



## MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 2, 2026

9:00 AM

Alexander Building - Bynum Conference Room

**BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Chairman Mike Newberry, Vice Chairman William Davis, Dee Grist, Secretary-Treasurer Steve Singletary, Dr. Shanice Richardson, Sam Hattaway and Eric Harris.

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Beth Chandler, Hank Jester, Charlie Sol, Jack Davis, Kim Mitchell, Bill Mills, Melinda Crook, and Susanne Reynolds.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Mike Newberry. Prayer was led by Eric Harris.

A motion to amend the agenda to include a sponsorship request for Peanut Proud Festival was made by Sam Hattaway and seconded by Eric Harris. All voted in favor.

Meeting minutes for Jan. 5, 2026 and Feb. 2, 2026, along with the current financials were presented. A motion to approve was made by William Davis and seconded by Sam Hattaway. All voted in favor.

**NEW BUSINESS:** A RLF application in the amount of \$150,000 for Smitty's Grill of Blakely, LLC. (Jack Davis, Alex Warr, Eugene Menette) was presented. The RLF funds would be used for acquisition, remodel/revitalization, equipment and other upgrades. The intention is to retain the same employees (new jobs created since new business) and add 5 new jobs with eventually a total of 8-10 new jobs over time. The structure of the RLF terms was presented as an annual payment for 10 years with an interest rate of 3% and the Development Authority of Early County being the first lien holder of the property (3 buildings) all pending approval from the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the Early County Board of Commissioners. A motion to approve the RLF recommendation to the Early County Board of Commissioners as presented was made by Eric Harris and seconded by William Davis. All voted in favor.

Kim Mitchell, owner of Blakely Chicken, made a presentation to request an extension for Blakely Chicken, LLC. RLF payment 2026 for 12 months due to unforeseen business expenses. Bill Mills gave suggestion to re-amorize the RLF for Blakely Chicken, LLC. and that the interest for 2026 be paid. A motion to approve the extension request was made by Sam Hattaway and seconded by Eric Harris. All voted in favor.

A request of \$2500 for a Peanut Proud Festival Sponsorship was made by Mike Newberry. A motion to approve was made by Dee Grist and seconded by Sam Hattaway. All voted in favor.

**OTHER UPDATES:** Chairman Mike Newberry discussed the need to plan for the future and asked Reynolds to research and find an expert, along with funding opportunities, for a county-wide strategic plan development consultant. He also stated that small communities such as Early County have been built on agriculture and railroad development. Now small communities, like Early, find themselves in a paradigm shift. He added that this area would always be ag-based, but we are shifting to other things and



we need to plan for the growth. Reynolds stated there would be another QTS info session for the public on March 26 at the Al Hutchins Jr. Community Center. Attorney Bill Mills stated he is working on a data center ordinance for the Early Co. Board of Commissioners. This would only include unincorporated areas of Early County. He also stated that recommendations from the Early Co. Planning Commission would be incorporated into the ordinance draft. William Davis, Vice Chairman, agreed there needs to be a strategic plan in place that includes the city and county. Dr. Shanice Richardson stated that it could take a year or longer for a strategic plan to be completed - and the need for professional help to develop it would be needed since it is a lot of information. Reynolds agreed that a strategic plan of this size would need to be outsourced and not something that could be developed internally. The community would be involved with the planning via focus groups, interviews, surveys, etc.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:** Charlie Sol stated that a strategic plan is something that could be done internally rather than outsourced.

A motion to adjourn was made by William Davis and seconded by Eric Harris. All voted in favor.

**Meeting minutes were recorded by Susanne Reynolds, Director for the Development Authority of Early County.**

Mike Newberry or William Davis  
Chairman or Vice-Chairman

Steve Singletary  
Secretary-Treasurer