

Larry Weber, President  
Kurt Herrington, Board Member  
Michael Page, Board Member  
Ben Campbell, Board Member  
Linda Dickens, Board Member  
Charles Drane, Board Member  
Will Brule, Board Member



Lisa Denton, ED Director  
Terry Johnson, ED Project Manager

Minutes from July 31, 2020 Special Board Meeting  
Palestine Economic Development Board of Directors

The Economic Development Board convened in a Virtual Zoom Special Meeting on Friday, July 31, 2020 at 9:00 am, with five PEDC Board members present: Charles Drane, Linda Dickens, Michael Page, Ben Campbell, and Will Brule were present. Absent were Larry Weber and Kurt Herrington.

Others present via Zoom included Lisa Denton Economic Development Director; City Manager Leslie Cloer; Terry Johnson, ED Project Manager; City Secretary Teresa Herrera and Mary Raum, Tourism Marketing Manager.

- A. CALL TO ORDER** – With a quorum present, Lisa Denton called the Virtual Special Meeting to order at 9:03 am.
- B. PUBLIC COMMENTS** – None
- C. DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS** – Discussion of Strategic Plan

Lisa Denton opened the strategic planning discussion by stating this is a plan not only for the next fiscal year 2020-2021, but also a discussion for the next two to five years, and the next six to ten years. Larry Weber emailed two short-term items he would like to see from PEDC, and they were: continued downtown revitalization and a guidebook for PEDC policies. The following statements and requests came during the meeting.

**Charles Drane**

- Emphasize cleaning up Palestine, whether with the gateways to Palestine or downtown projects. Any commercial areas that can be cleaned up for reuse would be good for Palestine.
- Have a ready list of property sites to provide to brokers, developers and site selectors that shows Palestine's inventory of buildings and land.
- Focus on empty buildings downtown through downtown revitalization and code enforcement.
- Educational institutions can be an industry, including ISD's. PEDC should consolidate a marketing idea for workforce development. Our marketing tool should be showcasing TVCC, UT Tyler Palestine and PISD Career and Technical Education Center. Tout the fact that we have a great educational industry in Palestine and Anderson County.
- Even in the City of Palestine, our internet service is not what it needs to be. We need improvement in broadband for our businesses in town, and people that live out in the county.

**Will Brule**

- Focus on education, housing, and infrastructure (streets, water, and broadband).
- Save money where you can.
- Let organizations like the Chamber stand on their own financially.

#### Linda Dickens

- Making tenants more accountable for buildings downtown, and if the owners do not want to open a business downtown, have codes to make them sell at a reasonable price after so many years.
- Showcase school art at Carnegie Library, Ben E Keith, and Vintage & More Art Festival event.
- Better broadband should be a priority.
- Social media and marketing are important.

#### Michael Page

- Business attraction and marketing must be a number one priority for PEDC due to our location. All the major highways are an asset and cost of doing business is better and more cost effective.
- School CTE Programs need to make sure they know exactly what the business needs are. Emphasize the soft skills and industrial skills students need to find work. Students need to be aware of all the different trade occupations available to them. There are a lot of 2-year degree plans available for those that do not want to attend 4 years of college. In Marshall, Texas, at TSTC, our Palestine students go to lineman school and electrical engineering schools to get a 2-year degree, and some of them may want to come back to Palestine to work for Oncor and TVEC.
- Industrial industries rely on broadband and PEDC needs to make the broadband investment. Satellite service is not as affordable or dependable. Broadband is the best option.
- Mission Statement – Michael will work on the ideas discussed at the meeting and create an updated, concise mission statement for the organization.

#### Ben Campbell

- Find a way to help small businesses get the knowledge they need to succeed in business, which helps our business retention efforts. Ask the SBDC to create a success plan, i.e., how to start a business, assistance with accounting and tax issues, and create several documents for public use. Advertise the SBDC more for public use in our community.
- Broadband is the key to growth in Palestine. Work with a company in a public-private partnership so that all citizens internet needs are met.
- Development of an industrial rail park, but we have no switches. The best location for development of an industrial rail park is the TSRR site.
- Add Ivy Payne Wildlife Refuge to the activity list for Visit Palestine.
- Find ways to get gas and water pressure up so that new industry will grow.
- Develop ways to improve and to market the Bachelor of Science Nursing Program at UT Tyler at Palestine. Market TVCC programs as well.

#### Lisa Denton

- Put a long-range plan in place to make the business park more marketable. Trying to locate the WCBP master plan. We need shovel ready sites with roads, water, gas, and broadband in place.
- Our Main Street Manager has a list of downtown code enforcements issues and planning a meeting with our Fire Marshall and Code Enforcement Officer soon.
- PEDC needs a business and retention plan that supports the bigger employers in town. The plan should provide opportunities for them to expand in Palestine. Potential Plant Manager meetings/roundtables. We need to build relationships with our local employers. The main purpose of business retention is to develop relationships so that we become aware of any red flags ahead of time.

- SBDC has access to an expert available to partner with downtown business owners to help them maximize their business opportunities.
- We must be able to show that the City of Palestine is business friendly and welcoming. Our development standards must not be too restrictive. We need to maintain strong partnerships between the city, EDC, and county, as well as other local agencies. For recruitment efforts, partnering in regional groups works well. Have also seen success from recruitment trips for CEO visits. If the board would like to investigate a higher level of recruitment, it would require more money in the marketing budget for these types of activities.
- PEDC needs to increase its partnership with local ISD's and higher ed to help promote workforce development. Match CTE programs to meet demands of local industries. Revive the Workforce Readiness Committee and build on these relationships.
- Career Fairs through the Workforce Board may be beneficial.
- Broadband focus is important to our community. A revenue sharing public-private partnership may be an option for our broadband issues.
- Focus on broadband first, and then focus on the marketing and attraction portion of our ED plan. We are waiting on our Connected Nation study, so that we can share with the service providers.
- Cartmell Homes will likely be moving in 6 to 12 months. PEDC needs to focus on the properties we own, and how we plan to market those properties in the future.
- Improve our social media campaigns.

#### Leslie Cloer

- Will share a document that will show a few test sites for manufactured housing in Palestine, specifically on Future Street inside Council Member Chivers' district. Planning and Zoning Committee is making the process much easier.
- City does not have adequate water pressure to support additional downtown living. The Calhoun building is our best option, but the city would need a lot of funds to fix the water pressure issues.
- Use one weekend per month to keep downtown businesses open for business. Antiques, art, dining, and shopping. The Visit Palestine App helps with special weekend promotion. Pop up art displays from a historical point of view could be helpful. Partner with downtown businesses to house displays. Can include youth art as well.
- Be readily available to developers for welcoming business to Palestine.
- Concerning Broadband, it is much more cost effective to tie into existing fiber. For example, in the business park. The PEDC and City will talk to vendors about costs and connection speeds. We should be asking the question, is the cost affordable for the quality of service we are receiving?
- Under business retention, only two restaurants have closed since Covid-19. We need to work with the Palestine Chamber to promote Shop Local Campaign for all retail businesses in Palestine.

This list of goals will be turned in for next City Council Work Session based on the above comments from the PEDC Board members.

#### **Goals:**

**Assets-Sites & Tools:** *Enhance capacity to accommodate new investment and job growth*

Broadband initiative (*short term top priority*)

Investigate partnerships with service providers

Tie into Willow Creek Apartments fiber to extend into business park

- Work with providers to offer cost effective rates
- Property identification (*short term*)
  - Determine shovel ready sites and marketable buildings for targeted industries (*short term*)
- Plans for infrastructure needs (*long term*)
  - Determine needs in business park (*short term*)
  - Work with city on water pressure issues and Atmos on gas pressure where appropriate
- Identify future sites and strategy for acquisition/development (*long term*)
  - Potential for Industrial Rail Park (TSRR site?)
  - Maintain updated inventory on PEDC site and other accessible sites (*ongoing*)

**Marketing & Attraction:** *Increase awareness of opportunities in Palestine*

- Build awareness of opportunities in Palestine (*short term*)
- Lead generation plans-identify regional partners or other avenues that offer cost effective solutions (*intermediate*)
- Increase social media awareness (*short term*)
- Continue downtown revitalization (*short and long term*)
- Extend program to improve distressed gateway areas (*intermediate*)
- Work with city to develop code enforcement plan (*short term*)
- After hours events in downtown (art, music) encourage stores to remain open
- Opportunities for infrastructure improvements (*long term*)
- Continue focus on commercial development (*short term*)

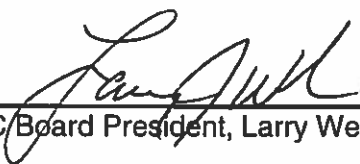
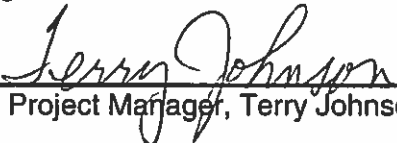
**Business Retention & Expansion:** *Create environment that encourages growth of existing businesses*

- Develop BRE program and implement activities to help support local business with emphasis on primary employers (*short term*)
- Maintain inventory of existing businesses and develop relationships (*short term*)
- Promote entrepreneurship opportunities through partnership with SBDC (*short term*)
- Plant Manager/CEO networking or roundtable events (*short term*)

**Talent Development:** *Elevate technical training to meet industry needs*

- Education-Industrial skills, soft skills, career fair (*ongoing*)
- Revive Workforce Readiness Committee
- Build relationships with ISD's and higher ed (*short term*)
- Build relationship with WSET and partner on employer initiatives (*short term*)

**K. ADJOURNMENT – 10:53 am** Meeting adjourned by Lisa Denton.

	8/20/20	12:51 pm
PEDC Board President, Larry Weber	Date	Time
	8/20/20	12:51 pm
PEDC Project Manager, Terry Johnson	Date	Time