

NEWPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Tuesday, March 10, 2026
7:00 A.M.
Business Resource Center

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr., Nyesha Greer, Hiro Kado, Typhanie Myers, Scott Foushee, Lee Scoggins, and Benjy Harris.

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

Chairman Dean Sides and Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner

OTHERS PRESENT

Others present were NEDC Executive Director Jon Chadwell, Director of Chamber Affairs Julie Allen, Director of Workforce Christel Taylor, and Mayor Derrick Ratliffe.

OPEN MEETING

Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr. opened the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Benjy Harris made a motion to accept the minutes from February, with a second by Scott Foushee, motion carried.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Director Chadwell presented the financial report for February. Director Chadwell presented the commission with sales tax and obligations. Due to the slowdown in electric vehicle production, Gränges has requested to be removed from the current obligations list. The company indicated that if funding is needed in the future, they will submit a new application at that time. Lee Scoggins made a motion to accept the financial statements for February with a second from Typhanie Myers, motion carried.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Ike Wheeler, ASUN
- Chris Murphy, Entergy
- Regan Pugh, AEDC
- Taylor Carpenter, A-State Childcare
- Kyle Tiffie, Jackson Holdings
- Michelle Allgood

DIRECTOR OF CHAMBER AFFAIRS REPORT

- 75 Strong Business Retention & Expansion Training
- Northeast Arkies Best
- New Vision Newport at Arkansas Steel

- Arkansas Scholars
- LeadAR, March 19 & 20
- Pot of Gold, April 17

RENEWPORT GRANTS

B and B Investments, located at 1308 HWY 367 N, in Newport, has requested a ReNewport grant to help with painting and removal of debris. The total cost is \$18,500 and the ReNewport grant would be responsible for \$2,500. Commissioner Lee Scoggins made the motion to approve the ReNewport Grant with a second from Nyeshya Greer, motion carried.

DIAZ REFINERY PROPERTY ACQUISITION UPDATE

An update was provided on the Diaz Refinery property acquisition by Jon Chadwell. The Phase I environmental assessment has been completed at a cost of \$2,700, and a Phase II assessment was not recommended. Approval was requested to move forward with submitting a Brownfield Grant funding application to the state. Nyeshya Greer made a motion to apply for the Brownfield Grant with a second by Lee Scoggins, motion carried.

NEWPORT SPEEDWAY LEASE/PURCHASE REQUEST

Director Chadwell presented a lease/purchase request for Newport Speedway. The proposal includes a two- or three-year lease with an option to purchase at the end of the lease term. The Newport Economic Development Commission (NEDC) would retain the first right of refusal if the property is sold and would also have veto power over any potential future buyers. The land will be surveyed and divided in half, with the designated portion identified for use as a racetrack and right to be inspected.

NEW WEBSITE 2026

A contract with Concourse Tech will be signed, and the team has already held its first meeting regarding website development. It was noted that updated photos and videos would significantly enhance the site. After discussion, it was agreed that the \$25,000 from the medical marijuana fund—originally designated for Newport promotional videos—will be used to produce new photos and videos to support the website.

LEADAR VISIT – MARCH 19-20

The LeadAR group will be visiting Newport on March 19–20. The seminar will include panel discussions with utility and economic development partners and will also focus on small business and entrepreneurship resources, as well as available federal and state programs. Commissioners are invited to attend a dinner at the Newport Country Club on March 19 and are asked to reserve their spot if they plan to attend.

INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY PRIORITIES FOR 2026

Surveys are currently being conducted for the industrial properties, with Miller Newell overseeing the survey work. Benjy Harris has requested that stakes be placed to clearly mark the property boundaries. It was also noted that the railroad right-of-way belongs to the City of Newport, and several adjacent property owners will need to be made aware of this. Research is currently underway to locate the original legal documents, which indicate that the right-of-way measures 100 feet.

INDUSTRIAL SITE INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT UPDATE

The Industrial Site Infrastructure Grant has been submitted.

I-57 CORRIDOR COALITION

The proposed I-57 Corridor Coalition would be a regional partnership extending from Cabot to Walnut Ridge. The coalition would bring together communities of similar sizes to collaborate on promoting and marketing the corridor nationwide, highlighting the region's assets and opportunities for economic development.

THIRD AND LAUREL PARKING LOT UPDATE

The parking lot on Third and Laurel has been delayed due to two manholes that are owned by AT&T. Logistics has worked out and work should be completed by Mid-March.

SITE CONSULT VISIT

On April 1–3, Director Chadwell will participate in a series of meetings with site consultants hosted by the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. This exclusive event is limited to just eight selected communities. During this time, Jon aims to engage in meaningful discussions about potential locations in Newport that could support and attract new business prospects.

75 STRONG

On April 1, Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, and Christel Taylor will attend the 75 Strong seminar in Conway. The day-long session will focus on ecosystem benchmarking and the development of a strategic plan to support and strengthen entrepreneurial growth.

TECH DEPOT UPDATE

Tech Depot continues to see strong activity today hosting the Northeast Arkansas Leadership Accelerator Academy. On Wednesday, the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center will be set up in the co-working space to provide business support services. Additionally, John 3:17 Ministries will host a week-long class at Tech Depot, and LeadAR sessions are scheduled for March 19–20. Activity will continue into the final week of March with a visit from the Arkansas Museum Association.

CALL CENTER UPDATE

The Business Resource Center should be completed by April 20. The freeze on grants delayed the project as well as pending elevator parts.

NEW SUBDIVISION UPDATE

Mark Morris Construction, located in Jonesboro, will be building the new subdivision for the Newport School District.

PROSPECT SMOCO

Prospect SMOCO has a Plat Map filed.

PROSPECT RICE STRAW

Prospect Rice Straw is moving forward.

PROJECT FUEL UP UPDATE

Casey's General Stores has purchased the property, and the City of Diaz will receive the associated sales tax revenue generated by the new location.

PROJECT HI HO

Project Hi Ho is investigating the site.

PROJECT TERMINATOR

Project Terminator's status remains unchanged.

ADJOURNED

Scott Foushee made a motion to adjourn the meeting with a second from Lee Scoggins, meeting adjourned.