**NEWPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**Tuesday, December 10, 2024**

**7:00 A.M.**

**Business Resource Center**

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Chairman Dean Sides, Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr., Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner, Benjy Harris, Dr. Johnny Moore, and Lee Scoggins.

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT**

Scott Foushee, Nyesha Greer, and Tommy Okada.

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Others present were NEDC Executive Director Jon Chadwell, Director of Chamber Affairs Julie Allen, Director of Workforce Christel Taylor, Assistant Director of Business and Financial Services Crystal Fulmer, and Mayor Derrick Ratliffe.

**OPEN MEETING**

Chairman Dean Sides opened the meeting.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr. made a motion to accept the minutes from November, with a second by Dr. Johnny Moore, motion carried.

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

Director Chadwell presented the financial report for November. Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner made a motion to accept the financial statements for November with a second from Lee Scoggins, motion carried.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

* Sales Tax Update
* Obligations Update
* A-State Greyhound Childcare Development Center
* Granges
* ASUN Board of Visitors

**DIRECTOR OF CHAMBER AFFAIRS REPORT**

* Newport Christmas Parade, December 12
* Retail Merchants Shop Til You Drop Promotion
* Tech Depot Open House, December 18
* New Vision Newport at Unity Health, City Hall, Courthouse, January 9,2025
* Newport’s 150th Birthday

**CHAMBER BUDGET**

Julie Allen, Director of the Newport Area Chamber of Commerce, reported that the Chamber had a successful year in 2024, hosting twelve ribbon-cutting events and maintaining a thriving membership base with over 200 members representing 370 individuals. The Chamber's financial account balances were presented to the commission, covering categories such as the General Fund, Depot Days, Scholarships, Scholarship Trust CDs, New Vision Newport, and Retail Merchants. Additionally, the proposed slate of officers for the 2025 Chamber Board of Directors was introduced. The Chamber provides support for Travel and Meals, Community Development initiatives, continuing education, hotel accommodations, civic club memberships, and country club dues for Jon and Julie.

**RENEWPORT GRANTS**

Arkansas Center for Independence, located at 1001 Malcolm Avenue in Newport, has requested a ReNewport grant to help with window repairs and painting. The total cost is $5,500.00 and the ReNewport grant would be responsible for $2,500. Jim Gowen Sr. made the motion to approve the ReNewport Grant with a second from Benjy Harris, motion carried.

**CALENDARS FOR 2025**

Jon Chadwell is working on and will present the commission with a staff schedule calendar and a Tech Depot calendar for 2025.

**VIDEO PROJECT UPDATE**

Think Studios has been selected to produce high-resolution marketing videos and photos for Jackson County. These materials will be versatile, serving as valuable assets for social media and broader marketing campaigns. Key supporters of the project include Southwest Steel, the Arkansas Department of Corrections, Greenway, and First Community Bank. To proceed, the project requires commitments from a total of ten businesses.

**CHILDCARE FACILITY**

Improvements to the A-State Greyhound Child Development Center are well underway, with a target opening date of January 15. The City of Newport and Jackson County are collaborating to pave sidewalks for the facility, enhancing accessibility. A-State has invested $150,000 in new furniture to outfit the daycare, ensuring a high-quality environment for children. Additionally, the Newport Economic Development Commission (NEDC) has contributed $11,500 toward critical renovations, including the construction of walls, installation of sinks and child-sized toilets, and repainting.

**12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS FOR AEDC/ADFA**

The **12 Days of Christmas** is a marketing campaign designed to showcase and promote businesses in Newport and to share facts about Newport’s economic development resources and activities. This initiative is presented to the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) and the Arkansas Development Finance Authority (ADFA). Locally purchased gifts are used to highlight key Newport facts. Each day of the campaign, a recipient from AEDC or ADFA is selected to receive a gift, accompanied by an email announcement that is shared with all participants. These announcements include facts about Newport, further promoting the community and its unique attributes.

**INDUSTRIAL SITE IMPROVEMENTS GRANT**

Governor Sanders will be presenting an Industrial Site Improvements Grants tomorrow and doing photos for a press release. Director Jon Chadwell, Commissioner Benjy Harris, Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr. and Jackson County Judge Jeff Phillips will be in attendance.

**DRIVESMART UPDATE**

Miller-Newell is finalizing the necessary forms for submission of the EDA Grant. The goal is to have the bidding process advertised by Christmas.

**RETAIL ACADEMY**

Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, and Christel Taylor participated in the Retail Academy Program in Conway, where Newport was one of only six communities selected, out of twenty-six, to collaborate with Retail Strategies. Upcoming attendance at the ICSC conference in Dallas this January will provide opportunities to connect with quick-service restaurants and potential new retailers, further advancing economic development efforts for Newport.

**75 STRONG**

**75 Strong** is a three-year program in Arkansas aimed at bolstering the state's economy by fostering entrepreneurship. Participants, including economic developers, community leaders, and university representatives, will receive specialized training and certification to become **Entrepreneurial Development Professionals (EDP).** Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, Christel Taylor, and a representative from ASU-Newport have submitted applications to participate in this impactful program.

**INDUSTRIAL GREENHOUSE**

The industrial greenhouse project is currently awaiting renovation estimates from FARCO.

**TECH DEPOT EVENTS**

Despite the holiday season, Tech Depot remains active. A room has been reserved for depositions on three separate days this week. Additionally, an **Excel Level I** class is scheduled for tomorrow, with a follow-up session planned for next week. Looking ahead, the **Christmas Open House** will take place on December 18, followed by a **blood drive** for the American Red Cross on December 19. In January, the Arkansas Department of Corrections (ADC) will launch a new training academy at Tech Depot.

**NEW DOWNTOWN PARKING LOT**

The parking lot on Third and Laurel will start in Spring of 2025.

**NEW EV CHARGING STATION**

Entergy is installing a Level 3 rapid charger in the Tech Depot parking lot. Entergy will maintain the charger. The NEDC gave an easement for access to install and maintain the charger.

**P3 GROUP HOUSING UPDATE**

The Newport School District, Miller-Newell, and P3 have begun planning for a new subdivision near Newport Elementary School. The proposed development includes up to 116 quarter-acre lots, with three located in a floodplain that can be excluded if necessary. The preliminary plan will be presented to the Newport School Board for approval.

**PROJECT CLIPPINGS**

Project Clippings would employ 25 to 30 individuals.

**PROSPECT RICE STRAW**

Prospect Rice Straw is continuing to work with Summit Utilities.

**PROJECT JUNIOR VARSITY**

Project Junior Varsity is looking for a suitable site.

**PROSPECT CRUSH**

Prospect Crush needs an air permit.

**PROSPECT SPLICE**

Prospect Splice is a biotech project. The prospect is encouraging Director Chadwell to fly to Boston to look at their existing facility.

**PROSPECT CHAR**

Prospect Char is moving forward.

**PROSPECT SAVE**

Prospect Save is a local industry that Jon Chadwell is assisting currently.

**PROJECT SCOOBY DOO**

Project Scooby Doo is mysterious, and Director Chadwell is answering their questions currently.

**ADJOURNED**

Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr. made a motion to adjourn the meeting with a second from Lee Scoggins, meeting adjourned.