

Oconee County Economic Development Commission
Minutes of Meeting
February 17, 2012

The Oconee County Economic Development Commission monthly meeting was held Friday, February 17, 2012 at the Commission office, 502 East Main Street, Walhalla, SC.

Attendances

Commission Members:

- √ Kim Alexander, District I
- √ Harold Gibson, District II
- √ Hank Field, District III
- √ Sammy Dickson, District IV
- √ Gene Blair, District V

Ex-Officio Members:

- √ Scott Moulder, County Administrator
- √ Ronnie L. Booth, President, Tri-County Technical College
- X Michael Lucas, Superintendent, School District of Oconee County
- √ Jeanne L. Ward, President/CEO Oconee Medical Center
- X Marvin Carmichael, Clemson University
- √ Robert C. Winchester, General Superintendent, Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority
- √ Art Holbrooks, Planning Commission
- √ Jim Gadd, Executive Director, Oconee Alliance
- X John Lummus, VP Economic Development, Tri-County Technical College

EDC Staff:

- √ Jim Alexander, Director
- √ Thalma Miller, Administrative Assistant
- √ Russell Johnson, Assistant

Guests:

Paul Corbeil, County Council District I
Archie Barron, County Council District III
Reg Dexter, County Council District V
Mike Powell
Kim Wilbanks

News Media:

LaDonna Beeker, The Journal
Dick Mangrum, Radio WGOG
Ray Chandler, Anderson Independent Mail

Call to Order: Mr. Field, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Action to Approve the Agenda: Mr. Gibson moved the agenda be approved as presented. Mr. Corbeil seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Minutes approved: Mr. Winchester noted that the Minutes should be corrected to read \$100 million on page 4 under the Directors Report. Mr. Dickson moved the Minutes of the January 20, 2012 meeting be approved as corrected; motion seconded by Mr. Blair. Motion carried.

Guest Report: Mike Powell, Director, Oconee County Information Technology and Kim Wilbanks, Broadband Grant Manager. Oconee IT Department gave a presentation on the Oconee FOCUS project. Mr. Powell explained the name Oconee FOCUS was derived as a requirement of the Broadband Grant application by Ms. Wilbanks and symbolizes the project: Fiber Optics Creating Unified Solutions.

Only 30.3% of Oconee County residents have access to terrestrial broadband (ESRI) so the project was initiated to offer equal opportunities for broadband access for all citizens. The project is designed not to compete with IP/Telco providers (i.e. AT&T) but to provide connectivity in locations where no Return On Investment for companies to install backbone fiber network exists. The hope is that current ISPs will choose to utilize FOCUS fiber to lower cost for county residents.

Mr. Powell described the project as the "Middle Mile" and open broadband network that does not provide service to end users. It is an extension of the Internet backbone that connects Internet Service Providers who ultimately serve the residents, businesses, and governments in our region, to the rest of the world. To date 90 miles of conduit has been installed, 20 miles of fiber, three Network Operations Center are set up and ISPs are signing agreements to bring further service to the communities. The first customers are expected within the next month.

One of the benefits of the project to Oconee County is linking all of the county, city and school facilities together to allow larger transfers of data including video connections making possible online courses, lectures, class rooms, municipal meetings etc. Oconee Focus will provide the opportunity to recruit and bring technology companies to Oconee County. Mr. Powell speculated on "The next Silicone Valley in the County???"

Oconee County Update: Mr. Moulder, County Administrator, commented on the recent retreat held by County Council to review goals and set priorities for the coming Budget Year. Plans for the Detention Center and investing in economic development projects to benefit the citizens are short term objectives. Job creation, completion of Phase I of Echo Hills, sewer to the Golden Corner Commerce Park and enhancing the tools for industrial recruitment are included in the priority list. The annual strategic planning retreats are useful and he hopes they will continue.

More interviews are being held to fill the Directors position. Mr. Moulder commented, "The process involves a good team of folks that he assembled to make this important decision."

Oconee Alliance Review: Mr. Jim Gadd, Executive Director reminded members of the second Scrabble Tournament to be held on Saturday, February 18th with 50 participants expected. The event benefits the Education Foundation grant program for teachers in the School District.

March 24th the Seneca High School Gym will be the site of the Tri-County 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament. All teams from the Upstate, Georgia and North Carolina are invited to participate. The event will benefit the Education Foundation Teacher Grant Program.

The Junior Leadership Oconee program aimed at High School Juniors has started. There are openings for 20-25 students with tuition at \$300.00 per student. The sessions are designed for emphasis on leadership.

The Oconee Alliance is scheduled to relocate its office to a Seneca location along Highway 123 on March 1st.

The next meeting of the Oconee Alliance will be held Thursday, March 8th at the Thrift Development Corporation offices. The educational program will feature Mr. Scott Moulder, County Administrator, giving a recap of the last 18 months of activities in Oconee County.

Mrs. Helen Rosemond-Saunders will speak on the history of the Rosenwald School and the preservation and restoration project. The meetings start at 8:00 a.m. and are open to the public.

Directors Report: Jim Alexander, Director, Economic Development Commission reported on activities of the EDC and included a written report in the meeting packet. Work on a Master Plan for the Golden Corner Commerce Park was kicked off with a meeting of stake holders this past week. Seamon Whiteside and Associates is leading the project.

A plan to update the EDC Strategic Plan will be assisted by a strategic planning grant from the South Carolina Power Team. The grant will pay 50% or up to \$25,000 of the cost. The current plan was completed in 2007 at a cost of \$44,000. The South Carolina Power Team provided \$40,000 of that cost.

The "shell" building continues to attract client. Several companies are reviewing specifications of the building or are looking at other available sites and buildings. Projects under consideration include: Project Sunshine involving a \$25 million investment and creation of 50 jobs. Project Michigan could invest \$12 million and create 50 jobs; the Special K Project at \$11.5 million could add up to 120 jobs. Project Ciao would invest \$14 million and create about 70 jobs. Two other projects have contacted the County but have not released investment information. Mr. Alexander commented, "Most of the companies need more than 50,000 sq. ft. to operate, and the majority are interested in spec buildings."

Mr. Alexander distributed the 2012 meeting schedule with date and location revisions.

Project and Marketing Report: Russell Johnson, Director of Projects and Marketing attended Session I of The Institute. The two day economic development course was held at the Memorial Waterfront Visitors Center in Mount Pleasant, SC. The session topics were focused on Leadership through Communication. "How to talk with the media, knowing when and what to say builds lasting partnerships with newspaper, radio and television reporters and is a valuable economic development skill," he commented.

The Economic Development Commission will be an Event Partner Sponsor for the Fourth Annual State of Oconee Luncheon to be held Friday, March 16, 2012 at the Northside Elementary School in Seneca. Mr. Field will give the welcome comments and Mr. Blair, representing the EDC is serving on the Planning Committee.

Old Business: No Old Business was brought forth.

New Business: The next meeting will be held March 16, 2012, 9:00 a.m. at the EDC office.

Adjourn: Mr. Dickson moved the meeting be adjourned; seconded by Ms. Alexander. The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Thelma Miller
Secretary