

Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation
March 20, 2025 – 2:00 pm

Technical College of the Lowcountry - 100 Community College Drive, Bluffton, SC

Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present: Alsko, Amundson, Arnette, Azallion-Kenny, Braun, Brown, Cromer, Feaster, Gough, Heirs (SCA), Shelton, Sisino, Perry, Williams

Guests: Alice Howard (Beaufort County Council Chair) and Anna Maria “Tab” Tabernik (Beaufort County Council Vice-Chair)

Public: Elvio Tropeano

Staff: O’Toole, Brunson, Warner (via Zoom)

Chair Braun called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm.

Chair Braun entertained a motion by Perry to go into Executive Session at 2:01 pm. Cromer seconded; approved unanimously.

Chair Braun entertained a motion to end Executive Session by Shelton; Perry seconded; approved unanimously. Executive Session ended at 2:47 pm.

Public Comment included Marilyn Hemingway of the Gullah Geechee Chamber and other residents from St. Helena.

Chair Braun entertained a motion to approve February 20, 2025, meeting minutes made by Cromer; Shelton seconded; approved unanimously.

Shelton reviewed the FY 2024-2025 budget to date. Transfers from the TD Bank account to Pinnacle have continued. The Pinnacle credit facility should be completed soon. BCEDC is operating well within their budget and should close out the year on budget. Notable deposits/holdings: BCEDC has received a \$1 Million grant from the SC Parks and Recreation Department for land acquisition for a St. Helena project, \$46,000 from grant performance claw back, and \$400,000 still in escrow from the Chilton purchase that did not occur.

O’Toole updated the board with the completed 2023-2024 990 filing.

Discussion followed regarding the SCDPRT grant that the BCEDC received for \$1,000,000. O’Toole provided details on the grant and the intention to pursue a community

development process with opportunities for the St. Helena community to guide the direction of the project. No action was taken.

Shelton reviewed the FY 2025-2026 draft budget. Budget is projected as being 11% higher than the previous year. As a draft budget, there is nothing that stands out as being abnormal and increases seem to be due to keeping up with inflation and increased employee insurance costs. The final draft should be ready for board approval by the next meeting. The gap is anticipated to be made up by fundraising efforts and interest income. A second event and Board Fundraising Sub-Committee have been in talks as possible aids to sponsorship growth.

O'Toole updated the board that a Request for Proposal is being drafted with the help of Shelton and Braun regarding the search for a new accounting firm. Continuing issues with the current accounting firm are being worked through and resolved, current year 990 will be completed, but a new accounting firm will be identified.

Chair Braun covered the recap of the Town of Hilton Head Island request for the funding of Northpoint development. \$800,000 from the Site and Job Fund for the purchase of land needed for access to the project. Chair Braun entertained a motion to approve the Site and Job Fund request made by Cromer; Gough seconded; approved unanimously. O'Toole added that BCEDC will work with all county administration that it is the proper use of funds and identification of other possible funds if not. Amundson raised the question whether this would qualify for the fund's usage from a traditional economic development standpoint.

Chair Braun entertained a motion to approve the BCEDC to secure appraisals, due diligence and master plan for the 58-124-acre Whale Branch area property moving toward a potential purchase agreement made by Perry; Alsko seconded; - Discussion: Perry asked what the appraised value of land and costs associated with appraisal and due diligence would be. O'Toole replied that BCEDC has an old appraisal that will be looked at for a cost estimated at \$2,500 and request for proposals will be sent out for due diligence costs to be looked at during the May meeting. Perry amended motion to approve moving forward to secure an appraisal; Alsko seconded; approved unanimously.

Grant Request from Gullah Farmers Coop - BCEDC Staff recommendation is for \$25,000 of the \$50,000 total requested. \$25,000 in Y1 with benchmarks to be met. If satisfied, the Gullah Farmers Coop can make a new request in Y2 for the remaining amount. Chair Braun entertained a motion to approve the Gullah Farmers Coop grant at the level recommended by BCEDC Staff made by Azallion-Kenny; Perry seconded; - Discussion: Williams asked for a balance of the Site and Job Fund. O'Toole responded that it is at \$3.2M currently. Perry provided clarification that this would be to assist in bringing someone in to effectively run the organization as the current executive director is looking to retire. No further discussion. Chair Braun called for a vote; approved unanimously.

Grant Request from SC Nursing Retention - BCEDC Staff recommendation is for \$48,000 of the \$50,000 total requested. Funds will be made available in incremental amounts and tied to the retention of 16 nurses over a two-year period with metrics-based reporting and claw backs attached. Chair Braun entertained a motion to approve the SC Nursing Retention grant at the level recommended by BCEDC Staff made by Brown; Shelton seconded; approved unanimously.

An update of the 134 Parker Drive (Geismar) land purchase was provided. The property acreage has been corrected to 14.77 acres. Chair Braun entertained a motion to approve the 134 Parker Drive (Geismar) land purchase made by Perry; Cromer seconded; approved unanimously.

O'Toole provided an update on the Tully Trask 117-acres. Purchase and Sale Agreement has been received. Multiple purposed uses have been floated for the property, but no specific user has been identified at this time.

O'Toole provided an update on the 72,000 sq. ft. Spec Building in the Beaufort Commerce Park. The two potential developers are at a standstill at the moment and no new information is available currently.

O'Toole presented the Job & Site Fund, including the amount of \$64,000 for the 134 Parker Drive (Geismar) land purchase to be added to the \$401,000 already in escrow, \$48,000 for SC Nursing Retention grant, \$800,000 for the Northpoint HHI development, and \$25,000 for the Gullah Farmers Coop grant; payouts will most likely occur in the next fiscal year, but were shown for reference. Perry asked for another update of the Job and Site fund. O'Toole explained that the earlier given \$3.2M figure and the \$3.4M figure in March's column would be worked out between BCEDC and Beaufort County, but the total is still well above \$3M. Chair Braun entertained a motion to approve the Jobs & Site Fund Budget including the grants for Gullah Farmers Coop and SC Nursing Retention; and the funds for 134 Parker Drive (Geismar) land purchase and Northpoint HHI made by Perry; Alsko seconded; approved unanimously.

O'Toole gave an update on the BCEDC Scorecard metrics of capital investment, job creation, product development, leads, BRE meetings, and average compensation. Overall, good results in most metrics.

O'Toole gave an update on current projects. Project German – CS Instruments, March 21 \$30,000 grant check presentation. Project Sabal – Encompass Health, waiting for performance agreement. Project Micro – TL+CO, April 11 ribbon cutting. Project Sun Spot, \$16M, 135 Jobs, \$52K average comp looking at 302 Parker Drive. Project Cloud, still waiting for the lease agreement. Development on 355 William Hilton Parkway, BCEDC provided economic impact report. Project Ceramic, moving forward with PSA for a lot in the Beaufort Commerce Park, moving slowly. Novant Bluffton – Buckwalter, April 8 groundbreaking.

BCEDC Staff Activity Highlights:

Brunson gave an update on the BCEDC social media performance featuring properties, board members, and blogs. Impressions are at 13K – in line with current performance. Brunson updated upcoming events including sponsorship of the Golden Oyster Awards and the MCAS Beaufort Airshow.

Brunson gave an update on the IEDC Staff Leadership Retreat she attended in Washington DC in February 2025.

Warner updated BR&E meetings YTD at 64 (85%). Provided an updated list of Results and Themes brought up from the BR&E meetings to compare to November 2024.

Brunson updated Community Involvement with USCB Coffee & Careers, HHIB Chamber Ball, Beaufort Chamber State of the Community, TCL Ribbon Cutting, and SCA Project Announcement in Jasper County.

Warner updated Community Involvement with SCWIT Mentorship Forum – Beaufort with SC Council on Competitiveness and MCRD Parris Island Spouse Summit with BRCC.

O'Toole updated BCEDC's attendance at the SC Power Team EDR addressing AI, international trade and energy (DRCI was featured).

O'Toole updated his activities as a part of SCEDA Advanced Symposium – featuring information about site selection, FOIA and cost/benefit analysis.

O'Toole updated future travel: Brunson joining SCA Aerospace Trip California (now virtual), O'Toole attending SC Competitiveness Aero Montreal March 26-27, SC Department of Agriculture/SC Power Team Netherlands and Belgium March 31-April 4, SC Department of Agriculture Blue Food Innovation Summit London April 8-9 and Select USA DC May 12-14. O'Toole provided an update on miscellaneous – Shelton looking for fundraising committee volunteers and second event planning. Accounting services RFP will be going out soon. Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest forms need to be signed and returned.

Hiers from the Southern Carolina Regional Alliance provided a written report of activity and an invitation to the SCA Skybox at the RBC Heritage in April. The May meeting will contain SCA Marketing update and overview.

New Business included Cromer reminding the board members about the South Coast Cyber Summit on May 13, 7:30 AM at Tabby Place in Beaufort. O'Toole reminded board members about Beaufort Digital Corridor Start Up Weekend March 21-22.

Chair Braun entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:57 pm by Perry; Cromer seconded; all voted in favor.