**NEWPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**Thursday, November 14, 2024**

**7:00 A.M.**

**Business Resource Center**

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Chairman Dean Sides, Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner, Benjy Harris, Scott Foushee, Nyesha Greer, Dr. Johnny Moore, Tommy Okada, and Lee Scoggins.

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT**

Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr.

**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, Charles Walker, and Mayor Derrick Ratliffe.

**OPEN MEETING**

Chairman Dean Sides opened the meeting.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

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

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

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

**EXECUTIVE SESSION – 2024 EMPLOEE REVIEW**

Commissioner Lee Scoggins made a motion to go into executive session at 7:16 a.m. for the purpose of staff review with a second from Nyesha Greer, motion carried. Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner made a motion to go back into session at 7:25 a.m. with a second by Benjy Harris, motion carried.

**2024 EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION**

Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner made a motion for Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, and Christel Taylor to receive a raise the same as city employees at either 3% or 5%. A 3% raise would increase the salaries as follows: Christel Taylor, $39,520.00 to $40,705.60; Julie Allen, $54,000.00 to $55,620.00, and Jon Chadwell, $150,000 to $154,500.00. Crystal Whitmire salary to go from $16 to $16.25 with a second by Lee Scoggins, motion carried.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

* Rural Innovation Network
* Alexander Johnson, Terminus Technology
* Paola Lopez, Serve2Perform
* Jim Gowen Jr.
* Mayor Derrick Ratliffe, HBCU

**DIRECTOR OF CHAMBER AFFAIRS REPORT**

* Chamber Board Elections
* Trashiest Team
* St. Bernard’s Pregnancy Clinic Ribbon Cutting, November 18
* New Vision Newport, December 3
* Festival of Trees Fundraisers
* Shop Til You Drop Promotion
* Unity Health Reception for Zack Goldman, December 9
* Newport Christmas Parade, December 12

**RENEWPORT GRANTS**

Taylor and Kimbrough Funeral Home located at 113 Clay Street in Newport, has requested a ReNewport grant to help with signage, landscaping, painting, and the removal of old materials. The total cost is $5,675.00 and the ReNewport grant would be responsible for $2,500. Lee Scoggins made the motion to approve the ReNewport Grant with a second from Nyesha Greer, motion carried.

**CHILDCARE FACILITY**

The Newport Economic Development Commission allocated $25,000 for construction for the A-State Greyhound Child Development Center. The improvements are being made by Jason Thomas for $900 per day for the crew plus expenses. To date expenses total $7,600. The facility is looking to open in January.

**DRIVESMART UPDATE**

Miller-Newell has building plans for the Business Resource Center which DriveSmart will lease. The plans will be submitted to EDA and hopefully construction will begin in January.

**RETAIL ACADEMY**

Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, and Christel Taylor attended the Retail Academy Program in Conway. Out of twenty-six communities Newport was chosen as one of six to work with Retail Strategies, which previously helped locate the Cobblestone Hotel in Newport.

**75 STRONG**

75 Strong is a three-year program in Arkansas that is designed to strengthen the state’s economy by supporting entrepreneurship. Economic developers, community leaders, and university representatives will receive training and certification to become Entrepreneurial Development Professionals or EDP certification. Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, Christel Taylor, and a representative from ASU-Newport have applied.

**B2SCALE GRANT WITH CORI**

Jon Chadwell has completed the Build to Scale Grant and it has been submitted. If received the grant total is $2,577,947.08. The match can be in-kind. So, the maximum cash match would be $302,040.45.

**GEN4JETS**

Garrett Lassiter has closed on the property at the airbase for Gen4Jets. The commission voted on an Industry Grant for $75,000 up front and another $75,000 upon closing and that has been completed.

**INDUSTRIAL GREENHOUSE**

Wayne Menley has asked FARCO for bids on the renovations to the Industrial Greenhouse. The Greenhouse is being marketed on the state website for rent of $15,000 a month.

**TECH DEPOT EVENTS**

Training and attendance continue to increase at Tech Depot. Training attendance mirrors the demographics for the population of Newport as to race and gender.

**NEW DOWNTOWN PARKING LOT**

The Delta Regional Authority has approved a grant for the City of Newport in the amount of $378,000 for the parking lot on Third and Laurel. The parking lot will accommodate 40-42 parking spaces. The total match for this project is $40,000.

**P3 GROUP HOUSING UPDATE**

The new housing subdivision that is a partnership between Newport School District and the P3 Housing Group, is finalizing plans to make best use of the land for maximized housing.

**PROJECT CLIPPINGS**

The General Cable building located at the airbase has a third of the building leased to Bad Boy Mowers. Prospect Clippings is looking at leasing the rest of the building.

**PROSPECT RICE STRAW**

Prospect Rice Straw and Summit Utilities are looking to upgrade the gas line for usage. Director Jon Chadwell is looking to see if Community Development Block Grant Funds are available.

**PROJECT JUNIOR VARSITY**

Project Junior Varsity is a joint project and both parties are looking to see if the project is feasible. The project would likely involve a property swap.

**PROSPECT CRUSH**

Prospect Crush has signed a letter of intent on the old Southern Oil Cotton site. The project will move forward once permits have been granted.

**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 a new venture that would put a plant with new technology in Jackson County. The facility would employ 30 to 40.

**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. A confidentiality agreement will most likely be in place.

**ADJOURNED**

Lee Scoggins made a motion to adjourn the meeting with a second from Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner, meeting adjourned.