

Town of Richlands  
Industrial/Economic Development Authority  
January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024

The Richlands IEDA held a regular monthly meeting at 6:00 P.M. with the following present:

Joseph Vance	Cody Harman
Craig Earls	Dr. Brandon Buskill
Dillon Smith	Lynna Mitchell

Members Absent: Jeff Casey  
Town Representatives: Jordan Bales, Jason May  
Guests:

Dr. Brandon Buskill called the meeting to order. Joseph Vance opened the meeting with prayer.

Craig Earls made a motion to approve the agenda. Dr. Brandon Buskill seconded the motion. No further discussion. All voted “Aye”. Motion carried.

The minutes from December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023, were presented with one correction update from “purpose” to “proposed” in the Miscellaneous IEDA Topics section. Joseph Vance made a motion to approve the minutes with proposed correction. Craig Earls seconded the motion. No further discussion. All voted “Aye”. Motion carried.

**New Business:**

**IEDA Member Introduction:**

Dr. Brandon Buskill introduced Lynna Mitchell as our newest member of the IEDA. She introduced herself as being raised in Richlands and operated the Tazewell County Free Press for 33 years. She currently works as a grant writer for AASC. She also volunteers a lot for the town and has worked with the downtown revitalization. Lynna worked with the town and is currently the chair of the section house advisory board. She was officially sworn in on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

The group welcomed her to the IEDA, and we look forward to working with her.

**Miscellaneous IEDA Topics:**

Joseph Vance: During our last meeting we discussed the IEDA not being responsible for power and electric rates. The town has the electrical committee that makes recommendations for those items, and they will make those recommendations directly to the Council. Jeff Casey discussed a potential property at Lake Park and that has easy access to power infrastructure. We also discussed the CNX peaker plant. Joseph confirmed that CNX does own 50% of the peaker plant and First Energy owns the other 50%. These generators only come online when peak rates are in effect.

The group discussed the proposed power gas turbine generation and that lowering infrastructure costs for the town will help bring in new businesses.

Town Manager Introduction – Jason May

Jason May: One of the things that drew me to Richlands was the electric utility. If you sell electricity low, you can get data centers and other high-power users. You have gas, water, electricity, and that is where we need to start. I think we have some challenges with the generator project, but if we run gas into the town, we have some additional benefits and we can offer those additional benefits packages. You need partners to be able to bring in projects of this size.

Jason May reviewed and passed out documentation from the Virginia Economic Development Partnership program that has grants available. They have some programs for sites that are 25 and 50 acres. There are opportunities for property in town that we can look at for development. The delta for the number jobs in 1984 to now is 1000 less jobs. That is a lot of jobs that have been removed for people to raise families on. Richlands has a lot of benefits like commuting time to I81/I77 in less than 45 minutes. Hendersonville, NC was a retirement community. They had textile/manufacturing, and they are now recovering by selling infrastructure that was in place. How do we maximize, and make sure we use all resources we have available? I want this group to work with our zoning and planning commissions to find viable economic sites. We just don't have the sites, so we need to find suitable sites with enough land for us to sell electricity. We need to work together to get jobs. We need jobs, and jobs that pay more than minimum wage. We need jobs in town that can support families and we need the sites to do that. I would like this committee to look at sites and help do the leg work. This information can be presented to the council to budget development monies for these sites. I would like us to work as a 501c3 organization. We can set this organization up to be able to get resources that a local government cannot.

The group discussed Mr. May's ideas and we welcomed him to town. We affirmed that we are looking forward to working together as a team and achieving goals to drive economic development that is needed to allow the town to prosper.

Mr. May: We also have a downtown coordinator position posted to help us log the buildings downtown. We need this so that we know the locations available.

Lynna: Are we in an enterprise zone?

Jason May: I am awaiting an answer from the county on that. Again, finding sites is our number one priority. Economic development incentive plans are a second priority. The vision I have for the town is that we desperately need good paying jobs.

Dr. Brandon Buskill: To the group. Between now and the next meeting, let's take an action item for us to look at potential sites for discussion at our next meeting.

Craig Earls made a motion to adjourn. Dr. Brandon Buskill seconded the motion. All voted "Aye". Motion carried.

Next Meeting February 5<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00 P.M