**NEWPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**Tuesday, May 13, 2025**

**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, Scott Foushee, Hiro Kado, and Lee Scoggins.

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT**

Nyesha Greer.

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Others present were NEDC Executive Director Jon Chadwell, Director of Chamber Affairs Julie Allen, Director of Workforce Christel Taylor, Charles Walker, and Mayor Derrick Ratliffe.

**OPEN MEETING**

Chairman Dean Sides opened the meeting and welcomed Hiro Kado to the commission.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Lee Scoggins made a motion to accept the minutes from April, with a second by Jim Gowen Sr., motion carried.

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

Director Chadwell presented the financial report for April. Tech Depot received a grant from Apprenticely in the amount of just over $6,000. A ReNewport Grant was awarded to Ace of Fades for $1,478.30 for signage. The Sales Tax Report and Obligations were supplied to the commission for review. Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner made a motion to accept the financial statements for April with a second from Jim Gowen Sr., motion carried.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

* Cryptocurrency Legislation
* Rural Planning and Development
* Summit Energy
* Arkansas Economic Development Commission

**DIRECTOR OF CHAMBER AFFAIRS REPORT**

* 75 Strong IEDC Training
* Chamber Board Meeting, May 20
* Retail Academy, June 2
* Community Development Class Director, July 28-August 1
* AEDCE Annual Conference

**RENEWPORT GRANTS**

None

**COMMISSIONER REAPPOINTMENTS/APPOINTMENTS**

Hiro Kado of Arkansas Steel has been appointed to the Newport Economic Development Commission, with a term ending May 6, 2030. Additionally, Benjy Harris and Dr. Johnny Moore have been reappointed to the commission, with their terms also set to expire on May 6, 2030.

**COMMISSIONER TERMS**

Commissioners Scott Foushee, Lee Scoggins, and Dean Sides are serving terms that will expire on April 14, 2026. Commissioners Jim Gowen Sr., Mike Turner, and Nyesha Greer are serving terms that will expire on April 13, 2027.

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE**

Director Jon Chadwell will be attending the Rural Development Conference in Little Rock, May 20 – 22.

**REMOTE ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Due to new legislation a remote attendance policy is required. Commissioner Lee Scoggins made a motion to not allow remote attendance with a second by Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner, motion carried.

**HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Commission held a discussion regarding the development of guidelines for housing infrastructure support. Jon presented a preliminary set of guidelines for consideration, including suggestions such as offering a forgivable loan grant and establishing a minimum requirement of 30 houses to be built within an acceptable timeline. The Commission requested that Director Chadwell begin drafting a formal set of guidelines for review and potential revision. Discussions on this matter are ongoing.

**ADVISORY COUNCIL CONCEPT**

The Commission discussed the potential establishment of an advisory council to provide input and strategic recommendations to the Newport Economic Development Commission. After discussion the Commissions requested that they have a month to consider various aspects of the advisory council and reconsider next month.

**LEGISLATION – INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS**

New legislation may facilitate the creation of an Industrial Development District, which could serve as a catalyst for economic growth within the county. This designation would act as a precursor to establishing an Economic Development District, which could provide tools such as property tax abatements to support housing and retail development.

**ICSC RETAIL RECRUITMENT UPDATE**

Jon Chadwell reported having three prospective leads as a result of attending the ICSC conference in Dallas. While the process is progressing slowly, the outcomes so far are promising.

**ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT UPDATE**

The third and final reading of the ordinance establishing an entertainment district in downtown Newport is scheduled for the June City Council meeting. Several supporters are expected to attend and speak in favor of the district. As proposed, designated cups will be sold for use within the district, and individuals will be required to use these cups when consuming beverages in public areas.

**75 STRONG**

Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, and Christel Taylor will be attending class for the 75 Strong Program. The class will be May 13 – 15th.

**TECH DEPOT UPDATE**

Tech Depot has been active recently, serving as a host site for Advanced Placement (AP) testing for Newport High School and providing support for the Arkansas Department of Corrections. Additionally, Tech Depot was awarded just over $6,000 in a grant from Apprenticely to support its ongoing workforce and training initiatives.

**DRIVESMART UPDATE**

The bidding process for the renovation of the Business Resource Center for DriveSmart is set to begin on May 20 at 10:00 a.m. The project has been publicly advertised, and site walkthroughs have already been completed in preparation for the bid opening.

**INDUSTRIAL GREENHOUSE**

The Commission is considering selling the Industrial Greenhouse in its current condition, prior to undertaking any significant renovations. The Bond Board has received two purchase offers; however, both have been below the expected value.

**P3 GROUP HOUSING UPDATE**

P3 is currently developing the preliminary cost estimate for Phase I of the new housing development. This phase will include the construction of 39 residential lots and the installation of a new pump station to support the development’s infrastructure needs.

**VERIZON CELL TOWER**

A new Verizon cell tower will be constructed on Hodges Street. The City of Newport will generate revenue through a land lease agreement, receiving $750 per month in lease payments.

**PROSPECT SMOCO**

Project Smoco has been notified that the former McDonald’s building has been demolished, and the site is now available for purchase.

**PROSPECT RICE STRAW**

Prospect Rice Straw is collaborating with Summit Utilities to secure a natural gas supply for their operations. The planned natural gas line upgrade is estimated to cost $1.7 million. Summit Utilities has indicated the project could be completed within 120 days and is expected to create approximately 75 jobs.

**PROSPECT FRESH AT HOME**

Prospect Fresh at Home is looking at two locations in Newport.

**ADJOURNED**

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