

From: Maybank, Burnet R. III <BMaybank@nexsenpruet.com>
To: Maybank, Burnet R. III BMaybank@nexsenpruet.com
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Opinion

Don't play games with CRDA

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The Charleston Regional Development Alliance logo. (Brad Nettles/File)

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The area's main economic recruiter had good reason to believe it had reached an agreement with the counties it serves - Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester - but the specifics of that agreement have apparently become a moving target, at least with Charleston County officials.

Charleston County Council Chairman Teddie Pryor's has listed extensive new demands that threaten to derail a final accord with the Charleston Regional Development Alliance. And that threatens the continued good work of the CRDA, which has brought 27,500 new jobs and \$7.5 billion in capital investment from 251 new or expanding companies since 1995.

CRDA board chairman Lonnie Carter, the head of public utility Santee-Cooper, said the "collaborative . unanimous agreement" reached early last month was expected to ensure the counties' continued support for the alliance. That agreement involved representatives of local governments, including Mr. Pryor, and the CRDA governing board, and was worked out with the assistance of state Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt. It set forth a protocol for marketing and recruitment, by which the CRDA would take the lead, then turn over a prospect to county officials once a site had been chosen. Under the agreement, the CRDA board would be comprised of eight private sector and seven public sector members.

And it set forth a plan for improved communication between the CRDA and the public sector.

Clearly, that provision is going to need some serious work in light of Mr. Pryor's surprise letter.

"Although I participated on the committee and supported the working committee's proposed recommendation, I have repeatedly reminded the group that I could not speak for council on this issue but would bring it back to council for its consideration," Mr. Pryor wrote.

In his letter, Mr. Pryor demands greater involvement by county officials in the marketing, recruitment and

deal-making processes. And he would give the majority of votes on the CRDA's governing board to local government, even though the private sector puts up two-thirds of the alliance's budget. The October agreement was intended to answer complaints from the counties about the CRDA so that it could continue to receive the needed support to carry out its economic development work.

"It takes a team effort," Mr. Carter says.

The additional conditions listed in Mr. Pryor's letter, in effect, keeps moving the finish line. It's not a winning strategy for the local economy.

Burnet R. Maybank, III
Nexsen Pruet, LLC
1230 Main Street, Suite 700 (29201)
P.O. Drawer 2426
Columbia, SC 29202
T: 803.540.2048, F: 803.253.8277
Cell: 803.960.3024
bmaybank@nexsenpruet.com
www.nexsenpruet.com

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