**NEWPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**Tuesday, February 11, 2025**

**7:00 A.M.**

**Business Resource Center**

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr., Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner, Tommy Okada, Benjy Harris, Scott Foushee, and Nyesha Greer.

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT**

Chairman Dean Sides, Dr. Johnny Moore, and Lee Scoggins.

**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, Joe Dupree, Mark Harmon, Charles Walker, and Mayor Derrick Ratliffe.

**OPEN MEETING**

Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr. opened the meeting.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Commissioner Benjy Harris made a motion to accept the minutes from January, with a second by Scott Foushee, motion carried.

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

Director Chadwell presented the financial report for January. $4,738.62 from the medical marijuana settlement was used for Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, and Christel Taylor to attend ICSC for retail recruitment for Newport. Director Chadwell presented the current obligations and updated the commission on sales tax collections. Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner made a motion to accept the financial statements for January with a second from Nyesha Greer, motion carried.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

* Representative Wayne Long
* Senator Ron Caldwell
* Newport Raceway

**DIRECTOR OF CHAMBER AFFAIRS REPORT**

* New Vision Newport
* Sesquicentennial, April 5
* Newport Area Chamber Banquet/Luncheon, February 28
* Pot of Gold, April 11
* 75 Strong
* ESO Summit
* Retail Academy

**RENEWPORT GRANTS**

Grady’s Electrical, Heating & Air, and Construction located at 827 Malcolm, in Newport, has requested a ReNewport grant to help with painting the front cap on the building, new exterior door and awning. The total cost is $4,947.00 and the ReNewport grant would be responsible for $2,473.50. Benjy Harris made the motion to approve the ReNewport Grant with a second from Mike Turner, motion carried.

**HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT**

Miller Newell has finalized the proposed plans for a new subdivision on property owned by the Newport School District. The development will consist of 84 lots, approximately one-third of an acre. The subdivision will feature two entry points, and the first 30 lots must be sold before Phase II of the project begins. The estimated cost for the necessary infrastructure could be as much as $400,000. To support this, Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner made a motion to allocate $250,000 for infrastructure expenses, which was seconded by Benjy Harris, motion carried.

**UPDATE ON NEWPORT POLICE DEPARTMENT SECURITY CAMERAS**

Mayor Derrick Ratliffe and Mark Harmon provided the commission with an update on the new license plate reader cameras installed in Newport. Additionally, residents of the Galeria Subdivision have purchased two additional cameras for their neighborhood. Mark Harmon also presented an update on current crime statistics for Newport.

**ICSC RETAIL RECRUITMENT TRIP**

Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, and Christel Taylor attended the ICSC conference in Dallas to promote retail recruitment opportunities for Newport. Several businesses expressed interest in the community.

**AGRICULTURE ROUNDTABLE**

Tech Depot hosted an Agriculture Roundtable to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges facing the farming industry today. Key concerns among farmers include H-2A labor issues and the impact of tariffs, particularly in light of the evolving political landscape. The next roundtable will focus on discussions with religious leaders.

**TECH DEPOT UPDATE**

The Arkansas Department of Corrections is hosting its training academy this week at Tech Depot, with 29 cadets participating in the six-week program. Additionally, the Transitioning from Recovery to Employment class has resumed and is now in its third week. Tech Depot will also host training sessions for Scott Petroleum, FARCO, Final Cut Pro Software, and Excel 1.

**CHILDCARE FACILITY UPDATE**

The A-State Greyhound Child Development Center is scheduled to open on March 1. A director has been hired, along with three teachers. Student enrollment will increase as additional staff members are brought on board.

**DRIVESMART UPDATE**

All paperwork has been submitted for the DriveSmart Grant. Director Chadwell has talked with White River Planning and Development on the status of the EDA Grant. Disaster Recovery Grants are currently on hold.

**75 STRONG**

Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, John Twyford, and Christel Taylor have been accepted into the 75 **Strong Program**. The official announcement is expected soon. They will attend the first **ESO Seminar** on February 17-18.

**INDUSTRIAL GREENHOUSE**

Director Chadwell has three prospects for the Industrial Greenhouse. FARCO still needs to submit an estimate for repairs.

**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.

**NEW DOWNTOWN PARKING LOT**

Director Jon Chadwell is reviewing the status of the **DRA Grant** for the parking lot to determine whether it falls under the recent grant freeze.

**NEW EV CHARGING STATION**

The new Level Three EV Chargers are up and running.

**P3 GROUP HOUSING UPDATE**

Once the Newport School Board approves the plans for the new subdivision, P3 will begin. The school board votes on February 18.

**VERIZON CELL TOWER**

Verizon is looking at its fourth location here in Newport.

**WALGREENS CLOSURE**

Walgreens announced yesterday that 27 stores will be closed in Arkansas including the Newport location. It is set to close between March 17 – March 27.

**PROJECT CLIPPINGS**

Project Clippings has leased the whole General Cable building.

**PROSPECT RICE STRAW**

Prospect Rice Straw has submitted a letter of intent to purchase 13 to 14 additional acres.

**PROJECT JUNIOR VARSITY**

Project Junior Varsity is a chemical company and will need a half a mile radius around the property.

**PROSPECT CRUSH**

Prospect Crush has signed a letter of intent.

**PROSPECT SPLICE**

Prospect Splice is not fruitful.

**PROSPECT CHAR**

Prospect Char is affiliated with an existing industry and moving forward.

**PROSPECT SAVE**

Prospect Save is a local industry that may be purchased to pursue expansion.

**PROJECT MAGIC DRAGON**

Project Magic Dragon is someone looking to purchase Revolution.

**PROJECT SCOOBY DOO**

Project Scooby Doo is a cryptocurrency company looking at the Industrial Greenhouse.

**PROSPECT CURRENCY BEAR**

Prospect Currency Bear is a cryptocurrency company.

**PROSPECT FRESH AT HOME**

Prospect Fresh at Home is looking at the former KFC Building.

**PROSPECT SMOCO**

Prospect Smoco has submitted its plans to the City of Newport. The other tenants at the location want improvements to parking facilities before plans go forward.

**ADJOURNED**

Mike Turner made a motion to adjourn the meeting with a second from Scott Foushee, meeting adjourned.