

Laurens County Development Corporation

Board Meeting – Minutes

Tuesday – September 20, 2022

Attendees:

Shawn Bell, Justin Benfield, Jim Donahoo, Jeff Field, Mayor Stellartean Jones, Amanda Munyan, Brown Patterson, Dr. David Pitts, Dr. Hope Rivers, Dr. Ameca Thomas, David Tribble, Steve West, John Young

Guests:

Thomas Higgs (Laurens County Administrator)

Staff:

Jon Coleman, Lynn Finley, Whitney Lagrange, Sandy Cruickshanks

Press:

None

Chairman Young called the meeting to order at 12:11 and gave the invocation.

Minutes and Financials

Chairman Young began by adding a new item to the agenda – Nominating Committee as item number “9”. He then asked the Board for a motion to approve the meeting’s amended agenda. Brown Patterson made the motion to approve the agenda and Steve West seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the agenda.

Chairman Young asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the 07/19/22 meeting. Jim Donahoo made the motion to approve the minutes as presented and Justin Benfield seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the minutes.

Lynn Finley provided a recap of expenses for July and August 2022. The financials were accepted as information only.

Existing Industry Update – Lynn Finley

- The 4th quarter industry meeting is planned for Tuesday, October 11 and is a partnership with the LCDC, Piedmont Tech and SC Department of Commerce. It is a brainstorming luncheon focused on increasing the technical talent pool in Laurens County. Industry leaders have been asked to come ready to explore how to better promote dual enrollment at LCAM, increase participation in apprenticeship programs and any other ideas that might move the needle to boost interest in a technical career and how the three organizations can better support workforce.

- Another avenue for building the talent pipeline is exposing students to different career options before they begin selecting specific career clusters. The LCDC is partnering with Newberry County and multiple other organizations to host the 3rd annual Career Showcase on Nov 1. It will be held at the Newberry Piedmont Tech campus this year and the goal is to have about 25 companies showcasing careers from the 16-career cluster model used in schools. All 8th grade students from both counties will have the opportunity to visit with these different companies to learn about future possibilities.

- Whitney and Lynn recently had the opportunity to attend a site readiness workshop hosted by the Upstate Alliance. Courtney Dunbar, who is a site selector with Burns & McDonnell, led the workshop and gave a lot of helpful information.

- The LCDC went through a computer conversion in August and all is going well. It was discovered that the old email addresses from about seven years ago were retired and no longer on forward. If anyone is still using the laurenscounty.org address, they no longer forward. Everyone uses growlaurenscounty.com now.
- July unemployment rates have been published. Laurens County dropped slightly to 3.4% and the State is at 3.2%.
- As an update on LCDC investors: Since the last board meeting two investors have dropped monetary support. Those are: BL Harbert – a construction company out of Charleston and South State Bank. There are currently 34 investors.
- The county has recently been contacted by the team at SC Department of Employment and Workforce about launching a pilot program called Direct Connect. Thomas Higgs is taking the lead on that project and he shared that they are looking at approximately 1,300 individuals that were employed in 2019, received unemployment benefits in 2020 and haven't rejoined the workforce. The objective is to identify and quantify what is preventing this group from going back into the workforce. The agency has ways to filter these people by situations such as incarceration or death to leave a workable group. In demographics the ages of the group range from 25 to 54. The 25 to 34 age group is 359 people which is almost 30% of the total number. When looking at the education level, 650 of those people have at least a high school diploma. 17% have less than a high school diploma. The agency is taking a grass-roots approach in reaching these people. They have asked to be connected with the leaders in the community for assistance in making a connection. (Church groups, nonprofits, community organizations, etc.) A launch party was held to bring in these different groups to ask for assistance. They are planning to send text messages, emails, mailings, phone calls, etc. As an incentive to respond to the survey, the Laurens YMCA is offering a free one-month membership. If the agency decides it is a successful effort, they plan to roll it out statewide.

Marketing Activity – Whitney Lagrange

-Everyone has a flat, white box at their place which contains an LCDC Logo neck fan. This is a new item that was ordered to be used at site visits. Summer prospect site visits can get very hot for visitors, especially those not accustomed to SC weather. When brainstorming ideas of how to make visitors more comfortable while making a lasting positive impression neck fans served that purpose. Recently there was an international prospect visit in early July, on a 90° day. They were visiting 2 to 3 properties and held all discussions on-site at each location. We worked to make them as comfortable as possible--cooler with multiple waters and Gatorade, two battery-powered fans to face the group along with rechargeable neck fans.

Holiday Drop-in- We will be hosting our holiday open house and drop-in on Tuesday, December 6th. It was previously reported as Thursday, December 8th but the date has been changed.

PC Athletics Partnership- LCDC continues to partner with PC Athletics this year. We will have a special sponsored football tailgate to coincide with the November 5th home game vs. Dayton. An invitation and more information will be sent out in early October. Our logo is hanging in the football stadium and will be hung in the gym on campus and PSAs are made at each game about our sponsorship and the mission of the LCDC.

Upstate Alliance Happy Hour- On September 7th, Upstate Alliance partnered with LCDC to host one of their monthly Small Group Gatherings in downtown Laurens at Palmetto Brothers. The Small Group Gatherings are networking opportunities provided by Upstate Alliance to help their investors and members make new connections in a laid-back atmosphere, where groups are kept small to maximize relationship-building. The guest list was limited to Upstate Alliance investors, LCDC Board and Committee members, as well as members of County Council.

Strategic Plan- Many projects and committees were born out of the strategic plan and continue to forge ahead in progress. We are extremely pleased with the dedication of all the team members and for the success of our strategic plan, even through the tough months/year of Covid.

- Livability Team: While this team hasn't actively met, Whitney has been working for months behind the scenes on a project that came out of this committee. Whitney mentioning the story map that a team of pro bono planners created at past board meetings. As reported before, the planner

working on this last summer completed and released the story map project to LCDC, so Whitney now has been working on transforming it more from an asset story map to a visitor's guide story map for Laurens County. It will include categories such as recreation, lodging, dining, history, salon services, etc. and each entry features a short write-up, a link to more information, as well as a map to the side showing where they are in Laurens County. It's a long process, but much has already been done. This should be beneficial to several county entities to hopefully host on their websites for a cohesive resource list, county-wide.

- Talent/Workforce Team & Education Team: As the goal for a new career & technology center seemed to prevail from a lot of this team's meetings and sessions, the Talent/Workforce team has transformed and grown into the Laurens County Technology Center committee. Through this committee, we continue to explore and plan for a future CATE center here in Laurens County. Committee members have toured a couple of different upstate county models and have heard from leaders and planners of each. Jody Penland has been instrumental in working with both school districts in helping to form a list of courses/programs offered as well as estimated FTE needs and human capital needed to run the program. Jonathan has worked with Macmillan Pazdan Smith on a possible rendering of the future building. Both the flyer and rendering are provided as a handout at each place for information. The committee had a meeting last week to hear from Dr. Bob Couch, a veteran educator in Anderson County who now runs a great model CATE Center, the Anderson Institute of Technology. He shared best practices and even some of the challenges they've faced to help in planning. Next steps are to continue efforts to secure funding from the State and develop an operational funding model.

Websites-

- In the process of a complete redesign/overhaul of the Higher Opportunity website. The same marketing company that helped with the main LCDC website overhaul a few years ago is doing this as well. Whitney has been working closely with the admin/backend designer to make any design tweaks. LCDC has been responsible for adding all business/industry listings, so that has been a big project over the last couple of weeks
- Lynn mentioned the Laurens & Newberry Counties Career Showcase that is being planned for November 1st. Whitney is in charge of creating and editing the website for the event, so that has been maintained as more information comes in for schools, as well as each company that registers. They have their own information page, with fun facts and career clusters listed.
- **STEAM Festival-** Whitney is on the planning committee again for this year's iMAGINE Lakelands STEAM Festival, to be held in uptown Greenwood on Saturday, October 22nd. There are a couple of Laurens County industries exhibiting, and are sending the information out to all G'wood and Laurens County school districts. Whitney will be working the event day-of and would love to see you bring your children/families by.

Web analytics- www.growlaurenscounty.com has had over 6,700 new, unique users since this time last year and is receiving good traffic.

Economic Development Activity – Jonathan Coleman

-Since the last board meeting the LCDC has had three announcements. Europastry which is a \$23 million investment and 155 new jobs and are backfilling the former Muffin Mam building in Hunter Industrial Park. Sunny Days Entertainment is a new toy assembly and distribution facility in Owings Industrial Park. It is a \$16 million investment with 80 new jobs. Volvo is doing an investment in the county with one of their suppliers. It is a \$21 million investment. There are similar arrangements currently with BMW. Coming up over the next month is two new projects. Project Supply which is an \$18 million investment and 120 new jobs and Project Tempo which is a \$49.6 million investment and 58 new jobs. The FILOT process will begin on one of those at the next County Council meeting and the other at the first meeting in October. These latest announcements bring the 2022 investment total to \$165 million and 526 new jobs to date.

-On the RFI front, the LCDC has had 64 RFIs to date. At this point in 2021 it was 48 with 68 total on the year. Activity continues to be tremendous compared to years past.

Strategic Plan Update – Staff

All information was covered in Whitney's marketing activity report.

Nominating Committee – Chairman Young and Jonathan Coleman

Chairman Young stated that the following board members have been asked to serve as a nominating committee: Amanda Munyan, Justin Benfield, and Jimmy Capps. Mr. Coleman will be contacting the committee to schedule a meeting to make recommendations for the upcoming term of officers. Mr. Coleman shared that the list will be provided ahead of time to be voted on at the November board meeting for the next two-year term.

Other Reports:

None

Executive Session:

None

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynn S. Finley