



**COLUMBIA ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 12:05 PM by Chairman Sam Davis.

<b>Attendee Name</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Absent</b>	<b>Late</b>	<b>Arrived</b>
Sam Davis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Will Brennan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tameika Isaac Devine	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**COMMITTEE DISCUSSION**

1. Columbia Technology Plan - Mr. Ryan Coleman, Economic Development Director

Ryan Coleman, City of Columbia Economic Development Office Director said the Columbia Technology Plan has been underway for over a year. Richland County has been the umbrella organization and has convened an extensive list of partners. South Carolina continues to fare well in the areas of manufacturing. In the Columbia, Richland, and Lexington area, we have the capability and assets to compete for more of the knowledge economy and high wage paying jobs. We need to realign our assets to create an environment that's conducive to entrepreneurship and start-up activity. Deloitte was brought in as the lead consultant. We pulled this plan together in August and it focuses on our innovative capacity, workforce and education, incentives, and marketing.

Jeff Ruble, Richland County Economic Development Director provided background information on the creation of Central SC Alliance and the City's Economic Development Office along with the need for the Columbia Economic Development Action Plan. Deloitte Consulting is the preeminent site selection consulting firm in the country.

Garry Powers, Richland County Economic Development Office Project Manager said there were 68 recommendations within the report. Deloitte said we were under achieving because we were not known for attracting and retaining knowledge-based talent; lack of identity or a brand; and a limited base of homegrown knowledge-based firms and a weak entrepreneurial system. The issue of elevated property taxes and lack of direct air service also came up. The target industries are in information technology and certain high growth areas of manufacturing. As it relates to education, training, and talent, we are working to attract transitioning military IT workers. We are working with the SC Council on Competitiveness on in-depth IT workforce and talent strategies and next gen manufacturing/logistics workforce and talent strategy. MTC is working



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with SCBIO on biomed education/training strategy. As it relates to innovation, we need to develop technology corridor strategies and sector-specific technology/incubator strategies. We are working with the City of Columbia on an Insurtech Summit and with UofSC to align their research priorities with the region's economic development activities.

Ryan Coleman, City of Columbia Economic Development Office Director noted that Benedict College and Allen University have also been involved in these discussions.

Garry Powers, Richland County Economic Development Office Project Manager reported that for incentives and taxation, legislation to reduce our state franchise tax has been pre-filed. Legislation has been drafted for major revisions to the Life Sciences Act. There will be future legislation for state and local incentives for white collar firms. The sector-specific local incentives will be requested to help build technology corridors, sector-specific incubators, and talent acquisition and retention. The Central SC Alliance will lead the effort in economic development marketing by creating a Columbia branding and marketing strategy.

Jeff Ruble, Richland County Economic Development Director said there are different efforts underway. We will do more place marketing to raise visibility for Richland County, Lexington County and the City of Columbia.

Ryan Coleman, City of Columbia Economic Development Director said we've had many conversations about regional marketing, and we are unifying our branding to better align with each other.

Garry Powers, Richland County Economic Development Office Project Manager said there will be targeted marketing efforts. There are 40 Insurtech companies in Columbia. Most of them are in the City and up to 12 of them have expansion potential. We will talk with them specifically about expansion opportunities. We will develop biopharmaceutical market prospect identification and other sector-specific marketing strategies. The Central SC Alliance is developing talent attraction marketing initiatives. When we come back, we will drill down into the specific recommendations, outcomes, value proposition for the City of Columbia, and investing into some of these initiatives going forward.

Councilor Devine asked what knowledge base are we lacking according to Deloitte.

Garry Powers, Richland County Economic Development Office Project Manager said we have a strong base in software but it is not growing. There is a tremendous amount of poaching between our IT companies in the Columbia market. There are not enough experienced workers.



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Jeff Ruble, Richland County Economic Development Director said according to Deloitte, Prisma chose Greenville for its headquarters because it was a better place to recruit and retain talent. We've had major exoduses of some of our best talent and technology companies.

Councilor Devine said if we are experiencing gaps in knowledge and talent, we need to address both of those. I want to make sure we are including K-12 in the conversation. They are charged with providing us with the raw material. I want to make sure higher education is aligning with our priorities, as well. As we talk about taxes and incentives, what other recommendations can be put forward to address the challenges we have in the Midlands regarding taxes.

Garry Powers, Richland County Economic Development Office Project Manager recalled that Deloitte says that property taxes are an issue but the overall tax structure in Columbia is not out of whack. The data analytics in the tax study that was done with the City were very good, but some of the conclusions were simplistic; especially the one that said we were losing 25-54 year olds because of the tax issue. We are losing them because of the structure of jobs in the Columbia area has changed. We are losing manufacturing and distribution jobs and replacing them with hospitality jobs. If more higher paying jobs were available to a broader range of people, that would address a lot of the economic development issues.

Jeff Ruble, Richland County Economic Development Director added that this is not a program for white people. The expectation has to be raised amongst our K-12. They have to understand that these are the jobs regardless of where you go to school. Ben Rex's program indicates that there is talent spread across the population and we need to educate folks so they can take advantage of these opportunities. The low end jobs of the past are being replaced by skill sets that require digital understanding and coding.

Councilor Brennan said we need to create the jobs for the people who create the robots.

Ryan Coleman, City of Columbia Economic Development Director said an educated and trained workforce has become the center point of these discussions. This is a comprehensive report and there are a lot of levers we can push on. If we make small to mid-sized changes in a variety of these areas, we can create a large bandwidth on the backend of that pipeline. A lot of things need to be better aligned.

Councilor Brennan asked what do you envision happening in the near-term for us to start the relationship building with a common goal of the big takeaways from this action plan?



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Garry Powers, Richland County Economic Development Office Project Manager said in the next 6-months we will make the greatest impact on education, training, and talent side. One primary goal for 2021 is to make sure city and county governments and industry leadership are on board on a sector by sector basis. We need to show you specific outcomes and we need to be held accountable for meeting these outcomes.

Jeff Ruble, Richland County Economic Development Director said this plan helps us to accomplish the goals of economic development and we need the elected officials of the City of Columbia, Richland County, and Lexington County to get behind this plan.

Councilor Davis said I was pleased to see that Midlands Technical College is viewed as a major player in all of this. They have a unique setup being that they are located in an industrial park and across from a high school. I observed Kennan's robotics program and I see that as a natural relationship transition and a resource for Midlands Tech. I don't know if there is a real relationship between the two.

Councilor Brennan asked what role will our delegation play in helping to build the foundation for the action plan. What is the Life Sciences Act?

Garry Powers, Richland County Economic Development Office Project Manager said the legislature doesn't typically work on legislation for economic development. We will be telling them about the projects we are losing. Over 10 years ago, the Department of Commerce helped to develop incentives for biopharmaceuticals and other life science medical devices, but the incentives were difficult for companies to use. Recommendations from the report were included in a draft bill for the Life Sciences Act. We will be coming back to you with specific things we want to partner with you on along with the value proposition, the path forward, and outcomes.

Councilor Davis said I see the City progressing as a result of the kind of work you all are doing. It is important for the members of Council to be briefed periodically.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was closed at 1:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Moore Hammond, CMC  
City Clerk