

**CLEVELAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**December 2, 2008**

The Cleveland County Board of Commissioners reconvened their recessed session of November 18, 2008 on this date, at the hour of 1:00 p.m., in the R.L. Alexander Conference Room in the Cleveland County Administrative Offices for the purpose of a Commission Work Session to discuss Economic Development.

**PRESENT:** Jo Boggs, Chairwoman  
Eddie Holbrook, Vice-Chairman  
Mary S. Accor, Commissioner  
Ronald J. Hawkins, Commissioner  
Johnny Hutchins, Commissioner  
David C. Dear, County Manager  
Kerri Melton, County Clerk  
Eddie Bailes, Assistant County Manager  
Bill McCarter, Planning Director  
Denese Stallings, Health Director  
Alexis Pearson, Human Resources Director  
Kathryn Larson, *Cleveland Headline News*  
David Allen, *The Star*  
Other individual names on file in the Clerk's Office

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairwoman Boggs called the meeting to order.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**LOCAL**

Dave Hart, President of 20/20 Economic Development Partnership (20/20), began by noting that 20/20 currently has twenty active projects most of which have come from the Charlotte Regional Partnership. The majority of these active projects are manufacturing companies who are looking for existing buildings. Mr. Hart listed those buildings available in Cleveland County. Cleveland 20/20 is currently targeting those companies who produce energy or military equipment and supplies.

Cleveland County has recently been listed as a Tier One county. Being a Tier One county enables businesses re-locating to Cleveland County to receive the highest incentive package offered by the State. In comparison to other counties, Mr. Hart explained that the local incentives offered by Cleveland County are very competitive. Gardner Webb University also offers incentives to businesses looking to relocate to Cleveland County.

Kristen Fletcher, Vice President of 20/20 discussed existing industry and identified those steps that 20/20 is taking to recruit and maintain existing industry in Cleveland County (*copy of presentation found on Page \_\_\_\_\_ of Minute Book 30*). Some of those steps include existing industry visits and phone calls to employers, Cleveland County Manufacturers Council and Lean Council, newsletters and teaming up with partners such as NC Department of Commerce and Cleveland Community College.

**REGIONAL**

Kenny McDonald, Executive VP of Economic Development Services for the Charlotte Regional Partnership, spoke about Charlotte including facts such as: Charlotte is the 35<sup>th</sup> largest Metro region and Charlotte is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest banking center. Mr. McDonald described the Charlotte region as "healthy" in that there are new people coming in to the area. North Carolina has much to offer potential employers including a non-union workforce and a community college system ranked first or second in the nation. Although the Charlotte region is no longer a textile employment center, it is a textile technology center. This is very helpful in recruitment of textile manufacturing businesses. The Charlotte Regional

Partnership is targeting new industries including Health & Life Science, Defense & Security and Energy & Environment.

Mr. McDonald shared a few strategies to help recruit businesses to Cleveland County.

- Take a regional approach.
- Have prepared infrastructure.
- Align policy with economic strategy.
- Create economic dialogue with educators.
- Take care of existing companies.
- Be market oriented and highly flexible.

### ***STATE***

Uconda Duggins, Existing Industry Specialist with the North Carolina Department of Commerce, stated that while things nationally are bad, as a state, North Carolina is still doing very well. She again stressed the point that a benefit for Cleveland County is that it is now a Tier One County by explaining that Tier One counties earn \$12,500 per job above five and there are no wage standards. She also talked about the NC One Fund which has helped companies such as Kitchen Ventilation Systems locate to Cleveland County. There have been 124 announcements in North Carolina this year. But, just because a company is here, doesn't mean it will stay. Ms. Duggins stressed the importance of partnership between existing industry, government, economic development and the school system.

### ***DISCUSSION***

Commissioner Hutchins discussed the possibility of looking at thresholds for incentives. "We have lots of small businesses. If a person has money to invest, we should be able to give them incentives." He mentioned the possibility of creating a finders fee for those who bring new businesses to Cleveland County and possibly taking a portion of the incentive package and re-distributing it back into Economic Development recruiting.

Uconda Duggins and Ken McDonald were optimistic about the election of Beverly Purdue. Although, at this time, they are unsure what changes will be made, both felt as though the changes would be for the better.

Commissioner Hutchins asked those who spoke what could be done to help us turn things around. Dave Hart spoke of the importance of additional inventory and Kristin Fletcher added the development of a strategic plan. Commissioners discussed the importance of a strategic plan and the possibility of creating an Economic Development Strategic Plan.

### **LOCAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE UNEMPLOYED AND UNDEREMPLOYED**

#### **EMPLOYMENT SECURITY COMMISSION**

Lawrence Roseboro of the NC Employment Security Commission discussed the unemployment rate in Cleveland County. In September, the unemployment rate was 8.5% and the unemployment rate in October was 9.5%. Cleveland County has not had an unemployment rate this high since 2002 where, at one point, it was 12%. Companies are having a hard time operating due to the credit crunch. Mr. Roseboro explained that it is not only Cleveland County being hit by this problem. The state unemployment rate in October was 6.7% and is not expected to go down any time soon.

Commissioners asked Mr. Roseboro if his office was placing anyone in new jobs. He responded by saying that there are a few companies still adding positions, however, even temporary agencies are struggling to find employment for their clients. The Employment Security Commission office in Kings Mountain has been closed due to cut-backs.

Unemployment benefits come from the employers. Employees can draw unemployment benefits for twenty-six weeks. The amount is based on actual earnings with the highest weekly pay in North Carolina being \$494. Congress has passed several extensions due to the economy which typically last thirteen weeks. People on unemployment must maintain a workforce search record unless they are in training.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & JOBLINK**

Bill Robertson noted the initiatives of the Workforce Development program including updating the Workforce Report to identify demographics of the workforce, completing the Pathfinders Report and Labor Market Information.

Mr. Robertson helps the North Carolina Rapid Response Team. He explained what the Rapid Response Team does when informed of a closing. Rapid Response for an industry facing layoffs is initiated to the state through a warn notice. The State then coordinates meetings through local partners. The team then meets with management to discuss what kind of services are available to their employees. The Rapid Response team then holds meetings with groups of employees to provide information about the services available to them and encourages them to participate in training. Several services available to employees include unemployment insurance, insurance for children, training and mortgage assistance.

Workforce Development focuses on education. They have helped over five hundred citizens get nursing degrees. It is their goal to steer people toward training where they will be able to get a job. They have also helped numerous others receive career readiness certification at no cost to the student. All who receive career readiness certification are placed in a database for potential employers. This information is a good way for communities to determine what the workforce looks like.

Mr. Robertson and Workforce Development in conjunction with Gaston County, will be hosting a job fair in the near future to help find jobs for those workers recently released (or ready to be released) from AGI and EDC.

## **CLEVELAND COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES WORKFIRST PROGRAM**

Teala McSwain of the Cleveland County Department of Social Services presented the Work First Program to Commissioners (*copy on Page \_\_\_\_\_ of Minute Book 30.*) A goal of the Work First Program is achievement of self-sufficiency through productive and meaningful employment. The program has been very successful. Cases have decreased 75% over twelve years. The Work First program promotes work and responsibility. Work First program workers not only help their clients get jobs but they help them find beds if they need them or clothes to be prepared for interviewing.

A case worker is assigned to determine what the clients interests and skills are. One obstacle that the case workers face is the fact that some clients only have a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education. This can be scary when interviewing for a new job.

There are certain time-clocks that those on the program have to meet in order to continue on the program. Once a client has been served for 60 months, they have met a lifetime and can no longer go on assistance again.

Karen Ellis, Cleveland County Social Services Director thanked all of the partners involved in the Work First Program and encouraged other businesses to become partners in this important program.

## **CLEVELAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY PLANNING**

Chad Chastain, Cleveland Community College shared a PowerPoint presentation on Workforce and Career Development (*copy on Page \_\_\_\_\_ of Minute Book 30.*) This presentation showed the needs of the unemployed workforce. It also outlined the weaknesses of the workforce and solutions to strengthen the workforce in Cleveland County.

Cleveland Community College proposed to

- Provide a full-time liaison through grant funds as they are available.
- Provide services inclusive with partners in various agencies.
- Create an accessible database with linked website of workforce information and industry needs.

Cleveland Community College proposed to do all these things by creating a Workforce Development Center to be housed at Cleveland Community College. The North Carolina Rapid Response team could direct displaced workers to this center to help with their soft skills which would ultimately help them find jobs. From these workers, a database would be created. This database would

be used by Cleveland County Economic Development professionals to market the Cleveland County Workforce.

Commissioners and others in attendance discussed the importance of this database. Dave Hart noted, "The last client question in a recent request was, PROVE that you have a qualified workforce."

Shannon Kennedy, requested Commissioners grant Cleveland Community College \$35,000 to get a Workforce Development Center up and running immediately. Funding would be used for salary, promotion and signage on campus.

**ACTION:** Ronnie Hawkins made the motion, seconded by Mary Accor, and unanimously adopted by the Board, *to approve \$35,000 in funding to Cleveland Community College for the implementation of a Workforce Development Center to help Cleveland County unemployed workers.*

Commissioner Hutchins noted that, although he voted to approve the funding, he would like to have tabled the discussion until the regular Commissioners meeting that evening.

### **CLEVELAND COUNTY SCHOOLS CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION**

Tony Fogleman, Cleveland County Schools Director of Career Technical Education spoke of the importance of education including educating students on soft skills. It is a requirement that all High School graduates complete a resume and a senior project. Last year, 300 students who graduated from a Cleveland County High School also received their Career Readiness Certificate and of those, 18 students graduated with a high school degree also graduated with a degree from Cleveland Community College.

Cleveland County Schools is helping displaced workers by allowing Cleveland Community College to use labs at the high schools to train displaced workers. School Social Workers are trying to find those in need and help by raising money to pay power bills and other essentials.

### ***FINAL COMMISSIONER COMMENTS***

Commissioner Hutchins asked that Cleveland 20/20 Economic Development Partnership come back to Commissioners with recommendations for funding incentives for small businesses.

Commissioner Hawkins talked about the Strategic Plan. He felt as though the plan needed to be broken down into three parts- local issues, existing industry and new industry. A committee could be set up to research and discuss each part. These three parts together would make up the Strategic Plan for Economic Development in Cleveland County.

### **ADJOURN**

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, Johnny Hutchins made the motion, seconded by Mary Accor, and unanimously adopted by the Board, *to adjourn.*

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*Jo Boggs, Chairwoman  
Cleveland County Board of Commissioners*

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*Kerri Melton, Clerk  
Cleveland County Board of Commissioners*