

MEETING MINUTES – NOV 27, 2023

BROOKS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Regular Meeting

Derren Yearby presided over the meeting and called the meeting to order at 5:36 pm. Board members Erin McKenzie, Ulysses Marable, Derren Yearby, John LaHood, Marie Horne, Tyler Hart and Jack Harrell attended, along with Executive Director (E.D.) Stephanie Williams and Director of Small Business Development. The meeting was held at the Brooks County Commissioners Administration Building at 610 S. Highland Dr., Quitman, GA.

Approval of Minutes

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

Appearances

None.

Financials

Chairman Derren Yearby moved to the acceptance of the financials for July, August, September, October 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

a. BCDA Administrative Office Update.

D&D Repair:

The contract was originally approved for \$37,000

At our last meeting, we apprised the Board that the damage was more serious, as the inside of the back wall had deteriorated to the point of collapse and a bearing beam had been severed by a previous owner and the back wall was being held up by 2x4s balanced on century-old flooring. The brick and mortar were degrading to sand and required wire mesh and concrete to keep the wall from deteriorating further. Mr. Yearby explained that he would keep the cost as low as possible for these unforeseen expenses.

Additionally, the front office wall had begun to crack inside the office, nearly 4 feet vertically, and both doors were against fire code regulations. We began having plumbing issues again- which we have had every few months since we acquired the building. We called Roto Rooter from Valdosta. They came and inspected; told us it was the hair salon next door that was clogging the pipes. The City of Quitman came as well and said from the alley it was clear. Roto Rooter cleared the backed-up pipe, but a week later we had to call them again for the same problem. The technicians got under the building and explained to me that the reason the toilet kept backing up was that the pipe from the toilet down to under the building was 3 inches in diameter, then it changed to a 2-inch pipe, and then hooked up to the City's 4-inch pipe. The tech then explained that the 2-inch pipe was the cause of the toilets backing up, that the 2-in. pipe needed to be replaced with a 3-inch pipe and the new flooring which Mr. Yearby had just put down in the back office

would have to be taken up and a hole cut through the floor to replace the pipe. He stated that the cost would run the Development Authority around \$4900.

I called Mr. Yearby and let the tech explain the same thing to him. Mr. Yearby told the technician that he would check it out himself and get back with him, if needed. Mr. Yearby then came to the office a day or so later, took up a portion of the newly laid flooring, cut a hole in the floor and examined the pipe, taking photos. He then called me in to the room where I could see from the office above that the pipe was not a 2-inch pipe but a 3-inch pipe. Mr. Yearby checked the elevation of the pipe and everything was fine.

Nothing needed to be replaced. In the end, it was the air filter in the ceiling that had been shut off, which did not allow air to flow through the plumbing and caused the water to back up in the pipe.

Additional Work done: Removed the fireplace and secured the area with mud (concrete) to secure the back wall, repaired the floor and installed a support beam for the roof, added extra square footage to the storage area, installed a new door at the front office, installed a new toilet (previous one had been cracked since before we purchased the building), repaired plumbing and other things necessary for plumbing to operate correctly, front office repairs. Total added expense: \$15,800

Mr. Yearby was nearing completion of the project when I heard something fall between the roof and ceiling tile in the front office. I went to the back and told him I heard something but could not see anything. Nothing notable for a couple weeks. Mr. Yearby finished his job.

On Friday, September 22nd, I walked into my office from the conference room, immediately noticing that my roof was concaved, twisting the plastic strips between the ceiling tiles over my desk and chair. I immediately called Mr. Yearby. (See photos.) Mr. Yearby came to check the office Monday afternoon, and he informed us that I had to get out of the room immediately as the roof was falling in. I got to the office at 6:45 the next morning, as I had to leave town that afternoon for a conference. I moved my things to the back office.

To make matters worse, the air conditioner in the conference room began leaking again, as there was no trap for condensation, and within minutes of me getting to the office, grabbing a 5-gal bucket to catch the dripping, the dripping turned into pouring. (I have a video.)

Within a day or so (maybe Wed or Thurs), Jayme called me to inform me that Jack had heard something in Jayme's office ceiling as well and that the ceiling was leaning in there as well and that she, too, needed to move to the back. For more than a week, we emptied full buckets of water from the AC (twice a day, including weekends). Mr. Yearby contacted an HVAC gentleman who examined the units and suggested that we replace the unit in the front half of the office. He estimated the cost at roughly \$6800.

Seeking a second opinion, I called a colleague of mine who owns an HVAC company. He examined the AC's and did not recommend replacing either unit at this time. He created a trap for the condensation tray in the conference room, drilled into the masonry while taking great care of its condition and integrity, installed the pvc pipes for drainage, checked the condensers and evaporators in both units. He showed me that there were two traps for the second tray in the back office, which is extremely unusual and checked the elevation of the tray to the pipe. He removed one trap and corrected the elevation of the tray. No issues since.

Total cost: \$1400

Mr. Yearby Came back to lift the roof and support the exterior wall. As this was an emergency situation, I made the judgement call to have Mr. Yearby complete the work since he had already been working on the building, was familiar with its layout, issues, integrity, and instability. The following work was completed:

Built an extension to the exterior wall to support the old roof to keep it from falling; Jacked up the area that had fallen down; Installed new Led lights in the front office; Fixed the damaged area on the front office walls; Replaced damaged ceiling tiles; Painted the front office; Removed and hauled off the old furniture from the office and storage unit; Assemble new furniture and put it in place on arrival. Final additional expense: \$9700

Storage Unit has been closed and we will save \$200 this year and ~1200 next year.

MNG:

Façade Update: Spoke to Michael Miller 11/10/23- the gentlemen are supposed to be here tomorrow (11/28/23)

ADT Security System:

On the morning of October 20, I arrived at the office as usual. At one point, I walked out of the side door (on S. Culpepper) and upon re-entering the door, I noticed an attempted break-in (jimmy marks) near the lock. Additionally, the crime rate in the City of Quitman has risen, including a series of drive-by shootings. I called a few places for quotes, but ADT was the only company to return our call and show up. Installation included: Interactive touchscreen, 2 door contacts (for front and side door), Motion detector, Remote access through my cell phone, 2 glassbreak detectors. Saving of \$500, total \$354.24, Monthly monitoring \$57

Additionally, we have ordered an additional feature which includes a camera and intercom for the front door. From the front office, you cannot see but a small portion of the frontage window, next to Bri's Bakery. The door glass is etched for privacy, but this also provides a disadvantage to seeing who is at the door. When we lock the front door, we leave a note on the window stating that we are there, and to either knock or call my cell phone. However, we sometimes forget to lock the door, and people walk in. Sometimes, we forget to place the note, and we've missed several mail deliveries.

Furthermore, I could not hear knocking or the door opening from the back of the office. This has led to some near-dangerous experiences, most recently being after the Skillet Festival. Outside, there will be an overhead camera to capture the entire person for identification purposes. The buzzer/doorbell will contain a two-way intercom. The inside camera and intercom will be located in the front office closest to the door (Jayme's office) while the back office will have just a camera. Cost: \$458.56 after a \$424.50 discount
Total cost for ADT Security system: \$812.80

b. Project Foxhole.

Mr. Tucker update:

Mr. Tucker's contract ended November 15, 2023. He did not want to renew his contract, and the Board had not seen a return on the investment. He did not wish to come to explain to the Board anything further regarding that matter, but he did request that the Board please be patient until the end of the year. (S&S Construction) I am waiting for an update.

c. Aviagen.

Update: EDGE Grant completed and closed out with the State (inspection of records).

We are now awaiting the DCA Division Director's signature on the formal closeout letter. As soon as she signs, they will contact me to schedule an appointment to walk me through formally closing the award in GrAAM.

Also, agreement between the BCDA, Aviagen and Tax Board has been completed from our end. Waiting on final copies from Aviagen to be filed with the Court.

d. **SAM.gov.**

After two years of frustration, inquiries, unanswered calls and unsuccessful attempts, we have finally moved beyond the hurdle of authentication on the SAM.gov federal site, and we can finally begin to apply for grants/loans.

Additionally, Jayme and I have recently completed comprehensive training in the most current grant writing concepts to sharpen our skills. To the best of my knowledge, the County has no grant writers on staff. The current average salary of a full-time, employed grant writer in the State of Georgia is \$51,000/year while individual fees can vary from \$500 to \$2000+ per grant application, depending on a variety of factors and excluding any associated costs for pre-application peer reviews. As Jayme and I are both qualified to write and review grants, we save the Authority and its taxpayers additional costs while providing a valuable service to the Authority and the community we serve.

New Business

Chairman Yearby moved to New Business.

a. **Bylaws and Organization of the Board.**

Williams stated that the purpose of the Bylaws is to hold accountable those who represent the Authority as well as maintain the integrity of the Authority through transparency and accountability. Williams also stated that Tyler Hart had expressed his desire to move the meetings to workday hours and that John LaHood had also supported that in a discussion. Williams also stated that many other EDA's also hold meetings during regular business hours, and that it was more feasible for those with families but who also wish to serve the community. Chairman Yearby and Jack Harrell defended the establishment of having evening meetings, and that if a person wishes to serve the community, then they need to make arrangements (excluding the occasional extenuating circumstances) or not volunteer for a position to serve on the Board.

Mr. Yearby expanded on accountability and showing up to monthly meetings or resign so that another person has the opportunity to serve. If not, the Board will have to make a recommendation for removal/replacement.

Terms for Jack Harrell, Districts 2, and Doc Marie Horne, District 6 are up for renewal/replacement December 31, 2023. Marie Horne expressed her desire to continue to serve on the Board. Jack Harrell noted his desire to resign at the end of his term (December 31, 2023).

John LaHood presented the BCDA District Map and asked if there was a "better map" available. Williams stated that the map is the Georgia militia district map, and it is the same map that Commissioners Folsom and Maxwell had presented her with in 2019, before being appointed to the Development Authority Board in January 2020. LaHood state that there must be a better map somewhere, to which Williams agreed but she has been unable to locate it. Williams also stated that she had previously contacted the County Administrator with an idea to hire a college intern to generate a new map using ArcGIS software, wherein the accuracy could be pinpointed down to latitude and longitude throughout the county. Additionally, Graduate interns are cost-efficient, and since Williams is familiar with the software and datasets, she offered to assist, if needed. Williams stated that she never received a reply; therefore, there is no updated map.

E.D. Williams asked the Chairman if she needed to run an ad, to which he replied with an affirmative.

b. **IP Mowing contract.**

Per the terms of the contract, the agreement with Driftin' South Lawn & Landscape for the mowing and maintenance for the Brooks County Industrial Park expires December 31, 2023. Previously, with Anthony Scale Company, the Board elected to renew the services of Mr. Cashwell for one additional year before re-opening the contract up for bid.

Williams discussed that Mr. Justin Smith had done an exceptional job and requested no price adjustment, should the Board wish to continue his services; but he had one request. He stated that during the rainy months, the grass/shrubbery grew exceptionally fast and that the new contract have an additional optional mowing, to be utilized only at the discretion of the Board. The purpose for this 6th optional mowing is to prevent overgrowth and to protect the investment of the Industrial Park through proper maintenance.

Erin McKenzie made a motion to renew the contract with Driftin' South Lawn & Landscape for the mowing and maintenance for the Brooks County Industrial Park for an additional year (2024) to include a sixth optional mowing at the discretion of the Board. Agreed compensation for the five mowings remains at \$25,270.00 with an additional optional mowing at a set agreed amount of an additional \$5,054.00. Seconded by Ulysses Marable; unanimously approved.

The contractor will be notified, and a new contract drawn up for 2024.

c. **Project NOW**

Mr. Murphy had approached the EDA with a project, confidential in nature, which he had previously approached the BCDA around 2009. The initial meeting was set at a restaurant in town wherein Williams, Coody, a local pastor and two of Murphy's colleagues all attended during lunch hours. This particular project was not one, but multiple projects, all interlinked. Williams asked for clarification as to whether this was one or four companies. Murphy stated that they were four separate companies and inquired about a piece of property that is currently owned and utilized by another industry, as well as a piece of property that is owned by a private citizen. As is common, Williams requested business plans for the potential industries to learn in what ways the EDA could assist. Meanwhile, Williams conducted preliminary research, which called several matters to attention and concern. Williams reached out to Chairman Derren Yearby and Treasurer Jack Harrell, to which Harrell requested that Williams not meet with Mr. Murphy again unless he was present. Williams complied with his request.

Two weeks later, on Nov. 10th, Mr. Murphy and his colleague, Mr. Harrell and Mrs. Williams met at the EDA office conference room. Murphy explained his ideas to Mr. Harrell, to which Mr. Harrell also requested business plans. After the meeting, Williams discussed with Mr. Harrell information specific to the history and research gathered by Williams. No further action is planned at this time, until the requested information is produced and reviewed.

d. **Project PG (Small Business)**

(Pawn & Gun) Looking for retail space (~4000 sq ft), preferably downtown, with room to expand. Capital already attained. Two successful locations- Madison, FL and Perry, GA.

e. **Project Serenity**

Project Serenity is a 36+ acre development of a spa in Brooks County. Additionally, this development is closely tied to the expansion of another industry in Brooks County. I am eager to provide updates as they come.

f. **Project Goldstar (Small Business)**

Project Goldstar was referred to UGA Small Business Development and currently working on a business plan.

g. **Project Rainbow**

Cap investment: ~900M; ~310 jobs

Inquired with MEAG Power in 2022 regarding the energy load capacity for another potential prospect. I was informed that Quitman was years away from being able to meet the load requirements. I emailed MEAG Power November 10, 2023, regarding the energy capacity to see if there has been any advancement, as this is one of the preliminary requirements of this client.

I was informed by MEAG that there is less than 40MVA available on the system near the Industrial Park today and that there is not enough capacity to meet the demand of the customer.

Even from an initial review, I could also hypothesize that the City of Quitman cannot meet the wastewater requirements at this time as well. I informed the Project Manager that we currently cannot meet the needs of the client but that we appreciated considering Brooks County in their search.

h. **Project Star**

Received a call a couple days before the hurricane and scheduled to meet with them, but they cancelled due to the storm. \$1.5B cap investment; looking for 200+ acres; GRAD certified land; 300 jobs by Y1, 500 jobs by Y3. I was told they would be back the following week wherein after they visited Brooks County, we never heard back from them -despite follow up calls and emails.

i. **Project Rhino**

~\$750M cap investment; looking for roughly 200 acres with rail access; room for a 1-2M Sq Ft building; ~1000 jobs by 2029.

Current preliminary requirements:

Water Requirements: 600,000 – 700,000 gallons per day

Wastewater: 425,000 gallons per day, 10,000 mg/L BOD, 1,150 mg/L TSS

Gas : Gas hookup available (usage TBD)

I emailed Lola Slydell, Interim City Manager, on 11/9/2023, to request the current load capacity for water, wastewater, energy and water pressure in the Industrial Park, specifically asking for water pressure of the fire hydrants as well as date they were last flushed/maintained.

1. Energy load capacity: 69 kV
2. Wastewater capacity per day: 250,000
3. Water Capacity per day: 200,000
4. Water pressure in the Industrial Park: 58 psi (static)

Mrs. Williams reported on conferences of other communities like ours, the TWO common reasons so many communities have taken decades to move forward are a lack of vision and politics.

Small business: Per Jayme, after multiple conversations between a local property owner regarding several possible small business prospects, she has met a brick wall. She has either told “we don’t need another store like that” or “we don’t need that here”, turning away several businesses looking to locate or expand in Quitman, Brooks County.

We know the problems. We need solutions.

We need to generate revenue. Since Jayme and I are ready to begin seeking grants/loans on behalf of the Authority, we need direction. We need workforce housing, business incubators, and possibly updating the infrastructure to support the industrial park. What is the first priority? It is the conviction of the Executive Director that the first priority should be reenforcing the infrastructure in the Industrial Park, to which the Board agreed.

Marie Horne mentioned that she has a recording of the overflow of the infrastructure on her property on March 26, 2023.

J. Project Dundee

Preliminary meeting held with this prospect first week of Nov, with more to follow. Multiple companies in 4 countries and looking to relocate headquarters to Georgia, possibly Brooks Co. Seems promising- Could be an opportunity for Brooks County. Will follow up as information unfolds.

Executive Session

Erin McKenzie motioned to go into Executive Session; seconded by Marie Horne; unanimously approved. Marie Horne motioned to go back into Regular Session; seconded by Ulyssess Marable; unanimously approved.

Marie Horne motioned to approve the Christmas bonuses for the Executive Director and Director of Small Business Development; seconded by Tyler Hart; unanimously approved.

Reports

Stephanie Williams, Executive Director

i. Economic Development:

Nextera: Quitman Solar- Code Enforcement has issued a citation for noise. Williams was asked to be present in court, as she has knowledge from previous communication with Nextera's hired staff regarding the noise. The case was continued, and to the best of Williams' information, knowledge and belief, the noise was reported from the inverters, not the panels, and that the company wanted to avoid particular language in the agreement, particularly relating to the noise, noise pollution and mitigation. E.D. Williams also noted that Mrs. Peg Howard, a local resident and complainant of the solar facility's noise and proximity to her residence, has successfully appealed her property taxes for the last two years, with this coming year (2024) being more than likely the third consecutive year. The value of her personal property has lost value based on "economic obsolescence due to the location of an industrial facility." Due to the laws of equalization in taxation, this could potentially wreak havoc on communities where current and/or future-planned solar facilities are spread apart and taxes continue to rise. The precedent has already been established. Regarding the citation, the case is ongoing, but it was relayed to the E.D. that they "are making progress" toward resolution.

ii. Workforce Development:

ECHOES: Williams and Coody have developed a 27-week program for College and Career Readiness, which they teach from 3:30-4:30 every Monday afternoon to juniors and seniors at the Brooks County High School. Williams outlined a series of goals with Mrs. Melissa Alexander- ECHOES Coordinator, created surveys for both the EDA and BOE as well as utilized the Heart & Soul survey to gain maximum insight into our future workforce. Our class has garnered attention from administration and educators who regularly sit in on the classes, and we have learned a multitude of things from our students to help our current leaders as we move forward toward a common vision for our community.

iii. Community Development:

Community Heart & Soul: Thus far, we've generated 177 responses, and \$4311.95 for in-kind matches from grant applications. We are working on a sustainability plan, and there may be an adjustment to the financials to separate the CH&S into separate GL codes for transparency and reporting purposes.

- iv. **Quarterly Economic Development Summit, December 1st (9am-12noon)**
Location: Brooks County Board of Education

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