

# BEAUFORT COUNTY

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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### BEAUFORT COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

#### Meeting Minutes

#### August 31, 2023

**Present:** Chairman Ed Booth, Commissioner John Rebholz, Clif Williams, Don Sadler, Stuart O'Neal, Sarah Bernart, Brian Alligood, Brad Hufford, Susan Squires

**Welcome:** Chairman Ed Booth

**Introductions:** Attendees

#### **BCED Update Brad Hufford:**

Welcome to all. As you know, we took a pause from the old Advisory Board and are now restarting as an Advisory Committee. In June the County Commissioners approved By Laws for our new Economic Development Advisory Committee. The timing worked out as the previous board member's terms had expired. Each of you should have a packet of information including an agenda, a copy of our new By Laws, future meeting schedule, a roster of committee members, map set of our industrial product, a slide deck that we use for clients and an economic overview of Beaufort County.

In reforming this group, we wanted to make some changes. The meetings now be held for an hour, be in person, and take place every other month. We have eliminated the guest speakers. Today's meeting is more of an orientation with our next meeting scheduled for Thursday September 28. Each subsequent meeting will be held the fourth Thursday every other month with adjustments made for holidays. The By Laws were updated to reflect changes from the original governing structure of the board and Economic Development. We adjusted the membership, organization, and will continue to operate under the open meetings law. In the event we need to discuss sensitive economic development projects, we will move to a closed session to protect client confidentiality.

The format of the meetings will cover recruitment, business retention and expansion, site and building development and miscellaneous topics.

A key component of our product development is working on sites. One of those sites is the Aurora Industrial Park. This project was started years ago and is now fully funded. Mayor Clif Williams will be making an announcement on September 9 at the Aurora Fish and Farm Festival and expect to begin construction soon after.

Another site is the Beaufort County Industrial Park at Chocowinity. This is a Duke Energy Ready Site, meaning due diligence studies have been completed. The site, on US 17 Hwy S, consists of 246 acres. A key feature of this park is the Norfolk Southern Rail line which intersects the property. North Carolina Railroad Company has awarded us with a grant to further develop this asset.

Our office is working with Washington-Warren Airport to develop an airport industrial park. The recent budget allocation of \$20 million has been used for airport modernization and land acquisition for an airport industrial site. We meet with Earl Malpass, Washington-Warren Airport Director, each week to assist in the development and ultimate certification of the park.

The Washington-Beaufort County Industrial Park is a certified ElectriCities Smart Site. This park is co-owned by the City of Washington and Beaufort County. As you know that industrial park has been our home for the last 20 years. Our office was in the Beaufort County Skills Center, developed in partnership with the Committee 100. We are happy to report that we had a client who was looking to locate in Beaufort County move into the building. This will serve as their base of operations while they plan and build their own facility right there in the industrial park. As a result, Economic Development and Committee 100 have moved offices to a new location downtown Washington at 108 Union Drive. We have a building now available at 715 Page Rd, the owner of Egret Boats has decided to retire and has listed his property for sale with the Overton Group. It's a very attractive property on 7 acres, approximately 27,000 sq ft with many amenities including a 4ton crane.

Manager Alligood asked if we had a site visit for this property. Yes, we had a visit from a prospective client, and they toured the Egret Boats building even before it had been on the market. Having a building to show gets clients here, and even if it isn't the perfect fit, it gives us the opportunity to show what Beaufort County has to offer.

Manager Alligood asked about incentives for existing businesses already here in Beaufort County. Absolutely, our efforts aren't just to recruit new industry to Beaufort County. Our office works with existing industry, certainly incentives may be available. We ask companies who are considering investing in your business, growing your headcount, buying new equipment or even adding onto your building to please call our office. There may be local, county and state incentives available to assist with that growth.

Mayor Sadler asked what are the local incentives that you offer. We have a number of tools in our toolbox, the cheapest one being mine and Sue's staff time. We work with companies and hold their hand

on different needs they may have. We help with connections to resources; we provide technical assistance and act as a liaison to different permitting agencies. When we own the land, we can offer the land at a reduced price. The main incentive is a Performance Tax Grant, which calculates a grant amount based on capital investment and the increase in tax base. Once the company completes certain benchmarks and pays their property tax, the County will write a check to the company for the agreed amount. North Carolina cannot abate taxes and therefore has established the Performance Tax Grant. We act as a liaison to the state and assist with those incentives. Customized Training from the Community College is a state funded incentive and is one of the most attractive and important incentives available to industry. Sara Watson with the Community College will create a customized program tailored to meet the needs of industry.

Commissioner Rebholz asked if we utilized customized training with MJM. Yes, the Community College has worked with MJM, and they also are part of the Apprenticeship Program. The North Carolina Customized Training Program is a great recruitment tool that is now being replicated in other states.

Key and foundational to our work in Economic Development is existing industry for a variety of reasons. They have already chosen to be in Beaufort County, they are part of our community, providing jobs and paying taxes. 75% to 80% of all new jobs are created by existing industries. We want to make sure we address their concerns and address any challenges they may have. Ultimately, we want to make sure they are successful and happy, so we touch base often and visit as we can.

Commissioner Booth asked what recent company has announced an expansion in Beaufort County. We had an announcement of Elite Truck Boxes. They are an existing e-commerce company that purchased the old Family Dollar on Market Street. They are investing approximately \$2.1 million and creating 30 jobs. Elite Truck was awarded a Building Reuse Grant of \$200,000 from the Department of Commerce to assist with the renovation of the building. We worked with Sarah Bernhart from EDPNC and Department of Commerce on this project. Elite Truck currently has 8 employees so this will be substantial growth for the company, not to mention this takes an old building that may be an eyesore and makes it new again.

When we visit companies often it is with their HR managers. We sometimes visit alone or with our Workforce Development Team, sometimes we visit with Sarah Bernart from EDPNC and most recently with Lori Benn from NCSU.

We receive requests for information (RFI) from various sources regarding Beaufort County. We also receive a lot of project activity from the state, EDPNC, regarding our sites and buildings. All projects are confidential until an official announcement, usually from the Governor's office, has been released. We respond to these requests for information and eagerly market our sites and buildings. We have recently had several visits from potential clients and in each case, we put our best foot forward.

Our office participates in numerous marketing activities, and we were fortunate to host NC100 for EDPNC. We have been recognized as a Foreign Direct Investment Community and as you are aware we have several foreign owned companies in Beaufort County. Electricities sponsored my participation in a Foreign Trade Mission to Munich Germany in March of 2023. I will be travelling with EDPNC to

FabTech in Chicago Illinois in early September and will be calling on potential clients who have expressed an interest in doing business in North Carolina.

We have re-founded our Workforce Development Team. The team consists of community partners including Beaufort County Schools, Rivers East, NC Works, Beaufort County Community College, and the NC Dept Health and Human Services Vocational Rehab. We are planning a job fair on November 15 at the Civic Center and will release details very soon.

We supplanted our workforce by having a Lead for America fellow and most recently a SECU Scholarship summer intern. As a small office we hope to continue to host interns.

I participate on a Retail Recruitment Team with the County Manager, Washington City Manager, Washington Beaufort Chamber of Commerce, Washington Harbor District Market to collaborate regarding attracting retail to Beaufort County.

Our office is implementing a CRM, Customer Relations Management software system to streamline and enhance our internal operations. We added ESRI Business Analyst Online which offers statistics and demographics regarding consumers.

I have been meeting with our Northeast Economic Developers in the Northeast Prosperity Zone to talk about what we are doing in our communities and what we can do together.

As a reminder our next meeting will be September 28, 2023, at 4:00 PM. We will get back with you on a location.

Mayor Williams reminded everyone to attend the Aurora Fish & Farm Festival on September 9, 2023.

**Meeting ended.**