

**MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
CUMBERLAND COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD**

**June 4, 2022
12:30 pm**

The meeting of the Cumberland County Economic Development Board was held on Tuesday, June 14, 2021 at the Greenview Inn, Italia Ave., Vineland, NJ. Chairperson Bert Lopez called the meeting to order and explained the meeting was being conducted in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act. Notice of the meeting was published in the local newspapers and posted as required. Silent Roll call was completed after the flag salute. The luncheon was sponsored by Archer and Greiner Law Firm.

Members present:	Bert Lopez Wade Sjogren Jerry Velazquez Christy DiLeonardo Mayor Kelly Comm Musso Cosmo Giovannizi Sandy Forosisky Paul Ritter John Ruga	Staff: Kim Ayres County Staff: Jody Hirata
Guests/Public Members:	Chris Cavaliero, ACE Carol Maier Sandy Acevedo Nancy Ridgeway Roy Spoltore	John Ferringer Chris Gibson, Archer & Greiner Allison Spinelli Beverly Cramer Mayor Crilley

Luncheon Sponsor:
Chris Gibson from Archer and Greiner was thanked for sponsoring the luncheon. Chris offered that the law firm is approaching its 100th anniversary and has grown to 200 lawyers with 8 offices in 5 states. They serve predominantly southern New Jersey.

Chamber of Commerce of South Jersey:
Unfortunately, Christina Renna, Ex. Dir of the Chamber of Commerce of South Jersey was ill and unable to attend the lunch. She will be invited back to the August meeting to provide a regional update at that time.

Danone USA: John Ferringer

The Board continues to hear from existing companies and industries throughout the county to better understand their products, business model, and challenges. Danone (Bridgeton) was

invited to this meeting to allow the board to meet new personnel and hear about new products. Mr. John Ferringer, Plant Manager, addressed the board.

John shared that he has been at the Bridgeton Plant previously, but transferred to the plant in Ohio. He recently moved back to lead production at the Cumberland County Plant. He has a total of 31 years in the food manufacturing industry with past experience in continuous improvement.

Danone was previously Cumberland Dairy, then Dean Foods, then Whitewave before Danone acquired the plant in 2017. Danone is the 15th largest food and beverage company in the US. They have invested significant resources in the Bridgeton plant, including \$50 million for a wnd processing system and 3 new production lines. They are developing a new plant-based milk and creamer and perhaps their most popular line is the one producing Silk milk products.

Danone has undergone many product and leadership changes over the past five years, so John's first priority is developing a positive company culture that focuses on the employees and the community. The plant culture is their compelling business need. They want employees to align with the culture and values of the company and they want the culture to be family-based.

The plant was recently selected to operate a pilot of a new product line that is plant-based called Next Milk and Wonder Milk. This is necessary to compete in today's market place.

John elaborated on the Strategic Plan being developed. After two years of changing the footprint in the plant and changes in upper level leadership, there has been a lot a turnover and change to be managed. He said a rebuilding of the culture and developing trust by employees is the current challenge, requiring a lot of attention on communication, training, and accountability. Through the hiring process they are identifying employees that can be upskilled and moved into higher level positions. They have partnered with Workforce Development and will be having a jobs fair June 15th. They have some of the higher salaries for positions within the county.

Beverly Cramer, Director of Human Resources, also spoke to the board. She has been in her position for approx.. 9 months and has moved from Pa. to Cumberland County. She has worked in food processing most of her career and emphasized Danone is hiring in all levels of positions. They have 131 employees and are 67% diverse. Their average age of workers is 47 years old. They are experiencing a lot of turnover and "poaching" of employees. They are combatting this with higher pay rates. The average tenure is now 7 years and they are a union operation. They offer sign on bonuses and have openings for filler operators, blenders, maintenance mechanics and HR coordinator.

Upper Deerfield Potential Development: Roy Spoltore and Mayor Crilley

Business Administrator Roy Spoltore led a discussion on numerous potential developments that may occur in the township. The township has 31 square miles, with 60% of it zoned for agriculture and a large amount of farmland assessed land. With that in mind, the township had to be careful about the remaining zoning and has an approved Redevelopment Area along Rt. 77

This area has 1060 acres, with 850 acres of vacant land, rail access, and municipal water and sewer. Many of the large parcels are owned by one entity.

The Mayor explained that the township has seen a tremendous amount of development interest over the last 6 months – much more than anytime in the past. The township has the following recent activity/interest:

- Warehousing and cold storage
- Mod Car wash facility
- Fast food restaurant
- Light manufacturing facility
- Residential development
- 279 3 bedroom townhouse units
- Several heavy industrial projects have been denied due to a lack of fit with township goals

Upper Deerfield is currently a dry community but has had a referendum to allow the sale of alcoholic beverages. They will qualify for 2 consumption licenses and 1 distribution license.

Workforce Development: Allison Spinelli, Christy DiLeonardo

Allison reported that there are many former unemployment claimants that have the skills for the high demand jobs that are open across the county. About 22% of the job openings are in transportation and warehousing and another 22% in manufacturing. Retail trade, health care, and social services are also in demand jobs. Their goal is to connect those coming off of unemployment assistance with these jobs as quickly as possible.

In 2012 unemployment hit a peak of 12.8% which was surpassed in 2020 at the height of Covid with a rate of 15.5%. Currently, the unemployment level is close to the prepandemic level and is measured in April at 4.8%

Christy provided the Board with numbers concerning the On the Job Training that has been implemented by several industries. During the first 5 months of this year a total of 39 OJT contracts have been issued valued at \$98,048.30. This is one of the best incentives the county can offer to our existing businesses. One half of the wages of the employee are covered during the training period.

The Authority: Jerry Velazquez

Jerry provided a quick summary of his powerpoint from the Bankers and Realtors Roundtable held June 3rd. The focus of the event was on the private sector investment that is occurring across the county. To date, over the last 2 years, over \$1.1 billion of private development has occurred or is planned. This has resulted in an increase in the ratable base of \$7 million dollars. The county has not been as heavily impacted by Covid shutdowns or disruptions due to our manufacturing base. We do not rely heavily on the hospitality/tourism industry like our neighboring counties which helped to limit impacts.

County Commissioner Musso:

Comm. Musso thanked the board for their service and interest in the development occurring across the county and was particularly appreciative to hear about the development interest on the western side. She said we will continue to assist businesses in working and growing within the county and utilize every resource to provide assistance.

There being no further business before the board, the meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting: August 9 at a location to be determined

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Ayres
The Authority