

Board Meeting Minutes
January 21, 2026
20 Doyle Street, Toccoa, GA

Attending: Brian Akin (via telephone), Evan Hellenga, Rick Phillips, Cassandra Wilkins, Fredda Wheeler, Christian Hamilton, Chuck Wright, Chad Dorsett, Abby Watson, Stacy Miller, Janney Sanders, Brittany Ivey, & Sadie Hawkins

Chairman Brian Akin called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

Phillips opened with prayer & led the Pledge of Allegiance. Akin read the confidentiality & conflict of interest statement.

A motion was made to approve the agenda as presented, [Phillips:Wilkins]. All in favor; none opposed.

A motion was made to approve the December 17, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes, [Hellenga:Wilkins]. All in favor; none opposed.

A motion was made to approve the December financials as presented, [Wilkins:Hellenga]. All in favor; none opposed.

Board Action Items:

The board welcomed new board members Evan Hellenga and Chris Rickman.

A motion was made to elect Evan Hellenga to serve as Vice Chair, [Phillips:Wilkins]. All in favor; none opposed. Akin turned the direction of the meeting over to Vice Chair Hellenga.

Program Updates/Reports:

Attraction: Ivey reported high activity at the end of December, with project managers contacted in early January for RFI updates. Project Aurora remains active but focused on another Georgia location. SCDA submitted Lots 3 & 4 for Project Blue Mercury, a proposed 160,000 sf facility with a \$100 million investment and 76 jobs, and is awaiting feedback. Project Defense is pending County site plan approval. Project Forge is still considering Lot 24. Project Grow should make an announcement in the first Quarter of 2026. Project Jazz said the building it was considering in our community is too far from the Savannah Port. Project MAX is awaiting an updated hotel feasibility study. Project Next is expected to close on one property on January 23. Project PI is working on a letter of intent & offer. Project Pillar remains active despite slow January activity. Project Venture received final GDOT approval for parallel parking, with renovations anticipated by year-end.

Existing Industry: Ivey reported ongoing discussions with Sark Wire regarding another potential expansion at their Toccoa facility and that incentives shared following the board's last meeting are under review.

Product Development: Freeman Creek Lift Station is fully installed, with testing scheduled for February 2. The Memorial Drive PUD developer is working on extending the contract and obtaining additional grading quotes. Ivey and Hawkins will begin grad recertification efforts. SCDA received \$15,000 from Georgia Power to support required studies.

President's Report:

Ivey reported strong turnout at the Pre-Legislative Coffee Chat and highlighted efforts to increase funding for technical college instructors. Wilkins attended December's Essentials in Economic Development training, with Phillips, Akin, and Hawkins scheduled to attend in March. SCDA was featured in the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Annual Report for the Manufacturing Challenge and will attend next week's planning meeting to start working on this year's bootcamp.

Workforce Development: The next 8th grade industry tour will be in March. Advancement Academy students will be visiting Piedmont and Toccoa Falls Colleges in February. Samantha Rickman will speak to the students Thursday.

Recruit New Industry: Ivey reported that our community's semiannual housing permit numbers are in. There were 63 single-family and 28 mobile home permits issued July–December 2025.

Input from Others: Hamilton reported the county is prepared for the expected winter storm this weekend. Wright noted positive feedback from attendees at specialty training last week regarding Stephens County and SCDA's work. Wilkins discussed Paysen's resignation from the Chamber, noting the board supports her decision and has an internal process to hire her successor. Wilkins reminded the group of the upcoming leadership graduation on February 26.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 a.m., [Phillips:Wilkins]. All in favor; none opposed.

Submitted By:

Attested By:

Brian Akin, Chairman

Brittany W. Ivey, President/CEO