

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

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr., Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner, Hiro Kado, Typhanie Myers, Scott Foushee, Lee Scoggins, and Benjy Harris.

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT**

Chairman Dean Sides and Nyeshia Greer

**OTHERS PRESENT**

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

**OPEN MEETING**

Vice-Chairman Jim Gowen Sr. opened the meeting.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Commissioner Benjy Harris made a motion to accept the minutes from January, with a second by Typhanie Myer, motion carried.

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

Director Chadwell presented the financial report for January. Sales tax was down \$327.79. Obligations for 2026 were presented as well. Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner made a motion to accept the financial statements for January with a second from Lee Scoggins, motion carried.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

- CTE Advisory Meeting, Newport School District
- Kristi Pulliaum, Delta Center
- George Kell Park Softball Field Meeting
- Consul General of Japan in Nashville, Wilson AR
- ASUN Grant
- Reverse Job Fair, April 20

**DIRECTOR OF CHAMBER AFFAIRS REPORT**

- New Vision Newport trip to Little Rock
- ESO Summit
- New Vision Newport at Arkansas Steel
- Monster Series Steering Committee
- Chamber Luncheon, March 6

- Pot of Gold

### **RENEWPORT GRANTS**

None currently.

### **COMPENSATION CLEAN UP VOTE**

Lee Scoggins made a motion for Crystal Fulmer and Christel Taylor for a 3% raise for 2026 with a second by Typhanie Meyers, motion carried. Director Jon Chadwell and Chamber Director Julie Allen salaries will remain the same for 2026.

### **NEW WEBSITE 2026**

Due to recently enacted legislation, the City of Newport, the Newport Economic Development Commission, the Newport Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Jackson County Courthouse are required to develop new websites. A total of 32 Requests for Proposals (RFPs) were submitted in response. Director Jon Chadwell reviewed all proposals and selected six firms to deliver formal presentations. Following those presentations, Concourse Tech was identified as the recommended vendor. Commissioner Lee Scoggins made a motion for \$18,000 for a new website with Concourse Tech with a second by Scott Foushee, motion carried.

### **NEW INCENTIVE POLICY**

Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner made a motion for incentives approved by the NEDC to remain committed for 24 months from the date of approval. At the end of 24 months, the Executive Director will notify the company awarded the incentive that their approval is expiring. Lee Scoggins seconded the motion, motion carried.

### **NEW EMAIL RETENTION POLICY**

The Newport Economic Development Commission does not maintain email backups. Lee Scoggins made a motion that emails should be deleted after 30 days unless they concern active projects. Emails may be deleted at any time after 30 days unless a FOI request has been submitted that would require the release of the emails. Upon the receipt of an FOI request that covers information in retained emails, the emails must be retained until the request has been fully satisfied. Scott Foushee seconded the motion, motion carried.

### **BYLAWS CHANGE**

Commissioner Benjy Harris made a motion for a quorum for regularly scheduled meetings consist of 5 of the 9 member commission in attendance. An exception to the regular quorum is made for agenda items that involve a vote for expenditure over \$25,000 not included in the annual budget or changes to the annual budget that exceed \$25,000, in which case a quorum shall consist of 6 members. Mike Turner seconded the motion, motion carried. Also, all special call meetings require a quorum of 6 members.

### **DIAZ REFINERY PROPERTY ACQUISITION**

Jon Chadwell would like to start a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment on the Diaz Refinery Property. Benjy Harris made a motion for up to \$7,000 for a Phase I study with a second by Lee Scoggins, motion carried.

## **INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY PRIORITIES FOR 2026**

A slide deck and to do list was presented to the commission of the Industrial Properties owned by the City of Newport and the Jackson County Industrial Bond Board. Lee Scoggins made a motion for \$165,000 from the Medical Marijuana Settlement to be transferred to the Bond Board for Industrial Property Sites with a second by Benjy Harris, motion carried.

## **SOUTHWEST STEEL PROCESSING FORGIVEABLE LOAN REQUEST**

Southwest Steel Processing received a forgivable loan in the amount of \$350,000 tied to job creation. Two years ago, \$175,000 of the loan was forgiven. Due to ongoing challenges related to the railroad economy, the company has been unable to meet its remaining job targets. Since that time, Southwest Steel Processing has received forgiveness of its state-level incentives from the Arkansas Economic Development Commission and has paid off its bonds through the Arkansas Development Finance Authority. Considering these actions, the company is requesting forgiveness of the remaining \$175,000. Lee Scoggins made a motion to table the discussion until September with a second by Benjy Harris, motion carried.

## **INDUSTRIAL SITE INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT UPDATE**

The Industrial Site Infrastructure Grant has been resubmitted with recommendations by the consultant.

## **THIRD AND LAUREL PARKING LOT UPDATE**

The parking lot on Third and Laurel should be complete by March 1.

## **75 STRONG**

Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, and Christel Taylor will attend the ESO session in Conway on February 25 & 26<sup>th</sup>.

## **TECH DEPOT UPDATE**

Due to a current hiring freeze at the Arkansas Department of Corrections, the NEDC is using this time to collaborate with partners to identify and develop additional training opportunities in Newport.

## **CALL CENTER UPDATE**

Completion of the Business Resource Center has been delayed until April 20 due to pending elevator parts. In the meantime, external marketing on the building is ongoing.

## **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 has been approved for a sign on the highway.

**PROJECT HI HO**

Project Hi Ho is a project that is looking to assemble the computers for cryptocurrency. Due to tariffs on Chinese imports it would reduce tariff costs from 100 percent to 15 percent.

**PROJECT TERMINATOR**

Project Terminator is an AI project that would require at least 1,200 acres and a large amount of power.

**ADJOURNED**

Benjy Harris made a motion to adjourn the meeting with a second from Mike Turner, meeting adjourned.