



COLES Together

The economic development organization for Coles County

Coles Together Board of Directors Meeting October 31, 2022

Members Present:

Doug Abolt, Mike Stanfield, Mike Taylor, Rick Hall, David Glassman, Brock Ashley, Bob Shamdin, John Inyart, Todd Vilardo, Amy Borntrager, Ashley Cobb, Josh Bullock, Tim Condron, Matt Webb, Steve Pankey, and Matt Smith

Members Absent:

Carlos Ortega, Jack Turner, Brooke Kieffer, Darrin Hite, and 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:

Edits were made to the September 26, 2022, minutes to correct attendees and individuals who made the motion to approve the financial statements. A motion to approve the September minutes with noted corrections was made by Mike Stanfield and seconded by John Inyart. The motion passed.

President's Report:

Griffin reported a solar farm is being developed by Blue Mound Energy, also known as Indeck Energy. Indeck is a national company headquartered in Buffalo Grove, Illinois. They are developing a solar installation on 1400 acres in Clark, Cumberland and Coles Counties. The majority of the project is in Clark County and they have just acquired 160 additional acres in southeastern Coles County adjacent to the Clark County line.

The company would like to access enterprise zone benefits, particularly the incentive for the sales tax exemption on building materials, but solar (and wind) projects are ineligible according to the guidelines of the Coles County Enterprise Zone. Also, the site is not within the zone territory and even if changes to the guidelines were passed by the enabling bodies, there is not enough excess zone territory to extend the zone to the project site.

The decision by the taxing bodies to exempt solar and wind developments was made primarily because there are few, if any, permanent jobs created once the development is online and there are numerous incentives at the state and federal level to help get these kinds of projects off the

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ground. This project will generate 409 MW of power and the company is beginning a public relations campaign to build community support for the project.

John Davis with Davis Implement Company is interested in a location in the Coles Business Park to build a new facility. He is considering relocating his operation that is currently in Charleston but was previously on 19th Street in Mattoon to the park. He is also looking at a site in Jasper County. His project is eligible for enterprise zone benefits so that, along with the large volume of traffic and the visibility in the Coles Business may provide benefits he may not get in Jasper County.

We are still processing the paperwork through the State of Illinois for the \$150,000 RISE grant.

We had a remarkably successful Industry/Manufacturing Day event last week. We achieved record attendance by students from all three county high schools who were able to tour Mars Petcare, Justrite Manufacturing, Safety Storage, Lester Building Systems, Coles Moultrie Electric Cooperative, Birkeys, Nordco, LIFT, and Elevate. All the students attended lunch and an aviation presentation in a hangar at the airport. Feedback was great from both the host sites and the schools with teachers reaching out to share anecdotal stories about their students' enthusiasm throughout the day.

Birkey's Farm Store has decided to move forward with its expansion adjacent to its current location in downtown Oakland. We are working with the company to process enterprise zone benefits and are also helping them apply for a utility tax exemption on gas and electricity which they should qualify for by calculating their cumulative investment and job creation numbers across all their Illinois locations.

The final civil engineering drawings have been completed by Anixter and have been forwarded to the city for approval. As soon as the plans are approved and a building permit is issued, the project will be able to move forward, and we will process their enterprise zone application.

Unfortunately, after all the training and work that has been done to get ready for the state to launch the Back to Business Start-up and REVAMP grants, the programs have been paused to make them "more business friendly." The good news is our partners at the state are making adjustments to the program after listening to those of us in the navigator groups across the state who have been saying the process was too cumbersome for businesses and they are truly trying to make the process easier. The unwelcome news is the money will not begin reaching the businesses that could really use it until the first or second quarter of next year.

The additional news is they are going to follow these two programs with three more new programs that target specific sectors of businesses. Overall, we are glad the state is making adjustments if we are going to be working with five programs. Also, it means the grant relationship with the state is going to continue for at least another year.

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Employment data was released late last week and the Coles County unemployment rate dropped to a low of 3.7% in September which is a rate we have not seen since before the pandemic. August's rate was 4.8% so a lot of people went back to work in September. We gained jobs in almost every sector tracked. Manufacturing had a net zero change and the only category we lost jobs in was transportation and utilities.

This month's webinar was held last Thursday and was held in recognition of National Women's Business Month. We set up a panel discussion with women business owners and had great comments and questions that ran the webinar more than 30 minutes past its end time.

We hope to have an early webinar in November about the aviation/aerospace initiative and we are planning an even earlier one in December to showcase businesses having special events for the holidays.

Other activities throughout the month included the CDC meeting and approving the site plan for the new Casey State Bank on Lerna Road. Also, Griffin attended a Transportation Improvement Plan (TIPS) meeting in Springfield. This is an annual meeting the airport authority board has at IDOT along with the airport's engineers, Hanson Engineering, to go over planned improvements at the airport over the next five years and the funding sources anticipated to pay for them.

Most of the improvements, new construction, maintenance and updating that occur at the airport are being funded in large part with state or federal dollars and very little local match so it is nice to see that funding coming into the county and paying many local contractors.

Also, the Coles County Airport manager, Andrew Fearn, and the airport have a great reputation in the state and at the division of aeronautics at IDOT, particularly for the way Fearn manages the airport and its funding. Our rankings are high compared to our peers and our projects are generally well funded. Griffin said this, along with the positive activity in the school districts, at LIFT, Elevate, the chambers, the cities, the developments like the sports complex all contribute to a growing and thriving region and it is good to learn the local airport is also top tier.

Considine provided the marketing report. She has been engaged in social media posts about the development activity in the county. She developed materials for Manufacturing/Industry Day and is developing marketing material for the new programs we believe we will begin to market soon.

2021-22 Year-end Review and 2022-23 Budget

Griffin stated the year-end numbers are revised from the numbers presented at the September Operations Committee meeting to account for the bills that arrived after the reports were run for the September meeting so net income for the year ended up being \$97,000 against a budget of \$75,000. Some things to note, member contributions exceeded budget. Income from the community navigator grant exceeded budget. Expenses for the community navigator grant also

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exceeded budget but since we get reimbursed for salaries on any economic development project we work on, not just grant activities, the net income from the grant is a positive \$27,000 which is exactly the amount by which we exceeded budgeted net income. On the expense side we had a couple expense categories higher than budgeted, some lower than budgeted and ended overall \$5,000 above budget. A substantial portion of that was a repayment of an enterprise zone fee to North American Lighting.

Even though the Operations Committee approved the budget for the coming fiscal year which started October 1, the board will need to vote to approve it as well since it has been adjusted since presented in September. A contract was executed for a new copier which reduced the monthly lease amount. Griffin increased the budget for workforce initiatives because we had such a high turnout this year for manufacturing day that our expenses were higher than anticipated and higher than previous years, including for the food. So included in the motion to approve the budget, Griffin said the motion will need to include specific language to pay the bills for the event, especially the bill for food which was more than her limit of \$2,000.

Griffin also increased the budget for maintenance and repairs to the office. The budget approved by the Operations Committee included approval to spend roughly \$12,000 to replace all the office windows except the windows in the doors, but after that particularly windy couple of days recently, some of the gutters blew off and others were damaged, so a lot of the guttering had to be replaced. Also, while the carpenters were looking at the windows, Griffin had them look at a place on the porch near the front entrance that was bowed and sinking. They discovered the floor joists were rotted and about to give way so they will be replaced and the porch repaired which will add expenses in maintenance and repairs to the office.

Those expenses will take the budget for maintenance and repairs to the office from \$15,700 to \$18,600. Griffin also increased the budget for travel to be more consistent with last year and to reflect higher gasoline prices. She also increased the budget for expenses in the Coles Business Park as the plantings died on both levels of landscaping around the sign and needed to be replaced. And finally, the raises approved by the operations committee were added, as well as increasing the budget for bonuses for Kasey for her percentage of new investments she is able to recruit. There will also be an expense for the \$200 stipend for healthcare and Griffin is working with Gilbert Metzger and Madigan about how it is incorporated into payroll.

Approval: A motion to approve the newly presented 2022-23 budget including approval to increase the workforce expense line to pay food-related expenses for Manufacturing Day that exceed the \$2,000 limit was made by Rick Hall and seconded by Brock Ashley. The motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 AM whereupon a presentation and tours of LIFT were conducted by LIFT students.

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Respectfully submitted by:

Carlos Ortega, Secretary