



**State of South Carolina**  
**Office of the Inspector General**

*Sent via electronic mail*

April 2, 2026

SIG File No: 2026-0006-I

Hon. Thomas C. Alexander  
President of the Senate  
Senate of South Carolina  
213 Gressette Bldg.  
Columbia, SC 29202

Re: Investigation of Clemson University and the Newry development matter

Dear Mr. President:

The purpose of this letter is to provide the results of the Office of the State Inspector General's (SIG) investigation pertaining to Clemson University and any actions undertaken by the university related to the Newry development matter in Oconee County as requested in your letter dated January 13, 2026.

The SIG initiated this investigation under its authority found in South Carolina (SC) Code of Laws, §1-6-20(B) and §1-6-30(1) to address allegations of fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, misconduct, violations of state or federal law, and wrongdoing in agencies. Pursuant to SC Code of Laws, §1-6-10, the SIG ensured the investigative scope of Clemson University's actions related to the Newry development matter in Oconee County did not extend into private businesses related to United Homes Group, private individuals, or political subdivisions.

The scope and objectives of this investigation focused on the following:

1. Determine if any actions were taken by Clemson University regarding the Newry development matter.
2. Determine whether any actions, if taken by Clemson University, regarding the Newry development matter, complied with state law and university policies.
3. Recommend lessons learned from this matter that may warrant consideration by the Clemson University Board of Trustees.

Reviews and investigations by the SIG are conducted in accordance with the professional standards set forth by the Association of Inspectors General's *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General*, often referred to as the "Green Book." The SIG utilized the preponderance of evidence standard.

### Executive Summary

The Newry development was a proposed 600-plus acre multi-use development project in Oconee County, near Newry Mill. The development company's proposal included significant residential components (initially reported as up to 5,400 units and later reported as fewer) alongside commercial elements and a potential research and innovation park.

Oconee County had a history of wanting a larger Clemson University (university) presence within the county due to the university's proximity and potential economic opportunities.

In late 2023, developers associated with United Homes Group (UHG) approached the university regarding an economic development concept that featured a research park to leverage the university's proximity and possibly attract other companies.

The university publicly stated, via an [official webpage](#) set up for the matter, that the university was invited to attend developer-initiated preliminary discussions and site visits for a potential 25-to-30-acre research park. The university stated that it had very limited interest in the developer's proposal, further clarifying that a formal proposal was never advanced nor was one ever considered for approval. The developer's pursuit of an arrangement with the university regarding the Newry development ended by November 2024.

### SIG Analysis & Findings

At the onset of the investigation, documents from a Freedom of Information Act request initiated by a third-party were provided to the SIG for analysis. These documents included the university's timeline of events, email correspondence, developer presentations, travel logs, proposed developer site plans, and the university's strategic plan.

Based on the analysis of these documents, the SIG conducted relevant interviews with state agency officials, current university staff, university Board of Trustees (Board) employees, and current and former Oconee County Council members and employees. Additionally, the SIG reviewed confidentially sourced documents, financial records, emails, contracts, university policies and procedures, and state laws and regulations.

Accordingly, the SIG made the following findings and recommendations:

#### **1. What actions, if any, were taken by Clemson University regarding the Newry development matter?**

Based on the SIG's interviews with university personnel and the detailed examination of relevant internal documents and correspondence, the SIG observed that Clemson University staff did not initiate contact, offer endorsements, or engage in any form of advocacy or decision-making on the project.

The SIG further observed that representatives and entities associated with the Newry developer(s) repeatedly initiated contact with university staff over a period of approximately one year. In response to those entities' outreach efforts, university representatives responded with a level of courtesy that would be expected toward any other constituent, stakeholder, or vendor who sought an audience with the university's capital project staff. The SIG determined that this protocol was consistent with how university staff communicated with similar external entities and that it did not imply agreement or direct involvement regarding the Newry development.

Multiple senior officials with the university stated to the SIG that the developer's proposal to the university "fizzled out" by November 2024. Additionally, a senior official for the university's facilities and planning department stated that he/she did not even want to expend university resources to conduct a formal analysis of the Newry development proposition presented by the developer(s) because the university had all its space and capacity needs already accounted for the "next 10 years."

**Finding #1:** The SIG determined that Clemson University did not engage in any proactive actions regarding the Newry development.

**Recommendation #1:** No further action required.

**Finding #2:** The SIG determined that contact with Clemson University regarding the Newry development was initiated solely by the developer and the developer's associated entities.

**Recommendation #2:** No further action required.

**2. Did any actions, if they occurred, by Clemson University regarding the Newry development matter violate state law or university policies?**

Clemson University officials and staff did not proactively engage the Newry developer(s) or its associated entities. The SIG investigated the actions initiated and undertaken by the developer(s) and participated in by university staff.

Most relevant among these actions was a developer-sponsored trip to a site at Purdue University's Discovery Park on January 18, 2024, in West Lafayette, Indiana. Discovery Park was an interdisciplinary research and innovation complex that featured mixed-use development elements.

The SIG determined that the Discovery Park trip was a standard industry benchmarking exercise for university capital projects' personnel who regularly interfaced with aspiring developers. The tour allowed participants, including representatives from the university, the state, and Oconee County to observe a model of collegiate-affiliated research parks that integrated academic, commercial, and residential components. The SIG observed that no employee of the university or the state obtained or sought any personal financial benefit from the trip.

Brief daytime visits to the Newry development site, which is approximately five miles from the university campus, were offered to the university's capital projects officials by entities affiliated with the developer(s). The SIG determined that these site-visits were also routine and standard for capital projects personnel.

The SIG determined that no wrongdoing, violation of state law, or breach of university policy occurred during any developer-sponsored activities that invited or involved university employees.<sup>1</sup> Clemson University officials participated in a passive manner that was routine when they received outreach from an external constituent.

The SIG also investigated whether former Clemson University president Dr. James P. Clements' role as a UHG Board member violated state law or university policy, and if his dual role had any influence on propositions offered to the university from developer(s) regarding the Newry development.

Following interviews with employees of the university's Board, the SIG confirmed that Dr. Clements complied with institutional requirements set forth in his employment contract, by fully disclosing his UHG Board membership. Additionally, the SIG observed that the compensation Dr. Clements received for his UHG Board service was filed in an accurate and timely manner with the State Ethics Commission.

An analysis of the documents and correspondence offered to the university by the developer(s) and their affiliated entities revealed that Dr. Clements was not involved in the Newry development matter.

Therefore, the SIG determined that Dr. Clements' role as a UHG Board member did not violate state law or university policy.

**Finding #3:** The SIG determined that there was no violation of state law or university policy by Clemson University, as it related to the Newry development.

**Recommendation #3:** No further action required.

### **3. Recommendations from this matter that may warrant consideration by the Clemson University Board of Trustees.**

The university president's employment contract and the university's Board of Trustees bylaws required that the president make certain disclosures about participation on other boards to the chairperson either verbally or in writing.

The SIG observed that verbal notification to the chairperson only had the potential to limit tangible documentation of the notification and full awareness by all university Board members.

**Finding #4:** The SIG observed that there was no certainty that all university Board members were knowledgeable of the disclosure(s) by the university's president when the disclosure was only required to be made (verbally or in writing) to the Board chairperson.

**Recommendation #4:** The SIG recommends that the university consider amending the disclosure requirements for the president to be in writing, annually, and that the disclosure is properly promulgated to all university Board members.

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<sup>1</sup> The SIG observed that applicable state employees were aware of potential disclosure requirements of Chapter 13 of Title 8 of the S.C. Code of Laws; including but not limited to S.C. Code § 8-13-100(16) ["gift" includes "travel"] and § 8-13-710(B).

To strengthen continued compliance with applicable reporting requirements, the university should adopt a university-wide policy mandating that all personnel, including, but not limited to all faculty (tenured, tenure-track, non-tenure-track, adjunct, visiting, and emeritus), administrative faculty (deans, provosts, and vice presidents), academic employees, professional employees, research staff, support staff, student employees, graduate/teaching assistants, athletic coaches and staff, personnel of the university's blended component units, and employees who report directly to the university's Board of Trustees, complete an annual affirmative attestation of any outside employment or compensated professional activities.

Such an annual attestation, which could be administered through a secure electronic reporting system, should require detailed disclosure(s) of all outside employment and compensated activities during the previous year. These attestations should then be subject to targeted audits and periodic reviews to verify adherence.

Thank you for bringing this matter to the SIG's attention and your concerns regarding fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement of state resources. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (803) 896-1287 (o) or (803) 605-3161 (c) for any additional information, questions, or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,



Brian D. Lamkin  
State Inspector General

BDL/jclh

CC: The Honorable Henry Dargan McMaster, Governor of South Carolina  
The Honorable G. Murrell Smith Jr., Speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives  
Kim A. Wilkerson, Chair, Clemson University Board of Trustees  
Robert H. Jones, Ph.D., Interim President, Clemson University