

NEWPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Tuesday, January 13, 2026
7:00 A.M.
Business Resource Center

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

Chairman Dean Sides

OTHERS PRESENT

Others present were NEDC Executive Director Jon Chadwell, Director of Chamber Affairs Julie Allen, Director of Workforce Christel Taylor, Mayor Derrick Ratliffe, 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 December, with a second by Secretary/ Treasurer Mike Turner, motion carried.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Director Chadwell presented the financial report for December. Director Chadwell presented the sales tax and obligations. The sales tax is up 0.6% for the year. Newport Raceway paid their lease for 2025 totaling \$10,000. Secretary/Treasurer Mike Turner made a motion to accept the financial statements for December with a second from Scott Foushee, motion carried.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Jackson County Bond Board
- Kyle Tiffey
- AECON
- Justin Foshee
- South Arkansas Development Council

DIRECTOR OF CHAMBER AFFAIRS REPORT

- Dells Corporation
- Arkansas Rehabilitation Services/Workforce
- Bark & Brews Ribbon Cutting
- ESO Summit in Conway
- Chamber Luncheon, March 6

RENEWPORT GRANTS

None currently.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR 2026

Commissioner Scott Foushee made a motion for officers in 2026 with Dean Sides as Chairman, Jim Gowen Sr. as Vice Chairman, and Mike Turner as Secretary/Treasurer with a second by Lee Scoggins, motion carries.

SITE CONSULTANT EVENT PARTICIPATION

Arkansas Economic Development Commission is hosting a Site Selection Consultation Event on April 1 through April 3. Newport will be one of eight communities to get one-on-one time with site selection consultants.

INDUSTRIAL APPRECIATION EVENT

Director Chadwell will check to see when Industrial Appreciation Week is and wants to hold a fish fry in the fall to support local industry.

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 will require new websites. Director Jon Chadwell will review all submitted proposals and narrow the field to three or four finalists. These selected proposals will then be presented at the February meeting for discussion and final determination of the option that best meets the needs of the City of Newport.

INDUSTRIAL GREENHOUSE PROPERTY UPDATE

The Industrial Greenhouse property is currently appraised at \$519,000 in its present condition. Director Chadwell has been in contact with two interested parties. Both parties have declined the initial offer price of \$488,000 and we are awaiting the possibility of a counteroffer. Director Chadwell will continue to follow up to assess any changes in interest.

DIAZ REFINERY PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The Diaz Refinery is a designated Superfund site with wells that continue to test above acceptable levels. The Newport Economic Development Commission (NEDC) has explored the potential purchase of the property in order to remediate the site, as it is located at the entrance to two of Newport's major industrial facilities. The Brownfield site encompasses approximately 5.9 acres. A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment is required and must be submitted to the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ). The Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) has a grant program that may fund the Phase I assessment, which will remain valid for 180 days. Due to existing environmental limitations, the most feasible use of the property would be for solar development.

INDUSTRIAL SITE INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT

The NEDC Director and Chamber Director Julie Allen will meet today at ASU–Newport to discuss an Industrial Site Grant. A site selection representative will also be in attendance, and following the meeting, the group will conduct a site visit of the proposed location.

THIRD AND LAUREL PARKING LOT UPDATE

Work on the Third and Laurel parking lot has resumed following the removal of the oil and underground storage tank, allowing construction activities to move forward.

INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY PRIORITIES FOR 2026

An overview of industrial properties owned by various Newport entities was presented to the Commission. Director Jon Chadwell reviewed each property to identify rezoning needs, required environmental cleanup, and any engineering or infrastructure improvements necessary to prepare the sites for future development.

75 STRONG

Jon Chadwell, Julie Allen, and Christel Taylor are currently in their second year of participation in the 75 Strong program. The team collaboration will meet in February, and the group will also attend the ESO session in Conway.

TECH DEPOT UPDATE

The Tech Depot update reflected strong utilization and instructional impact in 2025. Total daily attendance reached 6,613 visits, averaging 25.4 attendees per day, with 2,068 unique individuals served. Instructional offerings totaled 1,431.5 hours, resulting in 37,019 participant instruction hours overall.

CALL CENTER UPDATE

Jon Chadwell reported that construction is scheduled to be completed by February 17, 2025. In support of tenant recruitment efforts, 42 call center site consultants and support companies have been contacted via email, and conversations are currently underway with two potential tenants.

NEW SUBDIVISION UPDATE

The Newport School District is moving forward with plans for a new subdivision near the district. However, the school board is considering a different developer for the project, and P3 will not be constructing the subdivision. Discussions are continuing with Mark Morris, a contractor from Jonesboro, as the potential builder for the development.

TECH DEPOT GALLERY SCHEDULE

The Tech Depot Gallery schedule for 2026 includes a variety of featured artists and traveling exhibits. Gail Thaxton Fogleman's work will be on display from January 8 through March 24, followed by the American Revolution Experience traveling display from March 27 to April 11. The Clara Barton traveling exhibit will run from April 14 to June 24. Local artist Jeannie Walsh will be featured from June 25 to

August 20, and Jennifer Wilson's work will be on display from August 27 to October 1. The year will conclude with the Bandits, Badges, and Bars traveling exhibit from October 2 through November 25.

PROSPECT SMOCO

Prospect SMOCO is at a standstill.

PROSPECT RICE STRAW

Prospect Rice Straw is moving forward.

PROSPECT FRESH AT HOME

Domino's is open.

PROJECT FUEL UP UPDATE

Casey's is waiting for a permit from ARDOT.

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.

PROSPECT GIT ALONG

Prospect Git Along is being developed by Dwight Davis and James Thomas. Director Chadwell has put the owners in contact with the ARise Program to assist them with marketing.

ADJOURNED

Lee Scoggins made a motion to adjourn the meeting with a second from Nyesha Greer, meeting adjourned.