

**MINUTES
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
430 HELIX ROAD
GREENWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA
FEBRUARY 26, 2024**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Diane Anderson, Jackie Brown, John Calhoun, Jim Coleman, Frank Daniel, Ken Durham, Qwen Etheredge, Charles Goodwin, Otis Grier Jr., Charles Jennings, Wes McAllister, Marian Miller, Matthew Miller, Sen. Floyd Nicholson, Willie Norman, Ernie Segars, Brandon Smith, Albert Talbert, Faye Thomas and David Tribble.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Charlie Henry, Tiffani Ireland, Theo Lane, Sen. Shane Massey, Miliken Matthews, Randy Randall, David Sawyer, Roy Smith Jr., Don Smoak, and Sen. Danny Verdin.

STAFF PRESENT: Patricia Hartung, Sam Leaman, Rick Green, Melissa Phillips, Keith Smith, Kal Kunkel, David Hays

GUEST PRESENT: Kirsten Lackstrom, S.C. Office of Resilience Palmetto Air Quality Collaborative Program Manager; Hope Warren, Resilience Planning Program Manager; Kevin McLaughlin, SCDOT District 2 Administrator; Susan Jackson, Senator Jeff Duncan’s office; Christina Lewis, Statewide Planning Chief, SCDOT.

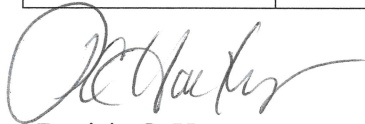
Call to Order	<p>The meeting was held in person with the option to attend via conference call. Willie Norman gave the invocation and Chairman Albert Talbert called the meeting to order.</p> <p>The October 23, 2023, minutes were approved unanimously.</p>
<p>Guest Presentations: South Carolina Office of Resilience “Palmetto Air Quality Collaborative”</p> <p>Watershed Planning Initiatives</p>	<p>Resilience Planning Program Manager Hope Warren gave overview of the S.C. Office of Resilience. She said the office was created as a result of the 2015 flood when grant money was available to repair and replace homes, and also due to 2016 and 2018 hurricanes Matthew and Florence. In 2018, the Governor started the Floodwater Commission to study how to recover from disasters which led to the creation of the Office of Resilience. She said the definition of resilience is the ability for communities, economies, and ecosystems to anticipate, absorb, recover and thrive when presented with environmental changes and natural hazards. Warren said the office is responsible for developing the Statewide Resilience Plan which was completed in June 2023. The Office is also responsible for helping fund projects that include buyouts of homes affected by hurricane flooding and turning into greenspace, public infrastructure projects to reduce future flood risks, and developing plans and studies to identify potential flood reduction projects.</p> <p>S.C. Office of Resilience Palmetto Air Quality Collaborative (PACQ) Program Manager Kirsten Lackstrom gave the Board details about the PACQ. The program was established by the Inflation Reduction Act in August 2022 and is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The focus of the program is to help states and metropolitan areas develop plans to address greenhouse gas emissions and other air quality issues. She said the Office is in Phase I of its planning grant.</p>

	<p>The Office will complete the S.C. Climate Action Plan by Friday, March 1, she said. The PACQ is focusing on innovative strategies to reduce greenhouse gases and other pollutants in SC. Greenhouse gases come from burning fossil fuels for energy production, vehicles, and landfills. The PACQ will need collaboration between COGs, local governments, private and public sector, and non-profit organizations. Lackstrom said the benefits will be cleaner air, improved public health, economic growth, and taking advantage of new technological innovations coming to industries in South Carolina.</p> <p>Implementation grant applications are due April 1, 2024. The EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program is offering competitive grants for states, regional agencies and municipalities to implement reduction measures and plans. Phase I of the CPRG provided states with \$3 million and metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) with \$1 million. Phase II will provide \$4.6 billion nationwide in competitive implementation grants.</p> <p>Warren gave overview of the Watershed Planning Initiative, which will allow communities to identify major flood risks in their areas and develop programs to reduce vulnerability. The Initiative will prioritize projects, programs and policies geared toward improving community and ecosystem resilience. She said the Office will be hiring watershed coordinators, including one in the Upper Savannah Region for the Saluda River Basin.</p>
<p>SC Brownfields Environmental Site Testing (SC BEST) Program Update</p>	<p>Government Services Director Rick Green discussed the SCDHEC \$1 million Brownfields Environmental Site Testing (BEST) Program. Catawba COG is administering the program, allocating funding to each COG region in the State based on population. The Upper Savannah region is receiving approximately \$73,446. The funding allows for environmental testing of brownfields sites that could be used for future development. The brownfields site with contamination or perceived contamination can be owned by a city, town or county, or by a private owner who agrees to an assessment.</p> <p>Upper Savannah staff reviews all potential BEST program projects and then the projects must be approved by the Board. USCOG has submitted the most projects in the state, now including at least one in each county. Additional funds might be forthcoming for more BEST projects.</p> <p>Green said the Riverside Community Development Corporation in the Town of Saluda is pursuing a BEST project for the Riverside School site in hopes of turning into an activity center. A phase I environmental is needed. The BEST project application was approved upon motion by Jim Coleman, seconded by Floyd Nicholson. The approval gives the Upper Savannah Region 10 BEST projects.</p>
<p>Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) 2024-2033 Update</p>	<p>Green asked the Board to approve two parts of the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) 2024-2033 Update.</p> <p>Part A is an extension to the TIP financial statement which will include years through 2033.</p> <p>Part B is the addition of intersections to the Plan. Short Cut Road and U.S. 25 in</p>

	<p>Edgefield County, S.C. Highways 101 and 14 in Laurens County (Gray Court), and 25 Bypass and Sweetwater Road in Greenwood County are ongoing projects. New intersections added to the TIP include U.S. 25 and Bauskett Street in Edgefield County (near Pendarvis Chevrolet in Edgefield), S.C. 121 and Edisto Street in Edgefield County (near Triangle Restaurant in Johnston), and W. Cambridge Avenue and Mathis Road in Greenwood County (in City of Greenwood). The TIP was approved unanimously.</p>
<p>Community Development Block Grant Program Update</p>	<p>Community Development Director Keith Smith updated the Board on current Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) projects and applications to be submitted in April.</p> <p>Smith said there are 15 active CDBG projects in the Upper Savannah region totaling more than \$13.5 million and staff will apply for two more grants in the April funding round.</p> <p>The three new projects awarded in December 2023 include improvements to the Greenwood County DSS building, which needs new roof, HVAC, improved restrooms, asbestos abatement, ADA accessibility, lobby/waiting room improvements, flooring, lighting, repainting, and parking lot and safety improvements for a total project cost of \$1,462,787. Also, the City of Greenwood received funding for Waller Streetscape, including sidewalks, brick roadway, curbing, ADA accessibility, parking stall indicators, landscaping and outdoor seating for a total project cost of \$1,232,368. Also, the Town of Ninety Six is receiving CDBG funds to demolish the Ninety Six Mill Village Community Center. The Town wants to demolish structure and turn into greenspace. Estimated project cost is \$344,600.</p> <p>Smith updated the Board on current projects, including City of Abbeville Structure Demolitions, City of Abbeville Chestnut Street Park, City of Clinton Fire Truck Purchase, Town of Saluda North Main/West Church Streetscape, Greenwood County Mathews Mill Sewer Upgrade Phases I and II, Town of McCormick North Main/Augusta Streetscape, City of Greenwood Booker T. Washington Sewer Upgrade, Laurens County Highway 56/76 Sewer Upgrade, Laurens County Clinton-Joanna Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade, and Town of Ridge Spring Sewer Rehab.</p> <p>He said the Abbeville Structure Demolitions asbestos testing has been completed and project to demolish 12 structures will go out to bid in March 2024, Chestnut Street Park bids for playground equipment and other improvements will go out in April 2024, Clinton fire truck will arrive in June 2024, Saluda streetscape bid is awaiting approval from SC Department of Commerce, Mathews Mill Phase I is under construction, Mathews Mill Phase II construction will begin in April 2024, McCormick streetscape to include increased parking near Town Hall and a veteran’s memorial park is under construction, Booker T. Washington sewer bids will open March 13; Laurens 56/76 project is complete and awaits closeout, Clinton-Joanna WWTP upgrade construction has begun, and Ridge Spring sewer awaiting right of way acquisitions and bid approval.</p> <p>An application will be submitted on behalf of Laurens County for Clinton-Joanna Wastewater Treatment Plant Phase II for installation of a second 750,000 gallon holding tank. Also, an application will be submitted for Greenwood County Mathews Mill Sewer Upgrade Phase III.</p>

<p>Workforce Development Program Update</p>	<p>Workforce Development Director Kal Kunkel introduced himself to the Board. He replaced Ann Skinner, who has retired. Kunkel has 32 years of workforce development experience including with the U.S. Department of Labor, county government, public education and in the private sector and also served in the Navy, he said.</p> <p>Kunkel identified Cliff Stanley as a success story in the H-1B Rural Healthcare Grant program that was funded to fill a need for paramedics and emergency medical technicians in the Region. He completed his training in December 2023 and earned his Paramedic License in January 2024.</p> <p>He said workforce development staff has participated in Rapid Response activities to support 52 workers laid off at Ascend Performance Materials. A job fair has been planned for Ascend employees (March 5th and 7th from 8 – 11 a.m. at Piedmont Technical College, Greenwood campus) and some have already been interviewed and have job offers.</p> <p>Kunkel said the next Upper Savannah Regional Job Fair will be held March 21 at Piedmont Tech’s Medford Event Center. Eighty employers have signed up to participate so far. Staff has distributed more than 2,000 job fair flyers throughout the Region.</p> <p>Kunkel said 159 adults, dislocated workers and youth are currently enrolled at SC Works programs since July 1, 2023, and that 162 are in post-employment follow-ups. More than 1,000 job seekers (1,034) sought services at SC Works Centers throughout the Upper Savannah Region in January 2024.</p>
<p>FY 2023 Audit Review</p>	<p>Assistant Director Sam Leaman presented Upper Savannah’s financial audit report for FY 2023. During FY 2023, revenues exceeded expenditures by \$101,000. At year fiscal end, the fund balance was \$1,796,370. Leaman reviewed an audit summary document with the Board. He thanked Finance Director Melissa Phillips for her integral work on the Audit.</p>
<p>EDA Conflict of Interest Regulations for RLF Recipients</p>	<p>Leaman presented the EDA Conflict of Interest Regulations with Special Rules for RLF Recipients. Conflict of interest avoidance is a point of emphasis for EDA in all its programs. Part of the updated RLF Plan requires the Board to review these regulations annually. Reading from the regulations, he said, “in all dealings with the board, loan review committee and staff must avoid dealings that could create a conflict of interest. Those include an interested party (an employee or member of the board of directors or other governing board of the Recipient) receiving direct or indirect financial or personal benefits from the award of Investment Assistance or an RLF grant.” Leaman provided the Board with the specific excerpt from the Conflict of Interest section of the RLF Plan.</p>
<p>SC COGs Annual Training Conference Questionnaire and Executive Director’s Report</p>	<p>Executive Director Patricia C. Hartung discussed the SC COGs Annual Training Conference questionnaires which Board members received. The questionnaire seeks Board member preferences on if they want the conference to continue at Kingston Plantation in North Myrtle Beach, whether they be annual or changed to every two years, if they prefer different kinds of speakers, etc. She said feedback will help COGs plan a better conference or keep similar. She asked Board members to fill out and return the questionnaires.</p> <p>Hartung said the state’s COG’s are pursuing an increase in councils of government</p>

	<p>recurring and nonrecurring funds in the State budget. The process has included presenting a statewide COG impact report. She said the COG is requesting \$2 million in recurring funds and an additional \$1 million in nonrecurring funds. The House Ways and Means Constitutional Budget Subcommittee has approved the \$1 million in nonrecurring funds to be divided among the state's 10 COGs for current financial needs. The funds must next be approved by the Senate Finance Constitutional Budget Subcommittee before advancing to the Full Ways and Means Committee, the Senate Finance Committee, and then the full House and Senate.</p> <p>Hartung distributed the staff activities report.</p> <p>Floyd Nicholson asked the Board to applaud Willie Norman for his work presiding over the SC COGs conference in November. Norman in turn thanked the USCOG Board Chairman and staff for preparing him for the meeting.</p> <p>Hartung said Sandra Johnson, who started the workforce development program at USCOG in the 1980s and was director until retirement (in 2016), had health issues after her retirement and recently passed away (in November 2023).</p>
Adjourn	Being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.



Patricia C. Hartung
Executive Director