



EDACC Board Meeting Minutes						
March 25, 2026					EDACC Conference Room	
Meeting called by	Chairman, Rick Evans - called the meeting to order @ 8:01					
Type of meeting	Board Meeting					
Facilitator	Chairman, Rick Evans					
Note taker	Linda Peplau					
Adjourned	8:44 AM					
Board Attendance	Rick Evans	Y	Mark Wills	Y	Stan Shepherd	ABSENT
	Jim Cox	Y	Jean Garniewicz	Y	Kerry Bridges	Y
	Mark Herbert	ABSENT	Ben Stapleton	Y	Rick Toole	Y
Staff/Guests	Cheney Eldridge, Anita Patel, Stuart Hilsman, Linda Peplau, Chris Driver (Hull Barrett, PC), Connie Melear (BOC), William Eubank (Thomas & Hutton) & Skyler Andrews (The Augusta Press), Anastasia Black (Corporate Environments), & Heath Taylor (CCo. Chamber)					
Meeting Agenda						
1 minute	Chairman, Rick Evans					
Discussion	Chairman, Rick Evans called for a motion to jointly approve the agenda for the March 25, 2026, EDACC Board Meeting & the minutes for the February 25, 2026, EDACC Board Meeting.					
Conclusions	Motion: Jean Garniewicz 2nd: Mark Wills Motion carries unanimously (7-0)					
Minutes of Previous Meeting						
0 minutes	Chairman, Rick Evans					
Discussion	See above.					
Conclusions	Motion: Jean Garniewicz 2nd: Mark Wills Motion carries unanimously (7-0)					
DACC Financial Report						
6 minutes	Treasurer, Mark Wills					
Discussion	<p>Treasurer, Mark Wills reported on the following items in the February 2026 financial report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Page 1 (balance sheet):<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Mark noted the transfer of funds from the Phase 3 bank account to the Operating Checking account related to the county reimbursement check for the White Oak capital costs.◦ He noted that next month's report will reflect the liability changes associated with paying the county debts.• Page 2 & 3 (monthly expenses):<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ He shared that there was an increase in contract services due to technology expenditures and reported that the invoices were reviewed and approved.• Page 6 (2026 FY budget)<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Mark confirmed that the Budget vs. Actual figures are in line with expectations for this time of year.• Mark asked if there were any questions. There were no questions. <p>Rick Evans reiterated from the last meeting that the county reimbursement included the 2017 and 2020 bond payments made by the county on EDACC's behalf, as well as the lift station construction costs.</p>					
Conclusions	Chairman, Rick Evans called for a motion to approve the February 2026 Financial Reports. Motion: Jim Cox 2nd: Rick Toole Motion carries unanimously (7-0)					



Chairman's Report	
2 minutes	Chairman, Rick Evans
Discussion	Chairman Rick Evans expressed his gratitude to the EDACC staff for all they do, including organizing training sessions, coordinating industry tours, and balancing the many responsibilities required in their day to day operations.
Project Updates	
3 minutes	Project Managers, Stuart Hilsman
Discussion	<p>Stuart Hilsman shared the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existing Industry visit updates:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Augusta Iron & Steel Works, Inc.<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Steel girders manufacturer with a 70,000 square feet production space.* The company has a machine shop, production facility for welding, shot blasting, and a staging area.* Projects are primarily in the southeast, including bridges in Atlanta and near Bobby Jones golf course.○ John Deere<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Shared takeaways from the meeting with John Deere and Georgia Tech's Manufacturing Extension Partnership, highlighting potential future collaborations.* Reported on John Deere's manufacturing processes, including the production of small, compact utility tractors.* JD has 4 lines in the N. factory and 3 in the S. factory, with final products made to order and shipped to dealers.○ Club Car<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Stuart announced that he has successfully arranged a tour of Club Car for June 10th, courtesy of the Existing Business Committee. He will send an invitation to the board to collect RSVPs.

Economic Development Update

17 minutes

Executive Director Cheney Eldridge, Project Manager Stuart Hilsman, and Project Manager Anita Patel

Discussion

Stuart Hilsman shared the following subject topics for **Existing Business & Workforce Committee meeting (03.13.2026)**:

- The committee discussed the importance of connecting the full board with existing industries.
- Industry visits and tours were discussed as a valuable tool for need exploration and strengthening connections with existing industries.
 - Augusta Iron & Steel Works, Inc. (recently toured)
 - GIW (on the list for future visits)
 - John Deere (on the list for future visits)
 - Augusta Iron & Steel Works, Inc.
 - Club Car (tour set for June)
 - Plant Vogtle (Kerry has organized a tour for October 01, 2026)(Rick suggested including the county commissioners)
- Georgia Power received a \$26.5 billion low interest loan, with \$22B allocated to GA and \$4B to Alabama for infrastructure.
- The new Grovetown hospital is currently under construction, and a tour is in the planning stages.
- The committee also discussed strategic planning, legislative updates, and the importance of transparency in economic development.

Anita Patel shared the following subject topics for **Property Development Committee meeting (03.11.2026)**:

- Anita noted that the committee minutes shared are not yet approved and are considered drafts only.
- Property Committee Updates and Strategic Planning topics:
 - Discussed sold parcels around White Oak
 - Grocery retailer project updates
 - New data center website collaboration with the Columbia Co. Chamber to help inform the public with accurate facts.
 - * A tour of the website was presented to the board at the request of Rick Evans.
 - The committee is looking at a 20-year strategic plan, including retail and mixed-use development.

Executive Director, Cheney Eldridge shared the following updates:

- Cheney reported a successful **rezoning update** of the parcel that previously contained a typographical error.
 - All parcels in PH2 & PH3 of White Oak are currently zoned DC.
- **Board Member Training** updates:
 - Reminded the board of the annual two hour continuing education requirement.
 - Informed attendees that an eight hour training is required for new and re appointees.
 - Noted that EDACC will begin adding the required board training dates for 2027 to the shared calendar (four dates per year) so members can plan attendance.
 - 2026 - 8 hour training is scheduled for:
 - * Wednesday, April 22, 2026 (4hrs) - in lieu of our Board meeting
 - * Thursday, April 23, 2026 (4hrs)
- Cheney shared that EDACC will be featured in the **April issue of Columbia County Magazine** with an article highlighting the new data center and technology park project at White Oak.
- Shared that the new **data center project website link**, which will replace the old one on the EDACC website (www.columbiacountydatacenter.com), is now available. Rick noted that the website is a living, continually evolving resource.
- Cheney reported that she attended the **Site Selectors Guild** in Atlanta to meet with top site selectors and participate in networking opportunities, noting that data centers were a leading topic of discussion.
- April **showcase** updates:
 - Shared highlights for Masters week:
 - * Guest list
 - * Board Dinner – Monday at 7 PM
 - * Richmond County Regional Dinner – Thursday at 7 PM (Low Country Boil)
 - * Red Carpet Events –Thurs. and Sat. (limited parking; van transport available from the EDACC office to the tent)

Discussion

Public Comments		
13 minutes	Connie Melear (BOC), Kerry Bridges (GA Power), William Eubank (Thomas & Hutton), Skyler Andrews (The Augusta Press), & Anastasia Black (Corporate Environments)	
Discussion	Rick Evans opened the floor for public comment by asking Commissioner Melear if she had any updates, to which she responded that she did not. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rick then proceeded to comment on the housing challenges in our region and noted that there are several legislative bills currently being considered that aim to help address this issue.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Commissioner Melear then shared information on legislative bills, including HB 439 and related Senate bills, which impact property taxes and utility costs for data centers.◦ Jean Garniewicz mentioned a well done President’s Roundtable discussion about energy that included data centers and suggested adding the video to our website after emphasizing the importance of providing accurate information and increasing public awareness about data centers.• Rick shared positive feedback regarding the new county building.	
	William Eubank (Thomas & Hutton) shared that he is currently working on a water utility expansion project to support growth in the community, noting that our region continues to attract significant state interest.	
	Kerry Bridges (GA Power) shared information about the impact of a \$26.5 billion low interest loan between Southern Co. and the U.S. Department of Energy, which will generate approximately \$300 million in annual savings. These savings will support continued efforts to maintain downward pressure on customer bills as Georgia Power ensures that large-load customers pay their fair share of energy and energy infrastructure costs.	
	Rick Evans welcomed Columbia County Chamber CEO Heath Taylor back to Columbia County. Heath Taylor (Columbia County Chamber) shared information about the newly launched data center website he is collaborating on with the county, which is intended to provide factual information to the public for transparency. Heath also mentioned Georgia Chamber updates regarding legislative bill HB 439 and related Senate bills that affect our region through tax incentives and matters related to data centers.	
Calendar of Events		
1 minute	Chairman, Rick Evans	
Discussion	Rick provided a quick overview of the upcoming calendar of events. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• April 01, 2026, Business Recruitment & Incentive Program Committee - 8:00 a.m.• April 20, 2026, Executive Committee Meeting - 8:00 a.m.• April 22 & 23, 2026, Board Training 8 -12:30 (2days/8-hour training)	
	Linda reminded the board that next month's board meeting will be replaced with board training.	
Adjournment		8:44 AM
Conclusions	Chairman, Rick Evans calls for a motion to adjourn the February 25, 2026, EDACC board meeting at 8:44 a.m. Motioned: Kerry Bridges 2nd: Jean Garniewicz Motion carries unanimously (7-0)	
Next meeting: May 27,2026		All