



COLES Together

The economic development organization for Coles County

Coles Together Operations Committee Meeting January 29, 2024

Members Present: Doug Abolt, Mike Stanfield, John Inyart, Bob Shamdin, Rick Hall, Blake Pierce, and Erica Boone

Members Absent: Jack Turner, Brandon Combs

Others Present: Angela Griffin

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

Approval of Minutes: A motion to approve the November 2023 operations committee meeting minutes was made by Mike Stanfield and seconded by Rick Hall. The motion passed.

Treasurer's Report

Griffin provided the December Treasurer's report. She stated December receipts were \$41,000 above budget. Of that amount, contributions were \$10,000 above budget and the remainder is primarily due to receipt of a farm rent payment in December that is budgeted for receipt in November. Disbursements were substantially below budget because it was anticipated the ARPA grant would be awarded and checks would have been issued in December for pass-through grants. That did not occur and an update on that program will be addressed in the President's report. Also, she informed the committee the US Bank CD was earning less than 1% so she worked with Al Volk to move the funds to a new CD that matures in December of this year. The penalty was \$7,000 but the new CD is earning 4.8% which will result in a net increase in interest income of \$5,000.

Approval of Treasurer's Report: A motion to approve the December Treasurer's Report was made by Rick Hall and seconded by Mike Stanfield. The motion passed.

President's Report

Griffin stated she is working with a local developer with plans to build a new 80,000 SF warehouse and distribution operation for Hardwoods in Mattoon. The company is currently located in the Niemann Foods building. For those not familiar with the company, it is a distributor

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of building products including lumber, plywood, veneers, laminates and composites. We have identified a site in the enterprise zone and they are developing the site and building plans.

The closing for Kingspan to purchase the former NCI facility was delayed but the site location consultant believes it will occur before the end of February. The company remains concerned about word getting out so they do not plan to submit applications until after closing. Once they close, renovations will begin almost immediately with installation of equipment to follow shortly thereafter and plans to be in operation by late summer or early fall. Capital expenditures at the site will be approximately \$10.5 million with 57 new hires at competitive, head-of-household wages.

LIFT students were unable to attend industry day tours in October so we planned an additional event that was held in January. We were able to take students to targeted host sites that employ individuals with the skill sets the students are learning in their LIFT pathways.

GDB International is currently in dialogue with the US EPA over the removal and disposal of transformers on site that contain PCBs. The previous owner was under an EPA consent agreement to remediate and re-use the transformers. When that did not occur and the property was sold, the previous owner was fined. When he sold the facility, he did not disclose the transformers were contaminated, which is a civil matter and of no consequence to EPA. GDB is required to remove and properly dispose of the transformers and they are eager and willing to do so having already contracted with state approved providers for removal. In addition to the cost of removal, GDB has been issued a \$250,000 fine. Griffin is working with the Illinois EPA, state contacts at DCEO, and the company to craft a counter proposal to the U.S. EPA to request elimination of the fine.

Griffin is working with Christine Stone to apply for enterprise zone benefits for the new pet boarding facility she is planning to construct on site near her veterinarian clinic on Beach Tree Road in Charleston. The project was approved at the Corridor Review Committee and was forwarded to the Charleston zoning board and Charleston city council for review and approval.

Griffin attended the ARPA committee meeting of the county board and made a presentation requesting additional funds to use as pass-through grants to companies that experienced costs related to the pandemic. The committee voted to approve the funding request and forwarded the request to the county board for a vote at its February 13 meeting. There are currently five applications pending and if approval is given, additional applications will be solicited.

The unemployment rate in Coles County in December was 4.1% up slightly from 3.6% in November. The statewide average in December was 4.8% so Coles County continues its trend remaining lower than the state average. The county added 900 net new jobs in December compared to one year ago. Growth continues in the same sectors that post growth nearly every

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month with health services leading. Losses continue in the same sectors with the largest loss of 225 employees in professional and business services and information technology.

Additional data was released in January for the southeast region comparing November of 2023 to pre-pandemic levels. Data was similar to the information reported in the October meeting including that this region has a higher than statewide average number of jobs attributed to manufacturing, particularly durable goods manufacturing. Construction payrolls are above the pre-pandemic level going from 5,400 in 2019 to more than 5,800 today.

The retail and service sectors, health services, and leisure and hospitality had recovered to pre-pandemic levels by mid-2022 and continue to grow, which is consistent with monthly reports that show those sectors adding jobs every month. However, financial and business services have not returned to pre-pandemic levels and we also see that also in the monthly reports.

Overall growth in the region shows payrolls 2.2% higher than pre-pandemic levels while state payrolls had recovered but were just 0.5% higher.

Miscellaneous Updates

Abolt provided an update as to the status of the presidential search. Pierce provided an overview of recent developments at Elevate and ideas about future collaboration.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:23 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Brooke Kieffer, Assistant Secretary