



EDACC Board Meeting Minutes

January 28, 2026 EDACC Conference Room

Meeting called by	Chairman, Rick Evans - called the meeting to order @ 8:00					
Type of meeting	Board Meeting					
Facilitator	Chairman, Rick Evans					
Note taker	Linda Peplau					
Adjourned	8:52 AM					

Board Attendance	Rick Evans	Y	Mark Wills	Y	Stan Shepherd	ABSENT
	Jim Cox	Y	Jean Garniewicz	Y	Kerry Bridges	Y
	Mark Herbert	Y	Ben Stapleton	Y	Rick Toole	Y

Staff/Guests: Anita Patel, Stuart Hilsman, Linda Peplau, Chris Driver (Hull Barrett, PC), Dr. Tom Clark (The Alliance for Fort Gordon), William Eubank (Thomas & Hutton) & Skyler Andrews (The Augusta Press)

Meeting Agenda

1 minute	Chairman, Rick Evans
Discussion	Chairman, Rick Evans called for a motion to jointly approve the agenda for the January 28, 2026, EDACC Board Meeting & the minutes for the December 12, 2025, EDACC Board Meeting.
Conclusions	Motion: Mark Herbert 2nd: Rick Toole Motion carries unanimously (8-0)

Minutes of Previous Meeting

0 minutes	Chairman, Rick Evans
Discussion	See above.
Conclusions	Motion: Mark Herbert 2nd: Rick Toole Motion carries unanimously (8-0)

DACC Financial Report	
13 minutes	Treasurer, Mark Wills
Discussion	<p>Treasurer, Mark Wills reported on the following items in the December 2025 financial report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page 1 (balance sheet): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provided a Net Position report from the totals on page 1. ○ Confirmed that the loan at First State Bank has been fully paid off using the closing proceeds from the sale of the White Oak Phase 3 parcels. ○ Pointed out that the balance in the Phase 3 bank account includes funds from the closing proceeds. ○ The current objective is to explore investment opportunities that offer high returns. ○ Reported the remaining debt on the balance sheet. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The goal at hand is to pay off high-interest debt while continuing to service low-interest debt. ○ Reported that the County Finance Department is compiling a reimbursement schedule for EDACC to repay. • Page 2 (monthly expenses): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Noted that appropriations are currently tracking on target. • Page 3 (monthly expenses): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highlighted the 'Professional Fees' line item recorded by Leanne Reece in connection with the land sale closing documents. ○ Mark Wills noted that there is ongoing collaboration with the county to confirm the journal entry for the land sale proceeds. • Page 6 (2026 FY budget) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mark reported that the expenses and budget on this page were reviewed and appear accurate and satisfactory. <p>Chairman, Rick Evans shared the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided a brief White Oak closing update. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reported that he reviewed the land sale journal entry that was executed by the county Finance dept. ○ Reported that we have 77 acres remaining in White Oak Phase I for sale for future projects. ○ Confirmed that EDACC successfully recouped all closing costs from the buyer, as reflected in the gain on sale. <p>Comments, Questions & Answers</p> <p>Q: Mark Herbert asked about intentions to pay off all liabilities.</p> <p>A: Rick Evans noted that EDACC is actively exploring paying off the 2017 Debt Service (W.Oak PH 1-Bond), as it carries a higher interest rate than the return currently being earned at the bank. Added that the next payment is scheduled 11/2026.</p> <p>Q: Kerry Bridges inquired about the transition from CPA to County processes, specifically regarding adjustments for journal entry recording and the preparation of monthly financial statements.</p> <p>A: Office staff reported that the County Finance Department has been very helpful in guiding and entering journal entries as directed by Leanne Reece and EDACC leadership (Cheney Eldridge and Rick Evans).</p>
Conclusions	<p>Chairman, Rick Evans called for a motion to approve the December 2025 Financial Reports.</p> <p>Motion: Mark Herbert 2nd: Jean Garniewicz. Motion carries unanimously (8-0)</p>

Chairman's Report	
11 minutes	Chairman, Rick Evans
Discussion	<p>Chairman Rick Evans provided the following updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment Plan and Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Money market account where funds are held is currently earning an interest rate of 3.5%. ○ We are currently reviewing the county's investment policies and exploring options for higher-yield investments to maximize returns while maintaining compliance and security. ○ Rick shared that Cheney has actively sought advice from surrounding communities that have already experienced the potential of projects similar to ours. • Project updates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shared that at the next Board of Commissioners (BOC) meeting on February 3, 2026, the commission will vote on the final rezoning of White Oak Phase II and Phase III to Data Center (D-C). ○ Rick Evans reported to the board that he and Cheney Eldridge meet regularly to discuss project updates and aim to keep the county informed of progress as information becomes available. • Strategy Session results: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It was agreed not to create a separate Investment Committee. Instead, the Executive Committee will take responsibility for exploring and identifying the best investment opportunities. ○ Reported that no changes were adopted to the committees, as they are functioning well in their current structure. • Future prospects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rick Evans reported that he would like to place a strong focus on small business development within our community.
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nomination Committee results: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As an officer of the EDACC Nomination Committee, Kerry Bridges reported that, given the current state of our project, he believes continuity in EDACC leadership is needed and recommended. ○ The Nomination Committee recommends retaining the current officers: Rick Evans as Chairman, Stan Shepherd as Vice Chairman,, Mark Wills as Treasurer, and Jean Garniewicz as Secretary. ○ Kerry suggested taking a more deliberate and strategic approach to how we address our balance sheet and future investment decisions in 2026.
Conclusions	<p>*** Kerry Bridges made a motion to leave the existing officers in their current positions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Rick Evans as Chairman * Stan Shepherd as Vice Chairman * Mark Wills as Treasurer * Jean Garniewicz as Secretary <p>Motion: Kerry Bridges 2nd: Rick Toole Motion carries unanimously (8-0)</p>

EDACC Committee Reports

3 minutes | Jean Garniewicz, for Existing Business Development & Workforce Dev. Committee 01.09.2026

Jean Garniewicz shared the following topics for the Existing Business Dev.& Workforce Dev. Committee:

- Jean reported that during the last Existing Business Development & Workforce Development Committee meeting, Kerry Bridges expressed his excitement about Georgia Power’s active role in meeting power needs as our community and state continue to grow into a leading energy provide.
 - Kerry provided the committee with details of the strategic plan that Georgia Power actively participates in to ensure power needs are met as growth continues.
- Meeting topics included the objective of ensuring existing businesses know that we are here to support them should they need assistance.

* Rick Evans reported that the Property Development Committee meeting scheduled for January 9, 2026, was canceled and did not take place.

Project Updates & Economic Development Update

8 minutes | Project Managers, Stuart Hilsman

Stuart Hilsman shared the following:

- Stuart thanked the board for accommodating the recent change to an 8:00 AM start time for board and committee meetings.
- **ARDA Presentation update:**
 - Stuart’s presentation was on January 22, 2026, at the Georgia Power Experience in Atlanta.
 - Stuart reported that he was able to network with other development teams during the event.
 - He thanked the board for allowing him these opportunities, which have helped him refine his presentation skills.
 - Presentation topics included:
 - * Workforce
 - * Demographics
 - * Overview of Columbia County
 - Data Center activity and interest
 - White Oak Phase 2 completely sold out
 - White Oak Phase 1 (77 remaining parcels)
 - Available industry spaces & properties
 - Overview of existing industries
 - Stuart made sure to express our interest in the state development representative’s recommendations regarding project potential.
- **Existing Industry Updates:**
 - Stuart reported that he will be participating in a webinar today (Jan. 28, 2026) regarding tariffs.
 - EDACC staff is developing a **comprehensive fact sheet** to provide clear, concise, and reliable information about our organization. This resource will be used to inform companies considering opportunities in our area and will serve as a handout during visits to existing industries.

• Stuart reiterated Rick Evans’ reminder regarding the Board of Commissioners (BOC) meeting scheduled for February 3, 2026, at 6:00 PM.

Project Updates & Economic Development Update		
6 minutes	Project Managers, Anita Patel	
Discussion	<p>Anita Patel shared the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy Session updates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anita reported that the EDACC staff is currently working on scheduling a date for board training. • Existing Business news: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anita provided the board with a brief update on her recent tour of Augusta Sportswear’s facilities. ○ Reported a positive holiday season for existing and small businesses. ○ Anita reiterated Rick Evans' desire to focus on small business growth in our community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * She reported receiving inquiries from small businesses interested in entering our community and expressed a desire to facilitate newcomers in purchasing existing businesses that are looking to sell. * Shared an idea of developing potential business start-up locations to support transitioning small businesses. ○ Reported that the new Iron Wood location by Westlake is now open. • Anita shared that she successfully attended the Eggs & Issues 2026 event. • Anita reported that she has created an excel spreadsheet to track House Bills being passed, providing easy access to this information. 	
Public Comments		
10 minutes	William Eubank (Thomas & Hutton), Kerry Bridges (GA Power) & Skyler Andrews (The Augusta Press)	
Discussion	<p>William Eubank (Thomas & Hutton) shared that the funding efforts by EDACC and the board are commendable.</p> <p>Kerry Bridges (GA Power)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared information on the GA Power Hurricane Book. • Provided an update on the winter storm and issued a preparation advisory. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Emergency kit information (also on GP website) ○ GP paused disconnection orders for storm support <p>Chairman, Rick Evans closing points: Where do we go from here with inventory? Shares plans to move forward. New possibilities for this organization in terms of spurring economic development in our community.</p>	
Calendar of Events		
0 minutes	Chairman, Rick Evans	
Discussion	N/A	
Closed Session		
Discussion	N/A	
Adjournment		8:52 AM
Conclusions	Chairman, Rick Evans calls for a motion to adjourn the January 28, 2026, EDACC board meeting at 8:52 a.m. Motioned: Kerry Bridges 2nd: Mark Herbert Motion carries unanimously (8-0)	
Next meeting: February 25,2026		EDACC All