



UPPER SHORE REGIONAL COUNCIL

Cecil County
Kent County
Queen Anne's County

Executive Board

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Delegate Jay Jacobs
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Maryland General Assembly

Doris S. Mason
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Executive Board Meeting Minutes

Date and Time: Thursday, April 23, 2015, 5:30 PM – 6:30 PM
Location: Upper Shore Regional Council
122 N. Cross Street, Chestertown, Maryland, 21620

Participants:
Dr. Alan McCarthy, Chairman, William Short, Kent County Commissioner (representing Kent County Commissioner Ronald H. Fithian), Jamie Williams, (representing Kent County Commissioner, William Pickrum), Joyce Bowsbey, Cecil County Councilwoman, Member, Doris S. Mason, Executive Director, and Ummu Bradley Thomas, Consultant, Freddie Bell Jones, Inc.

Welcome/Purpose of Meeting

Chairman McCarthy welcomed the Executive Board and announced that a quorum had not been established. As a result the group tabled the vote on the February and March Meeting Minutes.

Budget/Fiscal

Executive Director Mason provided the Budget/Fiscal Report on Treasurer Pickrum's behalf. The current account balance was listed as \$47,509.47.

By-laws Amendment Audit Vote

Executive Director Mason introduced Article XII of the Bylaws of the Upper Shore Regional Council regarding Internal and External Financial Independent Audits, which will be presented and voted on before the Full Council during the June 2015 meeting. Councilwoman Bowsbey inquired as to whether or not the Amended Bylaws have to be approved by the Full Council. Executive Director Mason confirmed that Bylaws did in fact have to be approved by the Full Council.

Project Updates

Executive Director Mason announced that she and Chairman McCarthy met with Alma Plummer of the US Commerce's Economic Development Association to get a sense of what the USRC needed to do as a region to qualify as an Economically Distressed District (EDD). The Mid-Shore, Lower Shore and Western Maryland currently qualify as an EDD. The Upper Shore and Southern Maryland do not historically qualify. The determining factors to becoming an EDD are one of the following:

- 1) Unemployment (at least 1% higher than the national average) over a period of 24 months;
- 2) Per capita income (80% or less than the national average);
- 3) Special Need (job losses, natural disasters, military base closures). The "Special Needs" category must be determined by EDA's Regional Office.

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Chairman McCarthy and Executive Director Mason shared with Ms. Plummer the following data to be considered for the “Special Needs” category as the Upper Shore Counties unemployment rates are too low and the per capital income for the counties are too high (noting that only 1 county has to qualify to meet the guidelines):

- 1) Kent County is listed as the “top 5 in State” for home foreclosures
- 2) Chronic out migration for employment is at 87% for Queen Anne's County
- 3) Students receiving free and reduced meals in Kent (the highest) is at 54% and Cecil County at 45%
- 4) Drugs and Heroin economic impact (highest drug overdose in State) for Cecil County
- 5) Kent County aging out population of seniors

Proposed projects shared with Ms. Plummer were (1) Regional Career and Technology Center; (2) Workforce Alternative Training Ctr. (for adults); (3) Regional Business Incubator (4) Regional Transportation Hub.

Executive Director Mason shared that workforce studies have been done in the last two years for Kent and Cecil Counties by The Sage Group and by B.E.A.C.O.N (Salisbury University) in Queen Anne's County. She further shared that Ms. Plummer recommended to complete a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS-like) process. The CEDS-like document will be built during the next few months. Plans for discussions with the County Planning Directors, County Administrators, and Economic Directors are underway. The actual CEDS-like document will be shared for 1st draft review during the Strategic Planning Retreat scheduled for Thursday, September 24, 2015, 9:00 am – 3:30 pm at the Donaldson Brown Center in Port Deposit, Maryland.

Commissioner Short stated in light of the current planning process and “due to the amount of meetings that my colleagues have missed, it should be put out in the meeting and ask for the change of representation on the USRC if they are not going to do it.” Executive Director Mason stated that she would move forward with Commissioner Short's request and thanked him for being willing to participate on the Executive Board.

Executive Director Mason further shared that each of the counties that qualify for EDA funding have CEDS documents that make partner linkages which support regional projects. For example, a regional technical center would require partners such as the Department of Labor and Licensing (DLLR), Workforce Investment Act (WIA); Community Colleges and other letters of support.

Commissioner Short inquired as to whether the support required from the partners was financial. Executive Director Mason clarified that the support is simply that the partners

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Jamie Williams inquired about whether or not social issues can be addressed in the CEDS-like document. Executive Director Mason indicated that the EDA is more interested in economic issues. Councilwoman Bowsbey stated that businesses do not move to areas with drug issues and workers on drugs do not go to work. Thus, it is difficult to separate social from economic issues.

Commissioner Short inquired as to whether the EDA was looking for really large populations outside of families and farms (as we only have a small population). Executive Director Mason said that percentages are used in place of real numbers and that the EDA is used to serving rural areas.

Executive Director Mason requested that the Board assist her in reaching out to some of its county partners indicating that she had reached out via email to some staff already and had not received a response in return. Commissioner Short recommended following up with a telephone call. Jamie Williams announced that she could help to make a connection. She further stated that everyone should understand that accessing EDA resources would be more funding for the county, but that it takes work and involvement as well as understanding the process.

Executive Director Mason shared that Ms. Plummer suggested that the USRC show regional support. For that reason, the Upper Shore Regional Council will ask for letters of support from Harford County (since it's next to Cecil) and Sussex County, DE (next to Kent). Additionally, residents from those counties work in the Upper Shore.

Chairman McCarthy shared that two of the largest employers in our region adjacent to Delaware; General Motors and Chrysler are gone. Commissioner Short stated that at least 2,000 workers leave Kent to commute work daily and about that same amount come into Kent to work. Chairman McCarthy shared that 50% of Cecil County residents go out of the County to work and that Cecil lacks the infrastructure (such as Broadband) to attract businesses. Executive Director Mason shared that the EDA encourages Tech Park investments (such as the investment to the tech park made in Dorchester County). Chairman McCarthy suggested that some emphasis should be made on Bainbridge in Cecil County.

Commissioner Short inquired as to whether or not projects can be micromanaged in Kent County indicating that Kent is able to retain current businesses. Kent would like to expand current businesses and jump start entrepreneurship and economic gardening by starting new and home-based businesses (cottage industry). Commissioner Short further

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shared that infrastructure improvement to the county will help to retain some of its current large businesses.

Jamie Williams shared that Kent County would entertain a Youth Tech Incubator. Commissioner Short indicated that the new Mayor of Chestertown is ready to move forward and wants to include Washington College in potential projects. Executive Director Mason stated that there is a lot of potential for what can be done with the EDD designation, but that it would take working with the City Staff feeding information and identifying priorities. Councilwoman Bowsbey shared that Lisa Webb, Economic Director, Cecil County desires to start an incubator and that it should be a part of the CEDS-like plan.

Executive Director Mason requested that the Board review the CEDS-like Development Process Questionnaire and Proposed EDA Timeline in the meeting packets noting that much of the work done in the time line and information listed in the questionnaires will be fed into the CEDS-like document.

Youth Engagement Survey

Executive Director Mason shared that letters were sent to the Board of Education Superintendents for Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's Counties. In addition, the youth dashboard www.youthdashboard.com is up and running and that Washington College is in the process of adding resources for young people looking for work to the site. Executive Director Mason further stated that there are many ways to use the data on the dashboard and that some of the information will also be fed into the CEDS document with regards to Youth Retention.

Councilwoman Bowsbey inquired as to whether or not Dr. Devine received the final report. Executive Director Mason confirmed that the final report was in fact shared with all of the Superintendents. Jamie Williams suggested adding the work links to County websites. Executive Director Mason added that state links and local links will be added to the dashboard.

Grants Report

Executive Director Mason shared that the most recent grant status report provided by Freddie Bell Jones, Inc. was included in the meeting packets. The USRC is currently in the process of submitting a Youth STEM Leadership & Opportunity Program grant to Verizon (mentoring young people and placing them in companies with ILSBio). USRC is also working on an unsolicited grant to USDA for Phase III of the Upper Shore Harvest Directory which has now expanded to the Eastern Shore Directory (including Mid-Shore counties) and an unsolicited grant to USDA for a Grape Production and Management

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Company. The USRC is also working on an application to the EDA for a Planning Grant to cover the costs of the CEDS-like planning document and retreat.

Contracts

Executive Director Mason announced that the Loblolly contract is active and covers the new site and wine trail development. The Shorevines.com and Chesapeakewinecountry.com sites are getting more interest by the month. Two new wineries are almost done in the process. Commissioner Short inquired as to whether or not the two wineries had already grown their fruit and the tonnage of grapes per acre. Executive Director Mason indicated that while she will research the tonnage of grapes per acre, the profit margin for growing grapes is double that for grains. She further stated that 75% of the grapes contained in a wine must be grown in Maryland for it to be considered a Maryland wine. The USRC encourages the process of farm diversification through adding grapes to the Harvest Directory, websites and social media.

USRC Calendar

Executive Director Mason shared that the USRC calendar codes were included in the meeting packets and encouraged the Executive Board to logon and view the daily activities of the USRC. The calendar has work events dating back to 2012.

Annual Reports

The Annual Reports for 2012, 2013 and 2014 were shared for the Executive Board to view. Electronic versions of the USRC Annual Reports will be made available online.

Meetings List-2015

The 2015 USRC Meetings will be posted to the USRC website at www.uppershoreregionalcouncil.org.

Open Forum

Commissioner Short suggested micro-breweries and expansion of the cottage industries for the Kent County area to include Wine and Beer tourism and Bed and Breakfast locations utilizing “farm-esque” properties (working with realtors to sell little properties as farm-esque with the potential to become brewery/winery location. Commissioner Short indicated that the Kent County area accounts for \$51 million in tourism dollars annually.

Executive Director Mason shared that precision agriculture is helping farmers to improve crop production. This management requires the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) and information management tools such as Geographic Information System (GIS) to



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input field conditions, assist with cultivating and harvesting and understand variable farm/soil management requirements.

Commissioner Short indicated that people are willing to travel distances to fields and to pay money to pick vegetables that are organic.

Councilwoman Bowsbey shared that Milburn's Farm is an example of agri-tourism.

Summary of Action Steps

1. The Board will further discuss continuation on Board with non-participating members.
2. The Board will encourage county stakeholders to participate in the CEDS-like building process.
3. The Board will review the CEDS-like Development Process Questionnaire.
4. The Board will provide feedback on the Timeline of the CEDS-like process.
5. The Board will review Annual Reports and provide feedback.

Chairman McCarthy adjourned the meeting at 6:30 PM. The members participated in the CEDS-like Activity listing proposed projects by County.

Next Scheduled Executive Board Meeting: Thursday, June 18, 2015, immediately following the Full Council meeting, 1:30 PM – 3:30 PM in Queen Anne's County. Location TBA.

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