

BEAUFORT COUNTY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



BEAUFORT COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE Meeting Minutes November 16, 2023

Present: Chairman Ed Booth, Commissioner John Rebholz, Sara Watson, Don Sadler, Stuart O'Neal, Sarah Bernart, Lynn Davis, Brandon Tester, Brian Alligood, Brad Hufford, Susan Squires

Welcome: Chairman Ed Booth

Introductions: Attendees

BCED Update Brad Hufford:

Welcome to all. This meeting, held every other month, will provide an update on Economic Development in Beaufort County. As you all know, Economic Development is a team sport. We work with a lot of different partners within our community. For today's meeting, we have put together a packet along with a PowerPoint presentation. Each of you should have a packet of information including an agenda, future meeting schedule, a copy of the minutes from the last meeting, roster of committee members, and an updated economic overview of Beaufort County. We subscribe to several databases that maintain current demographics, economic trends and statistics. The County is still at about 45,000 population with unemployment at 3.7%.

Our office has been assisting the Town of Aurora with the development of the Aurora Industrial Park for the last eight years. All the grant paperwork has been completed, construction is underway with clearing and grading of the site. We are planning an open house in coordination with the Aurora Leadership Council, the Town of Aurora and the Aurora Industrial Park Team on November 29th. This will be an open house forum for contractors and other interested parties. There was a question regarding the Golden Leaf Grant, if the funds were tied to job creation. This grant does not have any job creation requirements.

The Aurora Leadership Committee has created a flyer for the Industrial Park that is included in the packet. The zoning of the park has been completed, the plats recorded, and the lots are now available for sale. We are excited to see this project move forward. Commissioner Rebholz requested confirmation that the Community College was aware the lots were ready to be sold.

We have been working with the North Carolina Railroad Company on a grant for the Beaufort County Industrial Park @ Chocowinity. The County Commissioners approved a \$280,000 match for the Build Ready Sites grant which will provide a total of \$700,000 for clearing and grading of a pad. Manager Alligood advised the matching funds from the County were generated from ARPA monies and held within the General Fund Balance. Alliance Consultant Engineers have completed a preliminary Wetland Delineation for the Industrial Park. Currently the US Army Corps of Engineers is working on their final determination, and we hope to have that soon. The Chocowinity Industrial Park is our only rail-served site within the County.

The Airport Industrial Park is another site we are working to develop. We meet weekly with the Airport Manager to discuss different airport-related projects and to offer assistance with their Industrial Park. The original \$20 million dollar appropriation purchased 107 acres that is currently raw land. With the recent additional \$13.5 million appropriation the airport is considering adding to those 107 acres. We provide assistance regarding additional funding sources, such as grants, and infrastructure to include partnerships through ElectriCities. There was a question about Xcelebrate and how many jobs they are bringing to Washington. To clarify, Xcelebrate rents the airport and facilitates the testing of drones at Washington Warren. We hope that these companies they are bringing in to test will someday create a manufacturing presence in Beaufort County and therefore create jobs. The City of Washington has invested heavily in technological infrastructure to support the drone industry.

We have several projects looking at the Washington-Beaufort Industrial Park. The due diligence for this park is quite outdated so we are looking at updating that documentation. We hope to partner with ElectriCities to help out with the costs. The Egret building for sale is approximately 27,000 sq ft with a 4-ton crane. We have met with BTW Global, who is looking at a couple parcels for their future building construction.

As part of our ongoing efforts in Business Retention and Expansion we hosted a job fair. Our Workforce Development Team consistently hears from employers about the difficulty of finding employees. We wanted to help address their needs by putting together yesterday's Job and Resource Fair. It was very successful; we had a number of companies and community partners participate. A large number of students from Beaufort County Schools attended in the morning. We broke for a lunch which was provided to participants and sponsored by Brightspeed. The afternoon session was open to all adult job seekers and was very well attended. We had media coverage from local television and our own Beaufort County Communications Director Brandon Tester. Our Team plans to hold this event at least once a year.

As part of our marketing strategy, we reached out to Pam Pippen and her Human Resources group. I was able to speak at their breakfast meeting about our efforts.

There was discussion regarding different projects Beaufort County Economic Development is currently working on.

We consistently market the County by going to trade shows, cooperative marketing programs with EDPNC and participating in articles in different publications. Sarah Bernart pointed out that Business North Carolina Magazine just highlighted Carver Machine Works. We welcome any positive media attention.

Chairman Booth asked about the recent trip to Japan. I was able to attend the SEUS(South East United States) Japan Conference in October. Also in attendance was Governor Cooper and Secretary Sanders. Of note, North Carolina will host the next SEUS Japan Conference. While in Japan I was able to visit DAIKIN, the parent company of AAF Flanders. I met the manager and presented him with a gift. He expressed his appreciation and said they plan to continue to invest in their Washington location. Thank you for letting me go.

Our next meeting is January 25, 2024

Meeting ended.