



September 23, 2021

TO: SOUTH EAST TEXAS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT  
INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: BOB DICKINSON, DIRECTOR  
TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES  
SOUTH EAST TEXAS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

SUBJECT: SOUTH EAST TEXAS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT LUNCHEON  
MEETING

A lunch meeting will be held on **Thursday, September 30, 2021** at the Industrial Safety Training Council Office at **11:00 a.m.** The purpose for this meeting is to get feedback from a diverse group of Stakeholders on how the spike in COVID-19 Delta variant cases have impacted the economic recovery in our region. In turn, it will help our Economic Development Consultant, Mike Barnes, in competing our short- and long-term Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic.

**Industrial Safety Training Council  
3749 Highway 69 North  
Beaumont, Texas 77705**

**At 11:00 a.m.**

**SEE ATTACHED FOR DISCUSSION TOPICS**

If any questions arise, please do not hesitate to contact me at [bdickinson@setrpc.org](mailto:bdickinson@setrpc.org) or (409) 899-8444 ext. 7520.



**SEPTEMBER 30, 2021**

# DISCUSSION TOPICS

We are looking forward to meeting with you again to discuss how the COVID-19 spike in the Delta Variant cases have impacted the Economic Recovery in our region. I would specifically like to get your input regarding the following topics:

1. How has the COVID-19 Delta Variant further impacted the overall economic development within our Region?
2. Have more businesses closed with the new variant? If not, have they put in place activities to address the increasing variant cases?
3. Have businesses indicated a loss of revenue?
4. Has government placed restrictions/options on a during this new variant period?
5. Are there short/medium/long term issues that have occurred different from the early onset of Covid-19 and this new Delta Variant? Consumer confidence? Business Attraction/Expansion efforts underway?
6. Overall suggestions regarding actions that can be further taken given a longer term of COVID and its further future variants?
7. Additional thoughts/comments?



# SOUTH EAST TEXAS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT (SETEDD) BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## MEETING MINUTES

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DATE: September 30, 2021

TIME: 11:00 a.m.

LOCATION: Industrial Safety Training Council Office  
3479 Highway 69 North

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Mr. Bob Dickinson, Director, SETRPC, Transportation & Environmental Resources Division introduced and welcomed members for attending the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

This was an open discussion meeting, these are the main topics/responses discussed:

Mr. Mike Barnes, President and CEO, the Mike Barnes Group, kicked off the meeting by asking the group how the COVID-19 Delta Variant has affected them on their day to day responsibilities.

Mr. Matthew Peno, Specialty Leasing Manger, Parkdale Mall stated that their budget did not change to reflect COVID-19 cleanliness, so they had to push store personnel to come up with ideas to offset those costs.

He continued stating that he believed the area was hit harder by the Delta Variant within the last month and a half than it was last year with the COVID -19 pandemic. He referred to school closures and store closures due to lack of staffing.

Ms. Michelle Praznik, General Manager, Parkdale Mall stated that the leasing percentage has not dropped. She said that there were 6 open spaces within the mall during the pandemic and now they are down to only 2.

The biggest issue they are facing is the vaccination and employment of staff.

Ms. Maureen McAlister, President & CEO, United Way of Orange County stated that their campaign and community events have definitely suffered and she has noticed that people are not wanting to participate as much.

Mr. John Durkay, General Counsel, ISTC stated that he believes there is a better appreciation for the medical community across the country, but in this area, the deaths are high due to citizens not able to have access to proper care, mostly due to a shortage of medical staff.

Dr. Ben Stafford, VP Workforce Development Continuing Education, Lamar Port Arthur stated that he works with the 4 main hospitals in the region and there are approximately 500 to 600 nursing positions currently available. Baptist Hospital is spending over \$1 million/month on top of payroll on visiting nurses. Christus is spending \$1.5 million/month on top of payroll in agency nurses.

Face to face classes have resumed at the college. They are seeing a large number of students who want to return to those classes.

CDL classes have more than doubled throughout the pandemic as they were the only school that stayed open during the pandemic.

There is a desperate need for carpenters, contract workers, scaffolders.

Mr. Barnes asked what might be the cause for not being able to find students.

Dr. Stafford responded that historically, the unemployment was too attractive. We need to keep in mind that CDL drivers are in an air conditioned cabin making \$40 000 where carpentry, concrete builders and so on receive a little more pay, but the work is much more demanding.

Mr. Barnes asked if the refineries were having trouble finding qualified employees.

Mr. Durkay stated that they are consistently hiring because they are in need of operators, but COVID is definitely making it more difficult.

Mr. Barnes asked if the supply chain was an issue.

Mr. Peno and Ms. Praznik both confirmed that it is an ongoing issue for certain stores.

They also added that COVID made their retailers clean up their stores. They had to adapt to the new demand such as curb side pickup. JC Penny and Dillard's have changed their operating hours to better facilitate peak traffic times.

Mr. Barnes asked what can the government do to move forward and make the day to day easier.

Mr. Durkay responded that they need to reopen the Keystone Pipeline and issues with the vaccine will need to be addressed.

Mr. Barnes asked the group what else he needs to know.

- Consider the vaccination aspect of things
- Consider the detrimental impacts to the education system
- Consider the impact to the healthcare system
- Consider the impacts of remote work
- Consider the business opportunities that have popped up

Mr. Barnes thanked everyone for attending and participating in the roundtable meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 12:37 p.m.

## **GUESTS PRESENT**

Ben Stafford	VP Workforce Continuing Education, Lamar Port Arthur
John Durkay	General Council, ISTC
Matthew Peno	Specialty Leasing Manager, Parkdale Mall
Maureen McAlister	President & CEO, United Way of Orange County
Michelle Praznik	General Manager, Parkdale Mall
Mike Barnes	President/CEO, The Mike Barnes Group

## **SETRPC STAFF PRESENT**

Bob Dickinson	Director, T&ER Division, SETRPC
Shanna Burke	Executive Director, SETRPC
Lucie Michaud	Administrative Assistant, SETRPC

# Our Plan

## Prepare a Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic Short & Long Term Economic Recovery & Resiliency Plan to address the pandemic through a strategic approach directly.

Mike Barnes Group, Inc. was the economic development firm chosen to develop a short and long-term Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan. Also, to create a Resiliency component for our SETRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to deal with future pandemics.

- Stakeholder roundtables being held to discuss opportunities and challenges. Including disruptions to the supply chain and workforce, and highlight those aspects of the regional economy most likely to be under stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Important participation from:
  - Small Business
  - Major Employers
  - Non-Profit Organizations
  - Elected Officials
  - Real Estate Commercial & Residential
- Identify opportunities for accelerating SETX rebound. Including expansion & modernization of manufacturing and commercial & retail opportunities.