update: Have received 74 to date compared to 74 at the same point in 2022.

- There have been two meetings now with regards to a career and technology center for the county and the possibilities there and everything seems to be progressing.

- Board members are encouraged to drive through Hunter Industrial Park. The construction company should start pouring the concrete pad for the 650,000 SF spec building next week. The site is very impressive.

- Justin Benfield was congratulated on his recent recognition of being named to Top 25 C-Suite Executives in South Carolina.

### Fibertex Sewer Grant Funding Approval – Jonathan Coleman

- This is a voting item for an expenditure to go to Laurens County Water Sewer Commission for the Fibertex sewer project. This project has been a huge collaborative effort between the LCWSC, the LCDC, the State, US EDA, Duke Energy, Laurens Electric, Laurens County and Fibertex. The total project is just over \$4 million. The LCDC's portion of this project is \$128,958.80 which is being proposed to take from the Octagon Reinvestment Fund. Basically, this project brought sewer from ZF Transmissions to Fibertex and into the Town of Gray Court. Jeff Filed of the LCWSC added that this project was originally applied for to the EDA pre-Covid and when bids came in everything came in well over the budget. What was originally thought to be an 80% grant from the EDA did not turn out to be that so other partners collaborated to fill the gap. The lines are being installed at this time and the force main will be delivered and installed in a few months. The project is expected to be in service by April or May 2024. It is currently 60% to 70% complete. The company has also put in \$500,000 toward the project.

Chairman West called for a motion for vote and Brown Patterson made a motion to approve \$128,958.80 to be taken from the Octagon Reinvestment Fund to go toward the Fibertex Sewer project. Justin Benfield seconded the motion. Chairman West asked for a vote by show of hands and the motion passed unanimously.

*New Small Industry Grant Program – Jonathan Coleman:*

-At the September board meeting information was given about the plans for a small industry grant program to be managed by the LCDC. A draft was emailed to the board and is included in the packets. In summary, this is for small industrial manufacturing projects that won't qualify for the normal incentive program. This grant program is designed to be a mechanism that should help the small projects that are also very important to the community. A company investing at least \$1.5 million in real or personal property and hiring a minimum of 3 new employees, can apply to the LCDC for a \$25,000 grant to go toward real property improvements. It is not for equipment but for infrastructure or something in the building that will not leave and is a reimbursement after providing qualifying invoices. A maximum of four grants totaling \$100,000 will be awarded per year and will be paid from the Octagon Reinvestment Fund. There will be an application submitted by the company which will be approved by the LCDC Executive Committee then will be approved by the full board. The consideration will be the length of time the company has been in business, the history of the company and any other relevant information. There is a section included in the agreement for claw back if needed and the LCDC has the ability to check in with the company to ensure commitments are maintained. Another consideration is that if a company is already receiving an incentive or has a FILOT, they will not qualify for this program. The program is retroactive to January of 2022. It is modeled very similar to the SC Department of Commerce program. Chairman West called for a motion for vote and Jimmy Capps made a motion to approve the proposed Small Industry Grant Program. Brown Patterson seconded the motion. Chairman West asked for a vote by show of hands and the motion passed unanimously.

*2024 Operating Budget – Jeff Field, Treasurer:*

-Everyone has been provided with the proposed 2024 budget ahead of the meeting. The Finance Committee which consists of Brown Patterson, Shawn Bell, and Jeff Field met and went through the proposed budget in great detail with staff. It does show a small decrease of 2.5% from last year. As a balanced budget it was approved unanimously by the committee on November 1. Mr. Field noted the year comparison columns and called on Jonathan and staff for further explanation and to answer questions. Chairman West stated that coming from committee no motion is needed and called for a vote by a show of hands. The 2024 proposed budget passed unanimously.

*Executive Session:*

None

*Other Business:*

None

Chairman West adjourned the meeting at 12:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lynn S. Finley