

Board Meeting
February 24, 2026

St. Landry Parish Economic and Industrial Development District
Business Resource Center
5367 I-49 S. Service Road
Opelousas, LA 70570

Agenda

- I. WELCOMEChairman, Seth Robin
- II. PLEDGE
- III. ROLL CALL
- IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS, VIA COMMENT CARDS- Limit of 3 Minutes
- V. ADOPTION OF JANUARY 2026 REGULAR BOARD MEETING MINUTES
- VI. FINANCIALS, JANUARY 2026..... Treasurer – Candace P Haynes
- VII. 2026 PLANNING SESSION
- VIII. BOARD COMMENTS
- IX. ADJOURN

Voting Members Present: Seth Robin, Candace P. Haynes, Kevin Doucet, Lena Charles, Perry Fontenot, Chelsey Sharplin, Malana Helton, Kyle Keeler, Daniel Lyons, Susan Vigee, Don Dejean

Voting Members Absent: Sarah Forman, Devin McKnight, Carleen Sylvester, John Hamlin, Toni Effingger

SLED Staff Members Present: Bill Rodier, Janece Riser, Brittany Cretchain

Guests: None.

It was determined a quorum was present.

Chairman Seth Robin opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance and welcomed the board at 10:05 AM.

Public Comments:

Adoption of January 27, 2026, Regular Board Meeting Minutes: A motion was made to accept the January 27, 2026, board meeting minutes as submitted by Donald Dejean and seconded by Perry Fontenot. The motion was carried without objection.

January 2026 Financial Report: Candace P. Haynes provided a brief overview of the financials, highlighting revenues and expenditures. Mrs. Haynes noted a double Racino payment and regular ODDD and CSLEDD payments. It was also noted that there was a high accounting fee, which Bill Rodier explained was due to the audit process.

Susan Vigee made a motion to accept the financial report for January 2026, seconded by Chelsey Sharplin. The motion carried without objection.

2026 Planning Session: Bill Rodier, opened the discussion by outlining the overall purpose and structure of the 2026 planning session. Mr. Rodier explained that the objective of the session was not to develop a complete or exhaustive economic development strategy, but rather to identify and clarify a small number of priority initiatives for the St. Landry Economic Development (SLED) Board to focus on in the coming year.

Mr. Rodier noted that the desired outcome of the session was to surface one or two clear priorities that board members could collectively support and communicate. He encouraged members to think about initiatives that would allow them to confidently answer the question, “What are you working on with the SLED Board?” He also reminded the board that economic development projects are often complex and cannot move quickly, as they frequently involve coordination with multiple organizations and are subject to funding limitations.

Mr. Rodier further explained that while SLED and its related boards do have access to funding, resources are not unlimited. Board members were encouraged to consider initiatives that align with the reasons they chose to serve on the board and to identify projects where they could personally contribute to meaningful progress.

Opelousas Downtown Development: Bill Rodier, led a discussion regarding the importance of coordinating the St. Landry Economic Development (SLED) Board’s 2026 priorities with the initiatives being pursued by other related organizations, including Opelousas Downtown Development (ODD), C SLED, and Vision St. Landry. Mr. Rodier explained that while each

organization operates independently, aligning priorities where possible could strengthen the overall impact of economic development efforts within the parish.

Mr. Rodier reviewed several of ODD's current priorities and initiatives. One of the primary programs discussed was the ODD Building Improvement Grant Program, which provides grants of up to \$10,000 per project for building improvements in the downtown area. The program requires a minimum total project investment of \$20,000, ensuring that participating businesses contribute at least \$10,000 toward their own improvements. Since the program's inception in 2021, approximately forty businesses have participated, averaging about ten projects per year.

Mr. Rodier also discussed ODD's involvement in larger capital projects, including the ongoing stadium renovation and improvements to South Park. As part of these efforts, a nonprofit entity known as the Acadiana Foundation has been established to provide a non-profit funding mechanism that could be used for things like the stadium project, including naming rights, marketing, management, and maintenance responsibilities.

Mr. Rodier further explained that ODD has been exploring the concept of "catalyst" projects within the downtown area—major developments intended to spur broader revitalization and economic activity. Several potential catalyst projects have been identified, and he asked the board to consider whether SLED should play a role in supporting or co-investing in such initiatives as part of its strategic priorities.

Additional initiatives discussed included ODD's involvement in a regional Brownfield Redevelopment Grant program in partnership with three other communities, as well as ongoing efforts to expand the boundaries of the historic district in downtown Opelousas. Expanding the district would allow historic tax credits to be applied to a larger number of properties, as current eligibility is largely concentrated around the courthouse area.

Mr. Rodier also briefly introduced the Vine Street project, which ODD is actively pursuing through legislative support and funding advocacy. He noted that the project would be discussed in greater detail later in the meeting.

In addition to these larger initiatives, it was noted that ODD continues to manage routine downtown operations and support services. Mr. Rodier concluded the discussion by encouraging the board to consider which, if any, of these downtown and catalytic initiatives might align with SLED's strategic goals and whether the organization should participate financially or strategically in supporting them as part of its 2026 priorities.

Central St Landry Economic Development: Bill Rodier then reviewed several initiatives currently being undertaken by CSLED and how they may intersect with the St. Landry Economic Development (SLED) Board's priorities. One of the primary projects discussed was the I-49/Cresswell lighting project, which aims to install modern, connected lighting at every intersection along the Cresswell corridor of Interstate 49. The total project cost is estimated at approximately \$9 million. CSLED's anticipated contribution is approximately \$900,000, which will leverage a 90/10 grant partnership with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD). Mr. Rodier noted that this project reflects a strategy similar to efforts being pursued in Washington, where local funding is used to leverage significantly larger state and federal infrastructure investments.

Mr. Rodier also outlined several additional initiatives currently underway through CSLED. These include the development of a mural along Highway 190, where the wall has recently been cleaned and prepared for painting. Infrastructure improvements were also discussed, including the expansion of the local wastewater treatment facility, which will double its capacity and has already been bid and is currently underway. Other projects mentioned included the development of a catalyst equine sales facility as part of a broader catalyst concept for the area, the extension of a water line across the interstate to support future development, and the ongoing Business of the Month program intended to highlight and promote local businesses.

Mr. Rodier explained that these initiatives demonstrate that CSLED is currently focused on several infrastructure-driven catalyst projects, particularly those related to lighting, water, wastewater, and facility development. In comparison, he noted that SLED presently has somewhat greater financial flexibility than ODD; however, the organization also has existing commitments related to projects such as the I-49 lighting initiative and water line improvements. He encouraged the board to keep these commitments in mind as it considers potential priorities for the coming year.

Vision St Landry: Bill Rodier reviewed several initiatives currently being discussed within Vision St. Landry, noting that these priorities are still in the proposal and discussion stage and have not yet been formally adopted. He explained that understanding these potential initiatives could help the St. Landry Economic Development (SLED) Board determine whether there are opportunities for collaboration or alignment.

One initiative discussed was the development of a culinary program at South Louisiana Community College (SLCC). Vision St. Landry has been assisting in the effort to establish and build out the program, and it was noted that Evangeline Downs, through General Manager Carol Core, could potentially provide financial support for the initiative. Mr. Rodier presented this as an opportunity for

the board to consider whether SLED should play a role in supporting or investing in the program or whether the organization should simply remain informed and supportive of the effort.

Mr. Rodier also outlined Vision St. Landry's work in developing a mentorship framework for the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program. While the structure for the mentorship program has been established, additional work would be required to fully implement the initiative. The JAG program currently serves students from the eighth or ninth grade through twelfth grade and includes approximately 600 to 700 students across St. Landry Parish. Mr. Rodier noted that workforce development and student engagement represent an important long-term economic development consideration and raised the question of whether organizations such as SLED should devote time and attention to mentorship opportunities that support future workforce pipelines. He added that the primary challenge associated with this initiative is logistical capacity rather than the need itself.

In addition, Mr. Rodier noted that Vision St. Landry has provided financial support for various JAG-related events and programming. Through Vision St. Landry's business members, two annual scholarships are also funded for St. Landry Parish students: one in the amount of \$1,500 for a student attending South Louisiana Community College and another \$1,500 scholarship for a student attending LSU-Eunice.

Mr. Rodier concluded by encouraging the board to consider whether workforce development initiatives—such as youth mentorship, support for programs like JAG, or scholarship opportunities—should become a more explicit component of SLED's strategic priorities for 2026, potentially in partnership with Vision St. Landry rather than operating separately from those efforts.

Small Business and Entrepreneurship:

Bill Rodier introduced a discussion regarding the role of small business and entrepreneurship within the broader framework of economic development. He explained that small business development is widely recognized across North America as one of the core pillars of economic development, alongside business recruitment, existing business expansion and retention, workforce development, and community development. Mr. Rodier noted that many communities tend to focus heavily on recruitment as their primary economic development strategy; however, recruitment is often highly competitive and frequently involves national or international competition. He provided an example of an industrial park in Evangeline Parish that has been marketed for approximately twenty years with little activity, emphasizing that relying solely on recruitment may not always yield results. He further noted that regions with strategic advantages, such as deep-water port access along the Mississippi River, often have a significantly different recruitment profile than inland communities.

Mr. Rodier also clarified the definition of “small business.” He explained that, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration, a small business may include companies with up to 500 employees. However, in the local context, the term often refers to micro-businesses, including sole proprietorships, very small operations with one or two employees, or businesses with ten or fewer employees. He added that many state-level incentive programs require businesses to employ at least five individuals before they become eligible for certain forms of assistance.

The discussion then shifted to potential small business initiatives under consideration for 2026. One initiative is the St. Landry Small Business Summit, which is scheduled to take place in 2026 and to which SLED has already committed support. Mr. Rodier noted that while SLED plans to participate this year, there is interest in pursuing earlier and more collaborative planning with the local Chamber of Commerce for future events before committing organizational resources.

Another initiative discussed was the Accelerate entrepreneurship training program. Mr. Rodier noted that SLED hosted an Accelerate program in the previous year in partnership with the University of Louisiana at Lafayette LEAD Center. The program graduated approximately twenty-five participants and required an investment of approximately \$15,000 from SLED. Bill Rodier asked the board to consider whether this program should be repeated or prioritized again in 2026 and invited feedback on the value of the program. One board member commented that they attended the event and believed it served as a strong “jumpstart” for participants. The member also suggested that future programs could benefit from providing a clearer “next step” for participants after the course, particularly by connecting them with resources such as environmental permitting assistance through the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality’s small business support programs. The concern expressed was that many participants gain useful knowledge during the program but may encounter challenges when attempting to implement their ideas afterward.

Additional discussion addressed the follow-up process for participants who completed the Accelerate program. A board member asked whether there was a requirement or formal structure for continued participation following the class. In response, Brittany explained that staff conducted follow-up outreach with all program participants after the event. Participants were offered the opportunity to schedule one-on-one meetings with Ryan to discuss their individual business needs, whether related to launching a new business or strengthening an existing operation. Brittany noted that while not all participants chose to participate in the follow-up sessions, several individuals did take advantage of the opportunity. Similar follow-up efforts are expected to be included in future entrepreneurship programs.

Mr. Rodier concluded that small business and entrepreneurship support remain potential priority areas for SLED in 2026. The board may wish to consider continuing or refining its involvement in the Small Business Summit, determining whether to fund another Accelerate training cohort, and strengthening the follow-up support system for participating entrepreneurs by connecting them with additional technical assistance and state-level resources.

Available Development Capacity and Exposure: Bill Rodier, led a discussion on the importance of available development property and site readiness in business recruitment efforts. He emphasized that successful economic development projects often depend on the ability to control or secure access to land, noting that simply identifying potential sites is not sufficient. Sites must have appropriate infrastructure, access to utilities, and property owners who are willing to sell or partner in development.

Mr. Rodier referenced the Interstate 49 and Nuba area as an example of a location with strong development potential due to its interstate access. He noted that the Walmart Distribution Center and the planned Delta One warehouse project have strengthened the area's role as a distribution corridor. However, land west of Interstate 49 is privately owned, and varying ownership interests limit SLED's ability to control or promote the area for development.

The board also discussed the certification of development sites through the State of Louisiana. While certification places sites on the state's recruitment radar, Mr. Rodier noted that many certified sites still lack necessary infrastructure such as road access, water, sewer, or fiber, which can limit their competitiveness.

Mr. Rodier recommended that the board focus its efforts on one major development site or project rather than pursuing multiple large initiatives simultaneously. Concentrating resources on a single project would allow SLED to make more meaningful progress.

To support this effort, Mr. Rodier proposed adding a brief "site spotlight" item to future board meeting agendas. This would involve staff presenting a short overview of a property or development site, including its location, ownership, strengths, and limitations. Board members agreed that a recurring property discussion would be beneficial in increasing awareness of development opportunities within the parish.

Downtown and Parish-Wide Development Considerations

The board also discussed the balance between downtown redevelopment efforts and parish-wide economic development initiatives. Members noted several challenges associated with older

downtown properties, including limited parking, existing liens or unpaid taxes, environmental contamination, and high demolition or rehabilitation costs. In some cases, property owners have offered to donate buildings; however, accepting these properties can transfer significant financial liabilities to the receiving organization.

Members also discussed the natural assets and rural areas throughout St. Landry Parish, including locations such as Melville and Port Barre, noting that the parish's scenic landscape and geographic advantages are often under-recognized. The general sentiment expressed was that while SLED should remain aware of and supportive of downtown initiatives, the organization's primary mission should continue to focus on parish-wide economic development efforts such as site development, business recruitment, and large-scale job-creating investments.

Equine Catalyst and Event Center Discussion

The board revisited discussion regarding the equine and event center concept tied to Evangeline Downs. Mr. Lyons noted that a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district was established previously to support development in the area and that TIF revenues have already been used to purchase land and assist with infrastructure improvements such as sewer capacity, lighting, and site maintenance.

The long-term vision discussed includes development of a multi-use equine and event facility capable of hosting shows, rodeos, conventions, and similar events, along with supporting amenities such as RV parks and hotels. Members noted that St. Landry Parish has been designated the "Equine Capital of Louisiana," with Opelousas recognized as the "Equine City of Louisiana," and that the proposed development aligns with that identity. Some members expressed concern that while the framework for the project exists, progress has been slow. The discussion also noted that the current state administration has shown support for equine-related initiatives, which could present a strategic opportunity for advancement.

Economic Development Week and Off-Site Board Meetings

The board discussed potential activities during National Economic Development Week, which takes place during the first week of May. Ideas included hosting events at key economic development sites such as the Equine Center or other strategic locations to highlight SLED projects and partnerships.

A proposal was also discussed to occasionally hold SLED board meetings at local businesses or major employers. These meetings could include a brief facility tour and allow board members to gain a better understanding of workforce needs, expansion opportunities, and challenges faced by local employers.

Culinary Program and Workforce Alignment

The board reviewed information regarding the proposed culinary program at South Louisiana Community College. The program was described as a workforce development initiative connected to the parish's hospitality and tourism sectors. Members were informed that the project currently has an estimated funding gap of approximately \$500,000. Evangeline Downs and Vision St. Landry have both been involved in discussions regarding support for the program.

Board members acknowledged the importance of workforce development initiatives but expressed the need for additional details before determining whether SLED should provide financial support. Staff were asked to provide further information regarding the total funding structure, potential partner contributions, and the possible level of participation from SLED.

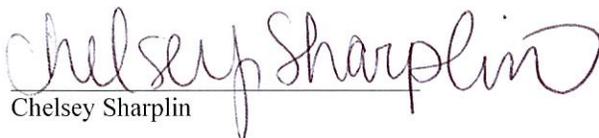
Podcast Room and Public Communication

The board also discussed the potential use of SLED's planned podcast room, which will include upgraded audio and video equipment. The concept involves recording short discussions featuring board members, staff, and partners to highlight current projects, economic development initiatives, and local success stories. Members noted that the podcast could help improve public awareness of SLED's work and provide regular updates on major initiatives. Suggestions included rotating board members as hosts or guests and potentially incorporating sponsorships from local businesses to offset production costs.

Board Comments:

With no further matters to be brought before the board, a motion to adjourn was made by Chelsey Sharplin and seconded by Perry Fontenot. The motion passed without objection, and the meeting adjourned at 12:12 PM.

SECRETARY:


Chelsey Sharplin

CHAIRMAN:


Seth Robin

