

Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation
March 26, 2026 – 2:00 pm
The COVE at Don Ryan Center, 97 Progressive Street, Bluffton, SC 29910

Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present: Alsko, Paul Arvantides (Town of Bluffton), Azallion-Kenny, Braun, Cromer, Feaster, Gilbert, Shelton, Stone (Designee for Arnette), Tabernik, Williams, Willis

Guests: Michael Moore (Beaufort County), Jason Semple (SCA), Kay Maxwell (SCA), Paula Brown (Beaufort County Council), York Glover (Beaufort County Council), SC Senator Tom Davis, Denise Smith (Coastal Community Fund), Amy Paige (Coastal Community Fund), Tess Martin (Coastal Community Fund), Deborah Slazyk (Coastal Community Fund), Kristin Williams (Open Land Trust), Michelle Mealer (Town of Hilton Head)

Public: Elvio Tropeano, Graham Trask, Nick Hammond (Davis|Floyd)

Staff: O'Toole, Brunson, Warner

Chair Braun called the meeting to order at 2:01 pm.

Chair Braun entertained a motion by Cromer to go into Executive Session at 2:02 pm. Shelton seconded; approved unanimously.

Chair Braun entertained a motion to end Executive Session by Feaster; Williams seconded; approved unanimously. Executive Session ended at 2:25 pm.

Introductions: BCEDC Board of Directors, BCEDC Staff and Guests made introductions.

Chair Braun entertained a motion to accept the Board Meeting Minutes from February 11, 2026, meeting made by Williams; Azallion-Kenny seconded; approved unanimously.

Shelton provided a Review of Budget FY 2025-2026 and Treasurer's Report. BCEDC is in a stable financial position with no areas of concern. Income from dues, sponsorships and grants are in line with expectations. The expense areas of marketing and legal are higher due to current marketing campaigns and increased need regarding legal assistance.

O'Toole provided an update on the Approval of Transfer of the SC Parks, Recreation and Tourism Grant to Open Land Trust. The BCEDC received approval to transfer funds from granting entity, SC Parks, Recreation, & Tourism (SCPRT) and SC Senator George E. "Chip" Campsen III, provided that the funds are used for the intended purpose. Attorney Tom Davis will draft a three-party contract between SCPRT, Open Land Trust and BCEDC that will meet this requirement of the funds usage and hold BCEDC harmless. O'Toole asked guest Attorney Tom Davis to speak to the agreement, to which Davis confirmed the synopsis that O'Toole provided was correct. Chair Braun entertained a motion to Approve Transfer of the SC Parks, Recreation and Tourism Grant to Open Land Trust made by Shelton; Feaster seconded; approved 10:2, Gilbert and Tabernik voting not in favor.

O'Toole provided an update on the Approval of the 1-Year Lease at The COVE, Town of Bluffton, for Office Space. The 1-Year Lease would be \$1,150/month for 602 square feet of office space and include the usage of The COVE Park View Conference Room (a value of \$500 rental space), an increase from the

current lease of \$800. This new amount is less than the rent paid for space in previous years prior to the current lease at the Don Ryan Center. This increase will not go into effect until the new space is completed, estimated after July 2026, and will not impact the current fiscal year. Chair Braun entertained a motion to approve the 1-Year Lease at The COVE, Town of Bluffton, for Office Space made by Feaster; Shelton seconded; Discussion: Tabernik asked if the lease included all utilities, Arvantes confirmed it does; approved 11:1, Tabernik voting not in favor.

Shelton provided an update on the Review and Approval of the Large Transaction Policy. A committee comprised of Shelton, Williams, and a representative from BCEDC's accounting firm will perform a deep dive into all significant transactions and all transactions involving restricted or conditional funds (above a \$5,000 threshold). This policy is adopted in response to auditor recommendations and is intended to ensure proper classification, restriction handling, and accounting treatment of funds recorded in the general ledger. Chair Braun entertained a motion to Approve the Large Transaction Policy made by Azallion-Kenny; Williams seconded; Discussion: O'Toole stated that these processes that have come out of the audit have been beneficial and will set BCEDC up for future success; approved unanimously.

O'Toole provided an update on the Development Agreement for the Beaufort Commerce Park Spec Building. A Letter of Intent has been submitted to the City of Beaufort. A Purchase and Sales Agreement and Development Agreement will be submitted to both the City of Beaufort and Beaufort County Councils. No action needed.

Chair Braun discussed the Board of Directors Composition & Officer Succession. Chair Braun will be unable to continue acting as Chair after July 2026 and encouraged the board to assess their ability to step up for officer positions as they come available. Additionally, Chair Braun asked that the board also consider individuals who would make good additions, bringing new ideas and expertise to the board. Shelton added that perhaps looking into amending the BCEDC by-laws to allow for more inclusion of members outside the public, education and non-government sectors, along with the number of members, may assist in this.

O'Toole provided an update of the Vacation and Sick Leave Policies. This is to limit fiscal liability; establish uniform policy and spell out the work anniversary increases in vacation. Tabernik asked that points 2 and 3 under Section 2: Use of Vacation Leave be combined as not to contradict each other and provide clarity as to the intent. BCEDC follows Beaufort County Holiday Schedule. Chair Braun entertained a motion to Approve the Vacation and Sick Leave Policies, with edit of Section 2 on Vacation Policy, made by Shelton; Cromer seconded; approved unanimously.

O'Toole provided a review of the Draft of BCEDC Strategic Plan. All notes from the Strategic Planning Session have been compiled and a draft of the Strategic Plan will be available for Beaufort County Council briefing at the April 20, 2026, meeting.

O'Toole provided an update on the Sale of 31.79 Acres in the Beaufort Commerce Park. A Letter of Purpose will be presented. Language resolving the borrow pit access and reversion of funds from land purchase to the City of Beaufort if the BCEDC ceased to exist has been provided to City of Beaufort Council.

O'Toole provided an update on the Site and Job Fund. No action needed. Long standing commitments have been moved ahead in the calendar.

BCEDC Staff provided a written activity report.

- A. Converge 2026 – Dr. Rebecca Battle-Bryant on February 18, 2026. Registration: 480. In-Room: 375, Online: 120
- B. SC Nursing Retention Initiative has been asked to speak at the June Coordinating Council of Workforce Development as a best practices subject.
- C. Blacquity has been awarded a 2026 Relentless Challenge Grant from the SC Department of Commerce
- D. Warner gave an update on Business Retention and Expansion: 58 BRE Visits completed YTD, 64% of Goal. BRE Spotlight: Connection. Example: A Business Retention & Expansion program creates direct, working connections between existing companies and the right public and private partners when issues come up. A structured BRE program gives businesses a clear path to raise concerns, ensures accountability within agencies, and helps move issues like infrastructure fixes to resolution before they escalate. It keeps businesses from falling through the cracks and protects jobs, investment, and ongoing operations. Coosaw Farms connection to Beaufort County Administration regarding situation with ditch maintenance and tidal gate installation.
- E. Brunson gave an overview of the marketing, social media and website performance from February 1, 2026, to February 28, 2026.
- F. Brunson went over the proposed meeting calendar for FY 2025-2026. The upcoming meeting schedule has been posted.

Maxwell provided the SCA update reviewed Project Inspiration announcement in Bamberg, HyProMag in Barnwell, Le Creuset ribbon cutting February 20, Coca-Cola expansion in Ridgeland, new Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Center in Allendale, website and social media performance, marketing mission SelectUSA with John O’Toole, NichiBay Center leads, the South Carolina Coastal Marine Transportation Network Feasibility Study and invitation to the SCA Skybox at the RBC Heritage.

O’Toole provided an update on the BCEDC 990 FY 2024-2025. Draft has been received from Moss and Yantis.

Public Comment: Graham Trask inquired about participating via Zoom. Chair Braun explained that, per a policy previously approved by the BCEDC Board of Directors and included on each meeting agenda, public comment must be submitted either in person or by email no later than 11:00 a.m. EST on the day of the meeting. Comments may be sent to info@thrivebeaufort.org. Mr. Trask then asked why Senator Tom Davis was permitted to speak. Chair Braun clarified that Attorney Davis was invited to provide subject matter expertise on a specific project in which he is directly involved. (Supplementary: This public comment policy was adopted and recorded in the minutes of the BCEDC Board of Directors meeting on September 18, 2025.)

New Business: None

Chair Braun entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:39 pm by Azallion-Kenny; Shelton seconded; approved unanimously.