

**GLADEWATER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
SPECIAL SESSION MINUTES
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 6, 1:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Luke Kimbrough, John Paul Tallent, Mark Carpenter, Danny Darden, Michelle Palmer (Executive Director), Amanda Nobles (Consultant)

ABSENT: Jim Bardwell, Charlie Smith (Ex-Officio), Scott Owens (Ex-Officio), and Kevin Clark (Ex-Officio)

GUESTS: Lois Reed and James Draper (Reporter)

1. CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM.

2. CITIZENS COMMENTS:

None

3. CONSENT AGENDA:

- (a) Acceptance of September 13, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes

John Paul Tallent made a motion to accept the consent agenda. Danny Darden seconded. Motioned passed 4-0.

4. CONSIDERATION to approve payment of \$4,207.50 to Amanda Nobles for January – September 2023 consulting services:

Danny Darden asked if Jan-Sept is the normal billing period or if it would usually be a year at a time. Amanda Nobles said, no, she just didn't get it done. Mark Carpenter commented that the corporation is getting a bargain for her services for nine months. Michelle Palmer agreed.

Ms. Nobles recommended the board include in the motion to accept wording that enables the auditor to move the payment into FY 22-23 since the invoice was not created in time to issue payment during the correct fiscal year.

Mark Carpenter made a motion to approve the payment of \$4,207.50 to Amanda Nobles for January through September 2023 consulting services and to move this payment into the 2022-2023 fiscal year for budgeting purposes. John Paul Tallent seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

5. CONSIDERATION to select and engage with a website design firm to redesign and update www.gladewateredc.com:

Michelle Palmer discussed her research on EDC websites and potential web design firms. Top firms considered were Golden Shovel, ED Suite, New Media Campaigns (NMC), and Revize. Golden Shovel was outside of GEDCO's price range, and ED Suite had previous performance issues. NMC's websites lacked desired functionality and aesthetics compared to Revize, which was impressive.

Revize's annual cost was \$1,200 higher than NMC but offered a free website refresh in year 4 on a 5-year no-interest plan. Revize provided more flexibility, support, and content management compared to NMC.

During the meeting, Mark Carpenter inquired about the annual cost of the current website, and Michelle Palmer explained it to be approximately \$1,800. Mr. Carpenter reviewed the cost

breakdown, requested documentation for future reference, and questioned the viability of using a GoDaddy website. Mrs. Palmer emphasized the significant differences between proposed web designers and GoDaddy, with Mr. Carpenter likening the comparison to a Volkswagen versus a Rolls Royce. Amanda Nobles chimed in, affirming that the proposed web designers weren't equivalent to a Rolls Royce.

The discussion continued as Mr. Carpenter asked about the current website's functionality, to which Mrs. Palmer clarified that GEDCO currently had a placeholder website. She stressed the need for specialized web designers to create content catering to governmental and EDC websites. Mr. Carpenter further probed about KEDC's expenses in comparison to the proposals, with Mrs. Palmer mentioning that Golden Shovel provides their website and likening them to a Rolls Royce.

The conversation shifted to the ability of the current designer to make necessary changes, and Mrs. Palmer affirmed that he could, provided she provided the requisite content. Ms. Nobles explained that Mrs. Palmer's expertise lay in storytelling and that interactive elements and background programming were beyond her capabilities. Danny Darden then interjected, highlighting the importance of electronic communication and the responsibility to cater to various communication needs effectively.

Ms. Nobles reiterated the significance of making information easily accessible to site selectors, especially those interested in rural communities. Mrs. Palmer emphasized that updating the website was a part of GEDCO's strategic plan and discussed the budget allocation for the website as opposed to the promotion line item. She recommended Revize based on feedback and the budget, with support from Ms. Nobles and Luke Kimbrough, who believed upgrading with Revize was the minimum step to take for GEDCO to be competitive.

Mr. Darden brought up the challenge of measuring the return on investment (ROI) and the difficulty in pinpointing the number of newcomers required before considering the website's success. Mr. Carpenter showed interest in measuring ROI and Mr. Kimbrough mentioned other growing communities with Revize. Mrs. Palmer shared her experience visiting Sherman, where an impressive website played a key role in the city's growth. She stressed the need to adapt to successful strategies. Ms. Nobles added that even smaller clients like Kemp appeared impressive online. Mrs. Palmer acknowledged the current designer's strengths but noted the necessity for specific EDC knowledge to advance GEDCO's goals. Mr. Carpenter questioned the continuation of the current designer's services, to which Mrs. Palmer responded that they would be used until the new site launch.

Ms. Nobles emphasized that upgrading the website was the minimum requirement, as the funds were intended for generating leads rather than sitting idle. Mr. Carpenter expressed a preference for a local web design firm but understood the limitations. Mr. Darden pointed out that improving the website could attract more investment to Gladewater, potentially leading to a local option in the future. Ms. Nobles highlighted that the website was more than just an EDC tool; it sold the entire community and could become a business hub. Mr. Darden read from the proposal, mentioning the potential for promoting businesses through plugins, and Mr. Kimbrough noted its integration with their social media campaign.

John Paul Tallent sought Palmer's recommendation, and she favored Revize. Mrs. Palmer discussed the cost and the five-year commitment, with Mr. Carpenter expressing hesitation about the duration. Mr. Darden believed that the cost would be the same whether they committed or not and saw the fourth-year refresh as a valuable addition. The discussion concluded with a focus on curating content appropriately and a plan to create a media library in collaboration with Viking Film Works. Mr. Darden further elaborated on the capabilities a Revize website could offer.

Mr. Darden made a motion to empower the executive director to enter into an agreement with Revize for their website system development services and that we use the 5-year agreement and begin working with them. John Paul Tallent seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

6. DISCUSSION of internal marketing:

Mark Carpenter initiated the conversation by seeking clarification on the distinction between marketing and promotions. He expressed his viewpoint that the executive director should present her spending plans for line items to the board for approval, particularly for expenses like newspaper advertorials. Amanda Nobles, however, contended that this approach would involve the board in micromanagement, explaining that the executive director's role is to make decisions within the approved budget. She stressed that the board's primary function is to set policy. Ms. Nobles emphasized the importance of internal marketing to inform citizens about the corporation's activities, especially in small communities, and mentioned that the newspaper, available both in print and digitally, serves as a suitable medium for such communication.

Mr. Carpenter raised the question of why the executive director didn't seek board approval before spending on the advertorials. Michelle Palmer clarified that it was an approved line item within the budget, which authorized the executive director to execute it. She explained that while she presents vendor choices to the board, the day-to-day budget execution falls under her responsibilities.

Mr. Carpenter expressed concerns about the potential conflict of interest arising from Jim Bardwell's ownership of the newspaper and his position on the board. Danny Darden inquired whether there were any allegations of unethical behavior, to which Ms. Nobles asked if Mr. Carpenter was worried about a conflict of interest. Mr. Carpenter affirmed his concerns, but Mrs. Palmer praised Mr. Bardwell's ethical conduct, stating that he refrained from seeking advertorial sales and declined to sign checks for newspaper payments. She emphasized the need for internal marketing and the transparency it brings to GEDCO's operations, aligning with Mr. Carpenter's priority for the organization.

Luke Kimbrough recalled a previous meeting where advertorials were discussed and although no vote was taken, he believed everyone was generally in favor of them. He emphasized that the executive director operated with the board's permission. Mr. Carpenter, however, stated that he didn't recollect such approval.

Mrs. Palmer expressed her desire to continue publishing advertorials as they provided the most effective means to communicate GEDCO's story to citizens, despite social media also being used. She noted the positive impact on relations with city council members, who were encouraged by what they read. Mr. Darden explained that using the newspaper alongside social media created a multi-pronged strategy for communication, with the added benefit of online presence for articles, enhancing visibility.

John Paul Tallent inquired about the cost of running advertorials, and Mrs. Palmer explained the average cost for a quarter-page space in the paper was approximately \$220, with an additional \$55 for copywriting services, totaling less than \$300 per article. She proposed running an article every three weeks, which both Mr. Tallent and Mr. Kimbrough supported.

Ms. Nobles also highlighted that advertorials equipped council members with information to counter negative feedback from disgruntled citizens.

7. CONSIDERATION to transfer funds from Texas Bank and Trust to Raymond James:

Michelle Pamer stated the current amounts were \$108,031.87 in the sweep account and \$147,673.10 in the checking account.

Discussion was had regarding the amounts the board previously set to remain in each account. In the end Amanda Nobles found it was recorded as \$50,000 in checking and \$100,000 in the sweep account.

Mark Carpenter made a motion to move \$100,000 from Texas Bank and Trust to Raymond James. Danny Darden seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION: Convene into Executive Session in compliance with Texas Local Government Code, Section:

(a) §551.072 Deliberation About Real Property – Project 324c

Closed session began at 1:58 PM.

9. RECONVENE IN REGULAR SESSION and take any necessary action regarding items from Executive Session:

(a) §551.072 Deliberation About Real Property – Project 324c

Open session began at 2:12 PM.

Mark Carpenter made a motion to authorize the executive director and the president to negotiate a contract with discussed changes recommended by the board with review of a real estate attorney for Project 324c. Danny Darden seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

10. ADJOURN:

Mark Carpenter made a motion to adjourn. John Paul Tallent seconded. Motion passed. 4-0. Meeting adjourned at 2:13 PM.

Michelle Palmer, Executive Director

ATTEST:

Danny Darden, GEDCO Secretary/Treasurer