

MINUTES – MEETING MAY 23, 2024

BROOKS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Regular Meeting

Chairman Derren Yearby presided over the meeting and called the meeting to order at 6:09pm. Board members Erin McKenzie, Ulysses Marable, Marie Horne, Tyler Hart, Harlie Bodine, and Derren Yearby attended, along with executive director Stephanie Williams and Small Business Director, Jayme Coody. The meeting was held at 610 S. Highland Dr. Quitman GA.

Minutes

After a thorough review of January 29th meeting minutes, Erin McKenzie made a motion to approve the January minutes; seconded by Ulysses Marable; unanimously approved.

Financials

Chairman Derren Yearby moved to the acceptance of the February, March, & April 2024. After a thorough review of the financials. Erin McKenzie motioned to accept the financials as presented; seconded by Tyler Hart; unanimously approved.

Old Business

1. Administrative Office Update:

Jayme Coody explained to the Board that she and Stephanie were waiting for the construction team to get back in touch with them by the end of the following week. There is a tentative scheduled time with Serve Pro construction lady to come by, but as it conflicts with a prior meeting with the IEDC, Jayme offered two options to the Board: that perhaps one of them might be able to meet them at the office or reschedule. "Other than that," Jayme continued "we have been cleared for construction." She further stated Serve Pro did a testing and all the results came back for the office and the bacteria is currently absent and construction is ready to begin at this point, and that she would update the Board as she was updated as well. Mr. Yearby inquired as to whether the office had sustained anymore backflow since the last time. Williams stated that the office had not sustained anymore back flow since the sewer pipes had been sealed. Mr. Yearby inquired as to when the bathroom sink and toilet is put back together, "there still would not be a functioning toilet if they (Serve Pro) capped the line.: Williams stated that Serve Pro would uncapped the line when the toilet is put back in, and her concern that the pipe could back flow again into the office but there was no certainty due to the city's infrastructure. Tyler Hart inquired as to any preliminary measures to fix the problem. Williams replied that she could not answer that because the infrastructure belongs to the City of Quitman who services it. Dr. Marie Horne asked Williams for further clarification in summation regarding the back flow situation. Williams deferred to Mr. Yearby who explained that the back flow was liquid waste, as opposed to solid waste, coming up from under the bottom of the toilet, even when the bathroom was out of service and that it continued to back flow in the office. He further instructed that Serve Pro does not need to uncapped the office toilet until we (the Board) know that the other problem (city infrastructure) has been addressed- to go ahead and make the repairs but leave the drain capped. Jayme asked for clarification and that the uncapping of the pipe needs to be the last thing done. Mr. Yearby reiterated that the pipe does not need to be uncapped until they (The Authority Board) are certain that the city infrastructure has been fixed. Dr. Horned asked if there were other buildings that had suffered damages, to which Williams replied that there had been others also impacted.

On a different note, Williams then stated that the administrative building's awnings were scheduled to be completed within the next week and a half.

Dr. Horne inquired if Jayme and Stephanie have sustained any injuries, medical or health hazards from sewage exposure due to being in the office at the time of the spill and/ or the conditions from continuing to work for an extended period afterwards. Williams stated that she and Jayme had suffered injuries and that it would be discussed further in the Executive Session.

2. Ratification of temporary office relocation:

For the purpose of ratification: Email sent by Williams to the board 04-29-2024 at 1:01pm "Good afternoon, all. The State Farm adjustor and his supervisor are scheduled to be at our office this Wednesday morning, May 1st at 10am. As of today, Serve Pro was able to take a few fans out, but there is at least one fan still going. They are planning to schedule the cleaning team to come before the next stage can begin. In the meantime, I need to complete the financials as well as begin gathering all the files and data necessary for the 2023 Audit. I have reached out to some facilities wherein I can temporarily locate for a time while the office is being repaired. Barwick City Hall has graciously offered a secure location for us at no charge. With your permission, I need to relocate these things as soon as possible. Please reply via email, so that I can move forward. Thank you so much! Stephanie"

On 4-29-24 at 3:01pm, Harlie Bodine replied via email, "Sounds like a plan."

On 4-29-24 at 3:01pm, Tyler Hart replied via email, "Yes. Proceed."

On 4-29-24 at 3:55pm, Erin McKenzie replied via email, "Yes, please proceed."

On 05-01-24 at 12:32pm, John LaHood replied via text message, "Please proceed. You have my approval to use the other office."

Ulysses Marable and Dr. Marie Horne refrained from voting on this issue; Chairman Derren Yearby did not vote as there was already a majority.

Motion made by Erin McKenzie to ratify the decision to temporarily relocate the Brooks County Development Authority files and main computer to Barwick City Hall until repairs are complete; seconded by Tyler Hart; unanimously approved.

3. South Georgia Studios Update: Williams explained that she spoke with Honnie and Gary Korngold while they were in France at Cannes promoting film in South Georgia. They are moving forward and making progress with their development, and she has requested that they come address the Authority Board as well as the Tax Assessor Board in June to provide further details and updates.

Williams also stated that the Authority has utilized part of the advertising budget for the creation of a promotional advertisement for economic development in Brooks County. Philanthro Films has been commissioned for this work and we expect delivery within the next few weeks.

New Business

1. USDA Rural Development Water Development Project in IP

Per the direction of the Board, we are currently working on a water development project within the Brooks County Industrial Park to place a 12 inch well and water tank with potable water to improve the water infrastructure within the park. The service area will be concentrated to the Industrial Park to serve and protect the current and future industrial development within the park.

Dr. Horne asked how the potential water project might impact the existing infrastructure. Mr. Yearby addressed Dr. Hornes concerns by stating that the well is public use but that we (the Authority) do not know the specs yet, none of the details other than we are just trying to get the well project completed. Mr. Yearby continued that the engineers have to bring us (the Authority) all the information, and until that time, we cannot speculate the facts. Dr. Horne urged due diligence to address potential environmental concerns as they may arise. Mr. Yearby stated that we would do so, as necessary, as we proceed with the water well project. Williams also stated that while attending the meeting with the USDA, engineers and well drilling company, it was asked about the service delivery of the well. While the well could open later to serve the City of Quitman, it will be controlled to only the Industrial Park, until

such time that the City's infrastructure can handle the load. Williams also reiterated that the purpose in doing so is to provide the service needed without potential negative effects to the city. She also stated that the Phase 1's and environmental info had been updated in recent months, as required by law, and that the Development Authority is current and taking the preliminary steps while moving forward.

2. Project Tabby cat

Prospect has recently relocated to Brooks County and is looking to expand its business into Brooks County as well. Interested in Block D, Lot 6- Building a 10,000 sq ft warehouse, with room for expansion. Approx 12 initial jobs, with more as expansion continues. Est. cap investment: \$500K

3. Project Torchwood

Prospect is interested in building block E: relocation of an industrial site from out of state to Brooks County, GA. Initial Cap investment: \$12M; 30 jobs; possible lease option with 5-7-year abatement. Additionally proposed investment to increase by another \$6M; additional 30 jobs by year 3.

4. Brooks Solar

Williams stated that to the best of her knowledge and belief the following: That there is a solar moratorium currently in effect by Board of Commissioners to amend and update the solar ordinance. There is one current solar prospect to which I have spoken: Approximately 1250 acres with this one project. Additional unknown projects holding another possible 3700 +/- acres in lease option. The current solar project location is off Jackson Rd- in the middle along the transmission lines. Should this project be approved by the Board of Commissioners, it would take little to join the two sides, thus splitting the county in half. The current decommissioning bond does not take into account inflation, and while there is a law through the EPA that states that the land should be put back into its original state, if the cost is above the decommissioning bond and the company is forced to clean the land, the company could then possibly subjugate against the County, potentially forcing the cost of the cleanup to be placed back on the taxpayers. Solar projects approved to be built over farmland violates the comprehensive plan or as it is referred to by the Department of Community Affairs, "the law of the land" in more than one instance, adding to the probability of the denial of future grant applications should it be purposely and repeatedly violated. There is also current litigation regarding a citation issued to Nextera for noise (at the Quitman solar site), and it is Williams' understanding that this is being mitigated but remains open and unresolved. Williams also stated that a resident has successfully appealed their taxes for the last two consecutive years, with this being her third year. The resident's personal property taxes have been lowered due to the devaluation of her personal property. The reason, "Economic obsolescence due to the location of an industrial facility". This fact alone sets precedent. In accordance with the laws of equalization of taxation, this could mean that every adjacent homeowner to a solar farm could appeal their property taxes and their personal property taxes would be lowered. Thus, any tax revenue the County would see would be off set by lowered tax revenue from those who successfully appeal their taxes. The Board of Commissioners is currently exploring the best route in which to address these issues. Williams also stated that "we (the Brooks County Development Authority) have no intention of discriminating against any industry, but it is important to note that while we represent industry in order to ultimately increase the tax base, we also represent the people of Brooks County and are responsible for maintaining the health, safety, and general welfare of the public for the betterment and advancement of economic opportunity. It is important that the people who are here tonight know that everyone on this Authority Board understands what is at stake. We (the Authority) understand both sides of the coin, and we value their thoughts and opinions on the matter".

5. IEDC: Economic Resilience

Williams stated that next week the BCDA is welcoming the International Economic Development Council as they are coming to visit and assist our community with the creation and implementation of a Brooks County strategic plan for economic development. Williams further invited the Board and the community to attend the historic event.

Public Comments

USDA Rural Development: Water project in Brooks County Industrial Park Project:

1. P.H. expressed her excitement and support of the Brooks County leadership as well as the potential for the water well project in the Industrial Park.

No other public comments regarding the well water project.

Brooks Solar:

1. P.W. expressed his concern for the solar farm's potential location near his property. He also posed general questions as to their location, purpose, and ownership. P.W. also asked how he can become more engaged and get more information on these projects. He further stated his concern regarding potential health damage from the proximity of these sites to his home.
2. K.S. stated that a substantial piece of property adjoining his property has a solar lease option on it and it is currently the largest tract that has been granted in the option. K.S. expressed his concern that the company that owns the forest property is a foreign- owned entity and that should the project move forward, it would enrich a foreign entity at the expense of the local community. K.S further stated that while the opposing argument is that government should not make demands on property owners, he reiterated that the government already does so through planning, zoning, and ordinances, etc. and that the purpose of this is to protect general welfare of the public, not the monetary desires of a few.
3. D.S. expressed his concerns with the potential for the solar project being around his property. Other than being an eyesore, he expressed his concerns for environmental hazards into the soil and Aquifer through leakage and natural corrosion over decades. He further expressed his concern about the protection of farmland versus industrial development that threatens our food supply.
4. J.F. stated that the reason for appearing tonight was for information and to hear what was being said and what was going on. Mr. Yearby answered that we were taking notes and that we would put something together, that we might be able to present something later after seeking legal advice in how to do so respectful of all interested parties. Mr. Yearby stated that the entire community must come together to make their voices heard by the Board of commissioners. Commissioner Lee Larko also interjected that there would be a town hall meeting about the solar moratorium in July that will be posted in the newspaper.
5. W.K. expressed her love and the beauty of her community and her land. She expressed her frustration over the destruction of the land by the solar projects, potential health, and environmental hazards as well as commitment to fight the projects invading her community.
6. T.A. stated that she has family that comes to visit from out of state, from dense, urban areas, who love Brooks County and our simple beauty. She expressed her disagreement with the solar project and that it was not good for the community, disturbs wildlife and harms soil. She further expressed her frustration over the decommissioning of the land and its return to the state in which it is now. She also stated she will continue to fight the issue. Mr. Yearby urged that the people get together to be unified and informed voices.
7. C.S. stated that she relocated from an urban area to Brooks County, GA after searching for several years. She expressed her love of her home and her sadness to know that it could be destroyed by a potential solar project. She stated that she keeps part of her land in conservation because she values the land and will not let anyone destroy it. She pleaded to the Board and community in the room not to allow anyone

to destroy the unique beauty of the land for someone else's gain. She also stated that she wished to stand with the community and engage others.

8. P.H. stated to the community in the room. She expressed her sadness and frustration as she has been living a nightmare since the first solar project was brought to her doorstep. She stated she would stand with the community and assist in any way she could, but wanted the community to understand that the Development Authority is just a step in the process and has no say-so in whether a project gets approved. The Development Authority can give an abatement, and that's it. Planning and zoning is the first yes or no are reports to the Board of Commissioners. She urged the community to come together, get educated and learn the process as they gather their thoughts. P.H. also stated that the Comprehensive Plan is the "Law of the land". P.H. also commended the Development Authority Board for allowing the people's voices to be heard. She continued by stating that the solar companies can still come into a community without an abatement. There are multiple projects on the books. She further stated she has spoken with the Public Service Commission and that this is a concern all over the state of Georgia. She also stated that the community needs to organize and engage others, utilize social media and inform others. She continued to educate the community as Irwin County's solar project and how the community rose up to fight this issue. P.H. also stated that the ordinance for Brooks County needs to be strengthened and that there's a lot of work left to be done. She also identified herself as the resident who had her taxes lowered and was instrumental in having the citation issued against the solar company for noise. She also stated that the noise has affected her mental and physical health. She further noted that the noise was once used in warfare, and that there are numerous studies on the effects of frequency levels, and while the panels do not make noise, the inverters and transformers do. P.H. expressed her thanks to the Board once again for allowing voices to be heard.
9. B.H. stated his concern that these solar projects bring in no jobs, and that once its here- its here. He posed questions as to how these solar projects help our community, whether through lower electric bills or jobs, etc. and urged the decision makers to think twice before allowing the projects to go through.
10. A.S. stated that he had been out to see the panels on Barwick Road and could hear the noise. He stated that as he looks out from his home, he will have a clear path of sight to the proposed solar farm. He stated that currently the land is farmed with corn and expressed his concern that it will be destroyed. He expressed his concern with the public benefit, the decommissioning process and associated costs- accounting for inflation- and the loss of use of farmland.

The attending public continued to converse between themselves. Chairman Yearby advised that the Board is simply there to listen and take the information provided.

Williams was granted permission by the Chairman to address the public to clarify how the process works through economic development. Williams explained the Development Authority's role from beginning to end and echoed the chairman's prior statement that it is up to the community to organize, engage, and be heard. Chairman Yearby thanked everyone for coming to speak.

Executive Session

No formal motion made to move into Executive Session; Chairman Yearby moved to Executive session. No formal motion to move into open session.

Reports

Jayme Coody reported of a potential business looking to expand in South Brooks. No other reports. Erin McKenzie made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Harlie Bodine; unanimously approved.