

**Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation  
January 19th – Strategic Planning Session – 12:00 pm  
Palmetto Electric Cooperative, Community Room  
1 Cooperative Way, Hardeeville, SC**

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**Meeting Minutes**

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Present: Feaster, Alsko, Dallas, Fobes, Gough, Mantua, Murray, Perry, Rodriguez, Shelton, Sisino  
(Designee for Panu)  
Absent: Sulka,  
Staff: O’Toole, Stone  
Guests: Fleming, Nelems, O’Brien, Steese,

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Chair Feaster called the meeting to order at 12:13 pm.

Chair Feaster entertained a motion to approve November 17th minutes, Murray moved; Gough seconded; approved unanimously.

O’Toole reviewed the BCEDC’s 2022-2023 operating budget. The BCEDC is over spent on lead generation for this point in the year. This is due to several trade missions early in the fiscal year. All other budget items are on track.

O’Toole reviewed the BCEDC job & site fund budget. The BCEDC expects to pay out \$75,000 grant to Project Lawn in January. The BCEDC also expects to have upcoming expenses related to BCP#2. With the 100% lease of BCP#1, costs shown under Magnus lease will not be expended and can be re-budgeted for BCEDC projects.

The BCEDC discussed the performance agreement for the \$75,000 grant to Blacquity. Stephen Murray noted the inclusion of language in the agreement pertaining to primary jobs as well as the importance that the organization can play in strengthening cultural tourism. Blacquity is also working very closely with the Don Ryan Center for Innovation. Blacquity will be required to graduate 25 individuals through their cohort and 25% to be businesses focused on making a product. Blacquity will also be required to conduct an economic analysis with the BCEDC on their graduates. The metrics are to be met by June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

BCEDC recommends to County Council that the BCEDC Chair Ashley Feaster is reappointed to the SCA board of directors as well as appointed to the SCA executive committee. The BCEDC also recommends that the County Council’s chosen BCEDC board designee is also appointed to SCA board. The third representative is not up for reappointment. Stephen Murray moved; Steve Fobes seconded; passed unanimously.

The BCEDC’s results since inception are \$279 million, 1,268 new and retained jobs, \$15.9 million in captured incentives and site development grants, \$53.2 million in annual payroll at realization of jobs created, and over 1 million sq ft of real estate constructed and absorbed.

John Fleming provided an update on SCA activity. Fleming stated that Secretary Lightsey and SC Department of Commerce are doing a strategic review of the SCDOC incentive program and how the State determines incentives. SCA is continuing to support on product development and also on several economic development projects – a EVTOL prospect and a injection molding operation.

## **Strategic Plan**

Feaster recommended that the EDC should complete an analysis of metrics and determine if the BCEDC should change any of the key performance evaluators.

## **Marketing**

Murray recommended that the EDC should look at how they target leads and what sectors those leads come from. Stephen pointed out that with Boeing in Charleston and Gulfstream in Savannah – Could it make sense for the EDC to complete targeted trade missions within aerospace? Or with the influx of automotive, Hyundai in Georgia, should the EDC focus on very targeted marketing toward automotive? The EDC currently completes focused trade missions. For example, the EDC has conducted ‘cyber security’ trade missions as well as ‘advanced manufacturing’ trade missions. Feaster asked if the EDC would look to bring more marketing internally with the hire of a new employee. O’Toole stated that the EDC would likely continue working with MindFlint and Robin Zimmerman for blog posts but would look at ways to improve in marketing. Mayor Perry brought up ‘quality of life’ as a marketing component. Specifically as it pertains to a younger demographic and retaining those individuals in Beaufort County. Murray also brought up workforce housing and how housing is a huge challenge in retaining young professionals.

## **Product Development**

Stephen Steese mentioned that the Town of Bluffton is looking at forming a landing pad for Bluffton companies that are conducting an analysis on the area or have made their site selection decision and need temporary space. Stephen Murray raised the importance of prioritizing product development prior to looking at more marketing. The Beaufort County EDC has had over 1 million square feet of newly constructed and absorbed real estate. The existing product inventory is quickly being exhausted. The EDC will reevaluate the EDC product plan and discuss with the County and each municipality sites to be prioritized.

## **Staffing**

O’Toole stated that the EDC is looking to hire a junior person that would focus on private sector fundraising, communications, and project management. Discussion occurred around the salary for said position. Board members raised the point of making sure that the salary reflects the skillset that the EDC is pursuing in private sector fundraising.

## **Educational Engagement**

The BCEDC is working with the COIN Group (Changing our image now) to inform K-12 students on workforce opportunities in region. BCEDC is also continuing to interface with the school district’s CATE program. The Beaufort County school district is hosting an event January 21<sup>st</sup> to connect students and businesses. The school district is also partnering with Beaufort Memorial Hospital and building a biomedical classroom at Beaufort High School. The school district aims to partner closely with USCB and TCL. The EDC board recommended reaching out to existing industry about potential internship for high school students. Sisino provided an update on University of South Carolina Beaufort’s implementation of a division II college basketball team. USCB is also expanding housing for students on Hilton Head Island and expanding cyber security programs.

## **Board Succession Planning**

The BCEDC is looking at ways to diversify the makeup of the board. The EDC will also need to replace the board chair position as Ashley Feaster’s term expire in June 2023.

## **Engagement of board members, municipal, and County leaders**

Feaster recommended a set update to Councils. Steese pointed out the extend length of time that economic development projects general take. Steese stated that he thought twice per year along with the individual meetings based upon specific projects was plenty.

**Diversified Funding**

Feaster recommended the EDC act quickly on the new staff member and pursuing a contract with a private sector fundraising firm. Murray stated that he would support approaching the City of Beaufort's council on raising the City's contribution to the EDC from \$25,000 to \$40,000. Discussion occurred on whether the contribution should be weighted by each municipality based upon population or another factor. The rationale against this previously was for each municipality to have an equal contribution and equal seat at the table.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:36 pm.