



COLES Together

The economic development organization for Coles County

Coles Together Operations Committee Meeting May 22, 2023

Members Present: Doug Abolt, Mike Stanfield, Mike Taylor, Rick Hall, John Inyart, and Jack Turner

Members Absent: Brock Ashley, Carlos Ortega, Brandon Combs

Others Present: Angela Griffin and Kasey Considine

Call to Order: Called to order by Doug Abolt at 7:30 a.m.

Approval of Minutes: A motion to approve the March 27, 2023, Board meeting minutes was made by Mike Stanfield and seconded by John Inyart. The motion passed.

Treasurer's Report

The April financial statements were still being prepared by the accountants. No action was taken.

Nominations Report

The nominations committee met by zoom to consider and discuss vacancies and re-elections to the board for the 2023-24 year. Doug Abolt and Carlos Ortega both completed a three-year term and are eligible to be re-elected to another three-year term. Vacancies exist to fill the seats of Jerry Groniger and Mike Taylor. Abolt and Ortega were both willing to be re-elected. Candidates for the open seats included Jason Tucker, Senior Vice President at First Mid Bank and Trust and Erica Boone, Vice President of Operations at Innovative Staff Solutions.

Officer positions for the upcoming year were considered. With Mike Taylor leaving the board, the position of Treasurer will become available. Brock Ashley has been serving as Assistant Treasurer and working with Taylor over the past several months. He is willing to fill the role of Treasurer. The remaining officers are interested in being elected to another one-year term. They include Doug Abolt as Chair, Mike Stanfield as Assistant Chair, Carlos Ortega as Secretary, and Brooke Kieffer as Assistant Secretary.

The nominations committee voted and recommended to the Operations Committee that Tucker and Boone be elected to a three-year term, that Abolt and Ortega be re-elected to a three-year term and that the following officers be elected to a one-year term all beginning July 2023:

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Chair: Doug Abolt

Vice Chair: Mike Stanfield

Treasurer: Brock Ashley

Secretary: Carlos Ortega

Assistant Secretary: Brooke Kieffer

Approval:

A motion to approve the nominations as presented and recommend the full board consider the nominations as presented at its June meeting was made by John Inyart and seconded by Bob Shamdin. The motion passed.

President's Report

North American Lighting is expanding its Mattoon location, doubling the footprint of the facility and more than doubling the local workforce. The company spent the last year completing a study of its four Illinois sites to determine the location for the upcoming expansion. Mattoon was chosen primarily because of the local workforce. In fact, the company was originally going to expand the service portion of the business in Mattoon, but they have been exceptionally pleased with the workforce and the availability of labor as compared to the company's other sites, they decided to bring more labor-intensive production to Coles County and take the less labor-intensive service expansion to a different facility. Current employment in Mattoon is 68 with plans to grow the workforce to 250. We are working with DCEO on state incentives including a new EV tax credit program and EDGE tax credits. They will be eligible for training funds as well.

Erik Olmsted with Olmsted Brothers Insulation had sold his Charleston-based insulation business but has now bought back into the company and is planning to expand the operation. He located a site in the enterprise zone south of Adams Memorials to build a 6,500 SF facility. He is currently trying to sell the existing facility in the Northwest Business Park in Charleston which is 5,600 SF.

Griffin met with Tony Reely and others representing Eastern Illinois Area Special Education (EIASE) about a possible expansion in the Coles Business Park. They are considering the lot immediately west of their current facility but are also considering a larger lot east and north to accommodate long-term growth which could include classroom instruction for adults and students in non-traditional programs. They are just beginning the evaluation process and would have to go through two boards for approval. They also want to make some improvements and changes to their current facility, and we are working with them to move that process through the City of Charleston and the Corridor Review Committee.

The John Davis Implement project is moving forward. A Corridor Review Committee meeting is scheduled this Thursday to review and approve the building and site plans. Also, Griffin prepared a Resolution for the County Board to consider at its next meeting to approve the sale of the lot.

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Once these approvals are in place, we will execute a real estate purchase agreement and move forward with closing.

Gail Mason from the county board shared that the application Griffin wrote for ARPA funds was approved at Committee and it appears Coles Together will receive \$250,000 to create and operate a grant program for Coles County businesses to offset ongoing costs related to the pandemic. When Griffin wrote the application, she included Bob Shamdin's ideas about being able to pay for overtime related to the pandemic and costs of recruitment. It is not clear at this stage that the application was approved as submitted but if it was, those costs should be reimbursable as Mason did not believe any restrictions were placed on the list of covered expenses Griffin proposed.

The application cycle has closed for the three categories of B2B grants through the State of Illinois. We helped numerous local companies apply. The applications are still under review so we do not know how many actually applied nor do we know how many will be funded. That information should be available by the end of June. As soon as all funds are disbursed, the state plans to open the B2B start-up and Restore grant programs for businesses that began operations after March 2020 or renovated a space during or after the pandemic.

NCI has listed its facility with a broker. The 125,000 SF facility is currently for sale with an asking price of \$3.2 million. Griffin talked with a lead last week that is making an offer which was one of the companies that has been interested in it for a while. She also sent the information to other companies that had expressed an interest in the facility.

Griffin attended the Enterprise Zone administrators conference in May where many recent statutory changes to the program were explained including that each zone was automatically given additional territory for expansion. We are in the process of adjusting the boundaries to the enterprise zone map to include portions of two parcels in the area of the planned sports complex. This effort should just be an administrative matter and not involve much cost or an application to the state. A more involved effort to take advantage of the extra five square miles of territory we have received as a result of the statutory changes will be undertaken with all units of government.

Webinars were held in April and May related to demographic trends and mental health awareness in the workplace. The annual meeting was a success with one company in attendance inviting the keynote speaker, Ken Gronbach, to address its operation.

The March unemployment numbers have been released. Coles County's unemployment rate was back down to 3.7% with 950 more jobs in March 2023 than March 2022. The state rate in March was 4.3% and the national rate was 3.5%. Gains of 575 were posted in educational and health services, 400 in government, 275 in manufacturing, and 125 in construction. Losses were

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attributed to 125 in leisure and hospitality, 75 in professional and business services, and 25 in financial activities.

In other ongoing matters, the RISE grant award documents are nearly complete with just two signatures outstanding of all that were needed to have a final award document. We expect that to be completed this month so we can begin the first phase of the grant work. We are working with an individual trying to open a grocery store in Oakland. The insurance adjuster approved repairs to the office needed after high winds in May and we are currently getting bids to complete the work. We are planning a trip to Chicago to meet in person with the Intersect Illinois team to introduce Kasey and familiarize her with the process from their perspective. Also, Griffin is looking for a conference to market the Coles Energy Center site in the same way she marketed the Trailmobile property. Interest is back in carbon management and the time might be right to take advantage of companies trying to use 45Q and other tax credits that incentivize carbon reduction.

Marketing Report

Considine gave the marketing report and stated she has been working to complete RFIs received from Intersect Illinois, maintaining the organization's social media presence, and working on the blog to add to the organization's website.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Carlos Ortega, Secretary