

Chamber of Commerce president resigns
Spencer Graham relocates for new job

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The Kershaw County Chamber of Commerce has a new captain at the wheel as Chamber President Spencer Graham recently took a new job in Charleston and relocated there. Chamber Executive Director Liz Horton broke the news at the chamber board's monthly meeting Thursday and said Amy Kinard, who had been first vice-president, has moved into the president's position.

"I truly believe you are receiving an upgrade in leadership with Amy taking over as the board president," Horton read from a letter by Graham. "Amy has been involved with the chamber for the past two years and perceives the needs of the community as well as anyone. I want to thank Amy for taking over as president, as this was an unexpected change."

Kinard then presided over the rest of the meeting, introducing guest speaker Otis Rawl, president and CEO of the S.C. Chamber of Commerce. Rawl outlined concerns the state chamber will take to legislators before their next session. In the past, Rawl said, the chamber has presented a lengthy list of requests, but now is considering a stripped-down approach with only two major issues: infrastructure and education.

"Infrastructure is the number one issue on our agenda this year. We've talked about it now for two or three years," Rawl said. "It's a real critical issue for us right now that affects the entire community, whether it's big box, distribution facilities and all businesses."

Rawl said the ability to move goods from manufacturing areas to the Charleston Seaport and the metropolitan areas relies on high-quality roadways and bridges. He said weight limits and low clearances under some bridges cause detours for trucks that result in lost time and revenue. Regarding education, Rawl said a major component companies look for when considering locations for new facilities is the availability of a trained and educated workforce.

"Workforce education is the issue beyond infrastructure. Most of our companies would tell you that they have to interview 11 folks to find one qualified applicant. That's really poor," Rawl said.

He said 57,000 new jobs have come to South Carolina, and Charleston is now regarded the largest seaport on the east coast.

"What you're going to see is additional distribution facilities, big boxes and small businesses pop up. We've got to have a plan to put workers in them. Manufacturing is one of the key issues or key job sectors we need to address," Rawl said. "We just don't have enough young people and adults to fill those jobs." The S.C. General Assembly reconvenes Jan. 13, 2015.

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