

White County Development Authority

REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

DATE: Tuesday, August 17th, 2021

PLACE: BOC Board Room
1235 Helen Highway
Cleveland, GA, 30528

TIME: 4:30 PM

Those present were Michael Meuse, John Ziemer, Don Allison, Michael Yarbrough, Ridley Kinsey, and Dustin Hulsey. Guests present were Beth Truelove, Carl Free, John Sell, and Mercedes Dodd.

Acting Chairman Michael Meuse called the meeting to order. No changes were made to the agenda. Motion made to approve the minutes from June 8th, 2021 was made by Mr. Ziemer and was seconded by Mr. Kinsey. Motion was unanimous.

Mr. Ziemer made a motion to keep the officers as they are until they have a full board. The motion was seconded by Mr. Yarbrough and was unanimous.

Mr. Sell stated that Ms. Ligon could not be present at the meeting, but would be available for questions as needed. Motion to approve both a check for the Request for Proposal (RFP) advertisement and a check for Carl Free, Attorney at Law, for legal fees was made by Mr. Ziemer and was seconded by Mr. Kinsey. Motion was unanimous. A motion to approve the financials was not made.

A contract with the County for funding was presented to the board. Mr. Ziemer and Acting Chairman Meuse expressed concern for not having had this contract previously. Upon a quick review of the contract with White County Board of Commissioners, Mr. Free stated the contract appears to follow the existing procedures that are in place. Mr. Sell clarified that the first contract of this nature began in Fiscal Year 2019 and was signed by the chairman. Motion to accept the contract as presented was made by Mr. Ziemer and was seconded by Mr. Allison. Motion was unanimous.

Mr. Sell presented the seven RFP's that were received by the deadline of August 13th, 2021. Mr. Sell presented the option of reviewing the packets at this meeting, of creating a subcommittee, or calling a separate meeting for review. He listed the proposals received as follows: Southern Prosperity, Georgia Mountain Regional Commission, Thomas & Hutton, BAE Urban Economics, and John Stover & Associates. He added that Georgia Tech and RSI sent in proposals but failed to complete the addendum. Mr. Sell stated that there is a self-imposed end of the month review and a tentative award date of August 27th. The board agreed that failure to complete the addendum should not eliminate a proposal and asked that Mr. Sell reach out to those companies to discuss addendum completion. Mr. Meuse suggested provided sufficient time for review and the board asked for staff to send out the RFP's via email for all to review. Mr. Sell said a score sheet will also be sent to the board members, as well. The board agreed to have a called meeting on Tuesday, September 14th, 2021, to further discuss the RFP's.

Mr. Sell stated White County and Windstream sent a proposal on August 17th, 2021 for a broadband grant through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). He said the total grant is approximately \$228 million of federal dollars to be dispersed. He added that they will probably keep this application for other grants since there are several opportunities that will be coming out soon. Mr. Sell explained that about twenty two percent of students are not covered by broadband, according to the state, so that was used as part of justification for this grant and by the schools for FCC grants and other dollars, as well.

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Mr. Sell also stated that the White County Comprehensive Plan has been approved and accepted by the Board of Commissioners. Additionally, he said the county will move forward in the next month or so with an update on the Bike and Pedestrian Plan, to which they are actively seeking advisory board members for.

Mr. Sell stated there is nothing to report for the Joint Development Authority (JDA).

Ms. Truelove stated that the Census data is in, but it is significantly lower than what was hoped for- a population of approximately 0.8 persons per household. She explained that she has reached out to the school systems and all have increasing enrollments, so the chamber reached out to congressmen to look into the matter. She added that the Governor's Office of Budgeting anticipated the population would be 32,000 but the Census came back at about 28,000. Ms. Truelove explained that Workforce is still a major project for the chamber and listed collaboration with the school systems, including the creation of part-time job boards. She added that roughly 35 applications were received at the recent job fair hosted at Truett McConnell University. Ms. Truelove explained that they had partnered with the Georgia Mountain Regional Commission to conduct a four-week program that graduated eight welders that all went straight into the workforce. She stated the chamber will be hosting an event with the Home Builder's Association, as well. Additionally, Ms. Truelove stated there is still a lot of commercial retail interest within City of Cleveland and City of Helen.

Mr. Sell added that Senator Gooch and Representative Anderson are both aware and investigating the Census numbers. He said the surrounding counties came in close to the 2019 estimates but White County fell short by a significant number. Acting Chairman Meuse suggested the pandemic may have impacted the Census manpower. Mr. Sell explained that the amount of building permits, which does not include new mobile homes, does not match the outcome of the Census.

Mr. Ziemer explained that the White County Water Authority (WCWA) had allotted for a contribution from City of Cleveland for 33 percent and that the reason for increased contribution is due to anticipated upgrades and growth. He also explained that there will be changes to the billing, stating there will be a bill for six weeks' worth of water instead of four to comply with EPD rules which is being communicated to customers in advance. As an update on the new well, he believes WCWA is about a month away from getting final EPD approval and added that the water lines and the well are both in. One of the reasons for the increase in capital funds is for anticipated upgrades and repairs to the water treatment facility. Mr. Ziemer noted there is roughly a quarter million dollars' worth of improvements to be made.

Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Allison and was seconded by Mr. Ziemer. Motion was unanimous.