



News Release

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Merle Johnson Returns to Lead Charleston County Economic Development as Executive Director

Charleston County Government is pleased to announce the return of Merle Johnson as its new Economic Development Executive Director, effective February 7, 2025. Johnson, a highly regarded economic development professional with 20 years of experience, previously served in multiple leadership roles with Charleston County Economic Development for over seven years.

Johnson returns to Charleston County after serving as the Executive Director of the Orangeburg County Development Commission (OCDC) for the past two years. During his tenure, he led efforts that resulted in over \$1.1 billion in new investment and more than 600 new jobs in Orangeburg County. His expertise in business recruitment, process improvement, and strategic site development played a key role in expanding the County-owned mega site and developing infrastructure growth plans to support industrial and residential development.

Prior to his leadership in Orangeburg, Johnson was the Director of Economic and Community Development for the City of Greenville, where his leadership resulted in more than \$356 million in new capital investment and 1,300+ new jobs. He facilitated major corporate relocations, including Kiyatec's bio-tech headquarters, Southern First Bank, and United Community Bank, helping to drive Greenville's economic growth and business expansion.

Johnson previously spent more than seven years with Charleston County Economic Development, holding key positions including Deputy Director, Director of Operations, and Director of Business Development. He also played a significant role in regional economic development efforts through his work with the Charleston Regional Development Alliance (CRDA), supporting business growth across Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester counties.

"Charleston County has long been a leader in economic development, and I am excited to return and contribute to its ongoing momentum. The foundation laid by former Executive Director Steve Dykes and the dedicated team has positioned the county for sustained success. I look forward to collaborating with our partners to attract new investment, support existing industries, and create opportunities that benefit businesses and residents across the region."

Johnson holds a Bachelor's in Math and Computer Science from the United States Coast Guard Academy. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma's Economic Development Institute, a three-session advanced leadership program accredited by the International Economic Development Council, and a Master Practitioner of the Advanced Economic Development Leadership (AEDL) program.

In keeping with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), those needing assistance should contact Charleston County at (843) 202-6917 during regular business hours.

