Manchester Development Authority

Regular Meeting

Agenda

April 17, 2025

 9:00 a.m.

The Manchester Development Authority held their regular meeting Thursday April 17, 2025 at 9:00 am at the MDA office located at 117 Callaway St. Manchester.

Board members in attendance making up a quorum were Beverly Wadsworth, Robin Garrett, Solomon Ferguson, Jimmy Mitcham, Scott Gilbert, and Glen Gosa.

MDA Staff- Executive Director Jodi Sharpe

Guests- Michael Sharpe (citizen), Blue Cole (Meriwether County Industrial Development Authority), Carla Stephens (business owner), Carmen Tagano (citizen), Suzanne Crawford (citizen) Vanessa Teague (business owner), Heather Carter (citizen), Mayor Mark Trimble, City Manager Mark Pullium, Virginia Strait (citizen).

MDA Attorney- Nathan Lee (via phone)

1. Call to Order- Beverly Wadsworth called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. Glen Gosa made a motion to go into Executive Session. Solomon Ferguson seconded the motion and all were in favor.
2. Executive Session- Real Estate

 Personnel Matter

The board entered the Executive Session at 9:05 am. Jimmy Mitcham made a motion to leave the Executive Session. Solomon Ferguson second and all were in favor. Jimmy Mitcham made a motion to enter back into Regular Session. The second was made by Scott Gilbert, and all were in favor.

1. Approval of Agenda for April 17, 2025, Regular Session

Glen Gosa made a motion to approve the agenda for April 17, 2025. Jimmy Mitcham seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Approval of Minutes for March 27, 2025, Special Called Meeting

Jimmy Mitcham made a motion to approve the minutes from March 27, 2025, special called meeting. Solomon Ferguson seconded the motion and all were in favor.

1. Citizen Comment

Carla Stephens asked the board if Railroad Days could be held at the Manchester Mill again this year. She stated that she would need 3 days. Thursday, October 16 for set up, Friday October 17 for vendor set up, and Saturday October 18 would be the event open to the public. Ms. Stephens stated that last year was the first time Railroad days had been at the Mill in several years and she felt it was a success.

Scott Gilbert made a motion at allow Railroad Days to be held at the Mill October 16-18. Jimmy Mitcham seconded and all were in favor.

Ms. Sharpe will prepare a “Rental Contract” for Railroad Days.

1. New Business
2. Welcome New Board Members- Robin Garrett and Scott Gilbert. Ms. Garrett is filling the vacancy left by the expired term of Atticus Mathis. Mr. Gilbert will fill the vacancy left by the expired term of Suzanne Bartels Pengelly.
3. Guest- Mayor Mark Trimble- Strategic Plan

The mayor provided the board with several handouts and thanked the board for allowing him to present today. He explained how the strategic plan came to be and who has all provided their input. He explained how all the boards and authorities needed to be team players. He stated that in December he began to feel a tear in the relationship between the city and the MDA. He said clear communication had stopped. Mayor Trimble apologized to the board for the disruption caused at the previous meeting, saying he felt it was necessary to open communication. He said that within 8 days prior to the meeting he was talking to MDA Chairman and Executive Director. The mayor stated that “we face a critical decision about the allocation of our resources and the focus of our efforts.” He said he wanted to advocate a strategic shift, a reprioritization of our activities. He asked that the MDA have a “primary, and unwavering focus on comprehensive economic development.” Mayor Trimble said that he had never said to abandon vendor events, that he would provide copies of the approvals of the events the MDA had given the city. He admitted that the events foster a community spirit, provide platforms for local artisans, offer enjoyable experiences, however they are operational tools and not the drivers of long-term prosperity. He wanted to be clear that the MDA was aware of the fundamental purpose of the development authority and that was in the name itself- development, to develop our economy. He provided the MDA with a copy of the “founding documents” from 1975, that created the MDA. He said, “you would see repeatedly the phrase “trade for the welfare of Manchester.” Welfare through trade, commerce, business, and employment opportunities. He said this means we need to be attracting and retaining business that provide stable jobs, generate significant tax revenue, and contribute to a diverse and robust economy. It means fostering an environment where innovation thrives, where local business can scale and expand, and where our residence can have access to meaningful and well-paying jobs. So why does economic development take priority, to create jobs. Increase, tax base.” Mayor Trimble then gave a history of Manchester losing its industrial base- Goody’s and Playtex, the housing crisis of 2007, and stated that we must restart the engine that started in 1909 with the Mill. Mayor Trimble admitted that the MDA has one of the most difficult jobs in this city, economic growth.

Mr. Trimble gave a breakdown of what “prioritizing economic development” looks like.

* Actively recruiting businesses.
* Working with the city to streamline the permitting and other registration processes.
* Developing strategic partnerships with educational institutes, communities and city staff, DDA, Planning and Zoning to create a business-friendly environment through policies that encourage innovation.

The Mayor then provided the MDA board with segments of the Strategic Plan, explaining that this was still a draft because it had not been ratified. He discussed that the listening sessions had allowed them to add three things to the plan. 1.) Gang taskforce in the schools 2.) Bringing back Head Start 3.) ???

Mayor Trimble then began explaining what was assigned to the MDA through his strategic plan.

* Master plan for the industrial park.
* Redevelopment of the Mill Property
* Attracting and retaining businesses
* Recruit new retail stores outside the Central Business District
* Recruit a grocery store

 The mayor stated that a grocery store could bring 30-40 new jobs. He said there haven’t had a business bringing 30 jobs in quite some time. Blue Cole spoke out and said, “I would disagree with that one sir.” Mayor Trimble replied, “We can talk about that.”

Mayor Trimble continued with his list:

* Attracting new jobs. Businesses with 100 employees (he said that this was a suggestion from a listening session, and we wouldn’t turn away a business of this size, that was not our focus.)
* Develop and recommend processes for onboarding new businesses
* Expanding tax base

He said as a strategic plan that this was a call back to basic economic development. He said that he nor the city had asked for a stop of the events. He provided the MDA board with copies of approved Special Event Permit applications.

Ms. Sharpe said to the mayor, “You are correct, mayor, you did not say that we had to stop the events, you said it was not part of our job, it did not do anything that we expected them to do. That is what was said. So, I agreed not to have events, per your opinion.”

The mayor then replied, “I said it quickly and proudly, that I had researched to make sure I knew what I was talking about, about events. I looked up trade and commerce. In the founding documents, the words trade and commerce have a very specific meaning based on the land purchase and things like that.

He then provided the board with additional handout about vendor markets and trade and commerce. He said he was not opposed to the markets, but he asked that it not be the top priority.

Ms. Sharpe commented, “It has not been the top priority.”

The mayor then stated he had one last thing and addressed the comments made on the MDA’s Facebook page and suggested that comments on this account be turned off.

Beverly Wadsworth told the mayor, “We will not be turning off the comments.”

1. Industrial Park Proposal

 Ms. Sharpe presented the board with a proposal from Crawford Grading to mulch and grind 35 acres at the industrial park. The price was $8750.00. Glen Gosa made a motion to approve the proposal. Jimmy Mitcham seconded the motion and all were in favor.

1. Events

Ms. Sharpe told the board that she had had a visit from Dawn Craven, a parent of a Manchester Middle School student. She said Ms. Craven was looking for a venue to host the 8th grade picnic. Ms. Sharpe said that there was expected to be 89 students, faculty and staff, plus families. Possibly 500 people. She said that the group would be cooking outside and would like to use the inside for tables and activities.

 Glen Gosa reminded the board of the previous decision that we are not ready for public use of the Mill. He felt that nothing had changed. He stated the restroom flooring was not complete and there were other issues that needed to be addressed. Solomon Ferguson agreed that if the MDA had previously voted against renting the building, nothing would have changed we were just not ready. Ms. Sharpe reminded the board that at the July 2024 board meeting a motion was made and unanimously passed that the Mill property would only be used for events hosted by the MDA and would not be rented to private individuals.

Beverly Wadsworth spoke to the board about the MDA and the events held. She stated that a citizen had approached Ms. Sharpe and told her that she had violated the MDA’s bylaws and charter by having events. Ms. Wadsworth stated that Ms. Sharpe had contacted the MDA’s attorney who said that the events did not violate the bylaws or charter. Ms. Wadsworth reminded the board that they had already given Ms. Sharpe permission to have events at her discretion. Ms. Beverly Wadsworth made a motion to allow Jodi Sharpe to do events at the Mill at her discretion and the approval of the board. Glen Gosa seconded the motion and all were in favor.

1. Keep Meriwether Beautiful

Ms. Sharpe reminded the board of the Keep Meriwether Beautiful clean up day. She said it was scheduled for April 26. She said the convenience center would be open. She stated that she would like to have an MDA team this year to clean up the area around the Mill- mill property, mill pond, and sidewalks around the property.

Ms. Sharpe introduced Blue Cole- “president” of Keep Meriwether Beautiful. Mr. Cole gave a summary of the Keep Meriwether Beautiful program. Mayor Trimble volunteered to help the MDA team for Clean Up day.

1. Property Purchase

Glen Gosa made a motion to confirm the execution of the Purchase contract on 116 W. Main St. Jimmy Mitcham second, and all were in favor.

1. Industry Update

Ms. Sharpe told the board about her visit with a company interested in coming to the former Goody plant. She said that there were currently three companies using the property for warehousing. She stated that there were a handful of employees. Ms. Sharpe said that the company asked about zoning and permitting. She stated that they were interested in the building, but the distance to the interstate was a concern. Ms. Sharpe said that this was a concern that many have when looking at Manchester. Ms. Sharpe said that she was attending another meeting with a second company when the board meeting was over. Ms. Sharpe then stated that the MDA was actively looking for rail-dependent businesses. She said that Manchester has two empty industrial buildings in town and a third owned by Eccomelt at the industrial park that she would like to see something come to. She said that the building in the industrial park will soon have some renovations made for possible expansion.

Glen Gosa asked if an update about the Mountain Springs development be given so that our new board member could have an idea of what is going on with that. Ms. Sharpe offered an explanation- “Years ago 1300 acres were annexed into the city of Manchester. A developer is slowly purchasing the property. The property is purchased from the city, but the purchasing transaction goes through the MDA. She said that the MDA was not directly responsible for the project we serve as a pass through with the purchasing of the property.” Glen Gosa stated that that was the point he wanted to make, was that the “MDA is a conduit, but the city is the controller, and we are the conduit.” Ms. Sharpe said that she had visited the property Tuesday. She said that there has been some grading and clearing done. It appeared there might be some planted rows. She said hopefully it is coming along, because their target date to open is May of 2026. She said that she was not aware of the progress being made on the housing that was supposed to be built there.

1. Old Business
2. Repairs to Butterfly Garden Retaining Wall

Ms. Sharpe presented the board with the estimate she had received for the repairs to the butterfly garden retaining wall. She said that she had tried to get two estimates but was only able to get one from Level and Square for $2284. The board members recommended that Ms. Sharpe try to find another company to get an estimate from for comparison.

1. Financial Report

Ms. Sharpe presented the board with financial report. She stated that the 2025-2026 FY budget would be available for discussion and approval for the next board meeting.

Glen Gosa requested that Ms. Sharpe work on creating a new logo for the MDA with a tag line about our focus- jobs.

1. Adjourn

Beverly Wadsworth adjourned the meeting.