

MEETING MINUTES – MAR 23, 2023

BROOKS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Regular Meeting

Derren Yearby presided over the meeting and called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm. Board members Erin McKenzie, Ulysses Marable, Derren Yearby, and Jack Harrell attended, along with Executive Director (E.D.) Stephanie Williams. The meeting was held at the Brooks County Commissioners Administration Building at 610 S. Highland Dr., Quitman, GA.

Appearances

Chairman Yearby moved to Appearances, wherein Steve Heddon with Fusion Creative Marketing discussed the branding of Brooks County and the upcoming workshop, should he be approved to continue his work. Heddon, having presented his feasibility study in February, asked if the Board had any questions pertaining to the information and data. He also spoke of the necessity of incorporating the community at large for input in order to attain successful implementation. He also suggested that representatives from every city, the county, Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce should also be at the table.

Mr. Jerome Tucker also reiterated that although it is ideal for everyone to get “on board” and collaborate with one another, there is no guarantee that they will. The decision lies in the control of the Development Authority and what the Authority can control. He also suggested that as Steven is ‘an outsider’ or third party, he can remain objective, and the Authority can stand behind Heddon as the expert.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Yearby moved to the approval of the minutes. After a careful and thorough review, Erin McKenzie motioned to accept the minutes for the Special Called Meeting held February 27, 2023, and Executive Session held February 27, 2023; seconded by Jack Harrell; unanimously approved.

Financials

Chairman Derren Yearby moved to the acceptance of the financials for February 2023. After a thorough review of the financials, Erin McKenzie motioned to accept the financials as presented; seconded by Jack Harrell; unanimously approved.

Old Business

Chairman Yearby moved to Old Business.

- a. Bylaws review and acceptance: E.D. Williams noted that she had updated the Bylaws, including two additions and one change. The additions were simply as follows: the addition of the Authority Vision Statement and the addition of the Authority Mission Statement. The singular alteration was simply the update of the regular scheduled meeting from the second Monday of every month to the fourth Thursday of every month. All additions, alterations were highlighted in yellow for ease of location and review. No other changes were made. Erin McKenzie made a motion to approve the Bylaws with the updated date and addition of Vision and Mission statements; seconded by Ulysses Marable; unanimously approved.
- b. Fusion Creative Marketing Proposal: Having heard the prior discussion, scope of work, and timeline, Erin McKenzie made a motion to approve that Mr. Steve Heddon move forward with the marketing and branding workshop for Brooks County; seconded by Ulysses Marable; unanimously approved.

New Business

Chairman Yearby moved to New Business.

- a. Public Accountant, Juan Turner. In prior conversations, the Authority Board has discussed the fact that Mr. Gary Zeigler's office had held the position of both Public Accountant and Financial Auditor by the Development Authority and Brooks County government for more than a decade, and that the consensus of the Board felt that was unfair and impractical, if not unethical. In 2022, the Authority Board hired a new financial Auditor. The Board of Directors asked E.D. Williams to seek qualified candidates for accounting purposes, which include payroll taxes and tax return preparation. After a careful review and discussion of Mr. Juan Turner's Curriculum Vitae, Erin McKenzie made a motion to hire Mr. Juan Turner as the Public Accountant for the Brooks County Development Authority; seconded by Ulysses Marable; unanimously approved.
- b. Workforce Housing: (for review and in February 2023 meeting minutes)
 - The Executive Director, Stephanie Williams presented the following to the Board of Commissioner on Thursday, January 23rd at their Regular Workshop Meeting.

"Proposal for acquisition of 50 acres of surplus land currently held for industrial development
The Brooks County Development Authority (BCDA) is interested in purchasing 50 acres of Industrial land (parcel no. 095 00041) currently owned by the Brooks County Board of Commissioners (BOC), which has been held for industrial development since 2007. Records show that at least one proposal was submitted to the BOC several years ago for an industrial prospect. The BOC approved the acquisition, pending development, but the project fell through and the land was reverted back to the BOC.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, industry and business have shifted, and so too, have the needs of those industries we look to serve and welcome into our community.

Housing, especially affordable housing, is sorely missing across the Southern region of the United States, and as communities are working to address this problem, it is spurring economic growth within those communities. Over the course of the last decade numerous academic studies show that tens of millions of people have migrated from urban to rural areas. This has been largely driven by natural disasters, pandemics and political climate. Since 2021 (post-COVID), the number of inquiries or potential prospects the BCDA has received has been in the dozens. However, for one reason or another, Brooks County could not meet the immediate demand(s) of that industry, and since the demand(s) could not be immediately met, they simply moved along to the next community. The most common demand remains to be housing. The second demand is warehouse space.

The BCDA is working to address both these demands, but the primary target at this time is housing. The BCDA currently has a prospect with which we have negotiated (Project Foxhole) that is looking at two communities other than Brooks County. Project Foxhole is an important prospect. The initial capital investment is \$2.5M, and they will be relocating their entire trained workforce of 30 workers and their families with them. That's 30 families to live, work, play and pay taxes in Brooks County. We also know they are also looking to grow and expand their business once established.

Additionally, this particular prospect brings with it the potential of two other associated industries looking to piggy-back the first, bringing more capital investment and more families.

Project Foxhole hinges on one demand we have promised to address in order to get them to build in Brooks County- workforce housing. We have a verbal agreement that should we meet this demand, Brooks will be their new home. This is significant, as this is the first prospect willing to work with us to meet this need rather than simply moving on to the next community.

The BCDA is needs to begin development of workforce housing as soon as possible, and we need your help to make it happen.

We understand that the land is currently zoned Heavy Industrial, and we are looking to only have a small portion rezoned Multi-Family Housing. This is not uncommon in many communities, and we would be happy to provide examples, should the BOC request some.

We understand that the acreage is currently assessed at nearly \$5000/acre, and we are willing to negotiate a fair and reasonable price to make this happen. We humbly ask for your help in this matter."

"The Board of Commissioners tabled the request until their March 6th meeting."

E.D. Williams stated that there was nothing new to report other than the meeting was changed to be at the Commissioner's Workshop meeting, held the last week of the month of March. Additionally, from the original proposal, which was submitted to the BOC both verbally and in writing on January 23rd to the Authority's current meeting (March 23), the original proposal of the Authority had been misinterpreted, causing significant confusion. E.D. Williams informed the Authority Board that since she would be out of town on business the following week, including the day of the workshop meeting, she requested that the meeting with the BOC to discuss workforce housing be tabled until April's workshop meeting. No action needed.

- c. Back-office Construction: Chairman Derren Yearby recused himself from the vote and discussion of the back-office construction to avoid any perceived influence or conflict of interest. Gavel handed to Vice Chairman, Erin McKenzie. Chairman Yearby then excused himself from the building during discussion.

E.D. Williams discussed the state of the current administrative office. When the prior owner had the building they split the 2000 sq ft building in two, essentially cutting off the egress from access. Williams discussed the fire hazard as there is currently on one way in and out of the building. Williams also stated that the Authority had been trying since 2021 to get a secured archive for records, along with a larger, functioning office space for the Executive Director. Currently, there is very little room to hold meetings, which is a frequent occurrence.

The last quote received by the Authority was in 2021, which included less than the proposed scope of work and more than \$48,000. In 2022, an agreement was made between the Authority with a contractor who agreed to do the work if he could lease the office space as an incubator while completing construction. Rent was negotiated at a lower price to essentially cover costs of office construction while providing a business incubator for a set time. The agreement was broken by the tenant, and the tenant was evicted in mid-2022. Given Mr. Yearby's reputation as a licensed contractor (Owner and operator of D&D Construction), respected pastor and valued member of the community, the Authority felt confident to ask for a proposal for the work to be completed.

Scope of work includes:

- Remove plumbing from the bathroom as well as the old cabinetry and plumbing on the walls and seal them.
- Remove ceiling tiles, vents, lights. Install new ceiling tiles, vents, lights and wiring, if needed.
- Remove and replace old flooring and base boards.
- Install new exterior door to the side street (S Culpepper) and two interior doors, one to the front office and one to the storage closet (archive).
- Build a closet (archive) for storage, eight feet wide by twenty feet long with shelving.
- Fix all holes going to the building next door.
- Remove post, if possible, and if not, rewrap with decorative material.
- Prime and paint interior of office.

Material and labor cost: \$37,000.

After discussion and review of the scope of work, Ulysses Marable made a motion to approve D&D Construction to complete the work as proposed for the cost of \$37,000; seconded by Jack Harrell; unanimously approved. Chairman Yearby was then invited back inside the building to reattain the gavel to preside over the remainder of the meeting, and no further mention of the Board's decision regarding the back-office construction (either for or against) was discussed.

- d. Office Façade: MNG Construction, Inc. had previously submitted a proposal to the Development Authority in 2022 to seal the deteriorating brick façade of the Screven Street building, which currently houses the Development Authority. Over 120 years old, the historic building is beginning to show its age as it is crumbling to sand. Michael Miller, of MNG Construction, has extensive experience working on historic buildings across the region and is highly reputed as an expert in his field. His proposal includes the following scope of work:
- Install cement grout in the deteriorating areas of the brick
 - Seal the bricks on the side
 - Repair the stucco on the front corner
 - Paint with exterior brick paint 2 coats on the front and side of the building

- Remove the ramp at the side door (S. Culpepper) and rebuild the steps
- Remove the door casing and stucco the area

Total Material and Labor cost: \$16,365.00

After discussion and review of the scope of work, Erin McKenzie made a motion to approve MNG Construction to complete the work as proposed for the cost of \$16,365.00; seconded by Ulysses Marable; unanimously approved.

Reports

Stephanie Williams, Executive Director

1. IP Mowing advertisement: advertisement for the Industrial Park Mowing is underway and in the Quitman Free Press. Bids to be accepted until 3:30 pm April 14, 2023.
2. Community Heart & Soul: Announcement for Seed Grant completed, core team assembled, and pre-planning accomplished as well.
3. ECHOES program: Williams is working with the BOE to address needs of parents and middle school/high school children as it pertains to economic development, community development and leadership skills. Williams explained that she has decided to dedicate time twice a month to this program.
4. Quarterly Community ED Summit: June 2, 2023 (9am-12pm) at the Board of Education

Jayne Coody, Small Business Development

1. Working on a few small business prospects, more news to follow as they develop.

With no other reports, Erin McKenzie motioned to adjourn; seconded by Ulysses Marable; unanimously approved.