

Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission
Economic Development Committee
Draft MEETING MINUTES

June 18, 2015
11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission
Accomac, VA

Members Present

Robert S. Bloxom, Jr., Delegate
Jarod Goodman, Tyson Foods, Inc.
Ralph Dodd, Ralph Dodd and Associates
Ava Gabrielle, New Road Community Development
Bel Holden, Perdue Farms
Mary McKenna Merrill Lynch (for Robie Marsh)
Charles McSwain (for K.Nunez), Northampton County
Steve Miner, Accomack County
Rich Morrison, Accomack County
Bill Neville, Town of Chincoteague
Charlie Russell, WESR
Curt Smith, A-NPDC (for Kay Lewis)
Linda Thomas-Glover, ESCC

Members Absent

Peter J. Bale, ES Defense Alliance
Robert S. Bloxom, Sr.
Tommy Clark, Don's Seafood Restaurant
and Tom's Cove Aquafarms
Rick Hubbard, Northampton County
Caroline Massey, NASA
Andy Mason, Mason-Davis Realtors
Lynwood Lewis, State Senator
Genevieve Walker-Switzer, T&W Block
Dawn White, Dawn's
John LeCato, Accomack County EDA

Others present:

Kerry Allison, Virginia Tourism Commission
Art Fisher, Citizen and former EDC Chair
Jean Hungville, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce
Bruce Penland, Independent Farmer
Susan Simon, A-NPDC
Julie Wheatley, Wallops Research Park

Call to Order

The Economic Development Committee was called to order at 11:35 AM.

Minutes Approval

A motion to approve the Minutes from the March 31, 2014 meeting was moved Committee Member Charles McSwain and seconded by Charlie Russell. The Board passed the minutes by acclamation without revision.

Information Items

Membership Changes: Staff informed the Committee that the two members, Oral Lambert and Irene Davis, resigned since the last meeting and a nominating committee would need to be formed to nominate individuals to fill the open membership positions for the next meeting. The Planning District Commission Board will also name a replacement for Tom Reinerth who resigned from the PDC Board. A-NPDC's Economic Development Coordinator, Susan Simon is also retiring at the end of June and would be replaced by A-NPDC Planning Director, Curtis Smith.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update: A-NPDC Staff gave a brief update of business retention/expansion and infrastructure improvement projects since the last meeting. Projects included an update of the Eastern Shore Bike Plan, winning a feasibility study grant to extend the Sothern Tip Bike and Hike Trail from the National Wildlife Center in Kiptopeke to the entrance to Cape Charles; helping Accomack county explore grant and loan options for the natural gas pipeline extension, helping the Eastern Shore Community College (ESCC) explore grant and loan options to replace the academic and administration building, supporting the Eastern Shore Defense Alliance's efforts to attract new aerospace company tenants to the Wallops Research Park, and pursuing Highlights included groundbreaking for new infrastructure at Wallops Research Park, development of a multimodal terminal in Cape Charles, a new mega-yacht maintenance facility in Cape Charles, new restaurants opened in Cape Charles and Chincoteague, a wind farm will be constructed in Accomack County, a new Artisan Trail and an Oyster Trail were launched, and an Exmore company was named 2014 Exporter of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration. Committee members introduced themselves and their affiliation. The representative from Perdue Farms, the largest employer on the Eastern Shore, noted the company added 100 new jobs in the last month, and has increased production to 1.725 million birds per week. Bay Shore Concrete added 250 jobs, and Virginia Employment Commission shows employment increased percent with 201 new jobs in manufacturing. Chincoteague has a new hotel applic

Delegate Bloxom informed the Committee that the House is currently not in session.

CEDS Update

Staff informed the EDC that a revised Year End CEDS Update was available on the A-NPDC website for the next 30 days and requested the Committee members' review and input.

CEDS Projects and Performance Measures

Infrastructure/Recreational/Tourism — Staff reported that A-NPDC was awarded a grant by the U.S. Department of Transportation for a feasibility study for Phase III of the Southern Tip Bike & Hike Trail that originates at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge (ESVNR). The feasibility study will examine how to extend the trail from Capeville Drive to Stone Road at the Cape Charles entrance. An extended trail would be a major economic development boon to the town, the County, and the region.

Staff noted A-NPDC is updating the 2011 Bike Plan for VDOT. The update focuses on making Eastern Shore roads more “bike friendly” to: capitalize on the inherent bicycling advantages on the Eastern Shore; attract more tourists to the region; and improve quality of life for residents.

Natural Gas Pipeline — A-NPDC is helping Accomack County find funds to extend the natural gas pipeline that a private company is proposing to build as far as the Perdue facility so the pipeline reaches and serves companies along Route 13. The pipeline project is progressing.

A-NPDC staff thanked the Committee and noted the EDC’s “success story” letter of support to the Governor for Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS). Virginia was selected as one of 6 test sites in late December, 2013.

Wallops Research Park — Committee Member Bales noted stories emerging about new domestic uses for UAS’s with the recent news that Amazon and Google are exploring possible UAS applications for their companies. The research aspect for UAS is also good news for Eastern Shore economic development. The FAA is establishing an air transportation Center of Excellence (COE) for UAS’s. Committee Member Massey told the Committee that the NASA/Wallops Research Park is on track to become a formal Mid-Atlantic Aviation Partnership (MAAP) member, and is engaging Virginia companies to grow the Park and woo them back. Governor McAuliffe, and other dignitaries, will be on hand to cut the ribbon on June 9.

Educational Support —Vice Chair Glover informed the Committee of the Eastern Shore Community College’s plans to replace the Administrative Building to bring it in line with the 21st century workforce development needs, and allow ESCC to expand into new program areas.

Food Policy —Guest speaker Jay Ford, founder of Shine and Rise Farm gave a presentation to the EDC about the Food Policy Council (FPC), and on-going efforts to rejuvenate the FPC to create a regional identity and use the FPS as a marketing tool to brand and sell locally grown products. Mr. Ford informed the Committee that 82% of ES agriculture is sent out of state, exporting our tax dollars and the value-added capability. He suggested a strategic rebooting of the “Buy Fresh/Buy Local” campaign that has proven successful in other areas. The Food Policy Council would also advocate toward an evolving societal standard for food that calls for organic, more nutritionally dense foods. Mr. Ford pointed out that the trend is to move towards more self-sustaining farms. FPC goals would be to get the Eastern Shore ahead of the curve with branding, developing our own version of “Buy fresh/Buy local”; advertising; encouraging businesses to buy from local growers; making the Eastern Shore synonymous with high quality; connecting Eastern Shore farmers to new and local consumers; and promoting agri-tourism with marketing and advertising to attract visitors to tour local farms. The Eastern Shore could “put a lot more on the table” by marketing and using the organizational capacity of the FPC as an aggregate to go after funds to promote the area and to set up demonstrations and food processing labs. Committee Member Bale cited the huge potential to use UAS technology to measure hydration, nutrients, and plant stress levels, noting a study that showed a 25-30% increase in plant productivity. Mr. Ford also recognized Northampton County’s efforts to include hobby farms and niche farming in its zoning overhaul process.

Mr. Ford also talked about the need to integrate technology and the recent grant he received from Healthy Communities to create a demonstration of a food forest, only the third one in the country. The food forest mimics a forest ecosystem, except everything is edible. The

demonstration food forest, located on the Central Green site, will be an opportunity to show what Eastern Shore farms could look like and the potential. He told the Committee that the national average for soy is \$800/acre. Gross revenue for a food forest is \$3,500-3,800/acre, and produces more tonnage per acre. The food forest puts money in farmers' pockets, helps conserve water, and produces high value products that can be sold in Virginia and regional markets. Mr. Ford said food forests could help tap the huge Hampton Roads market, and it makes sense to keep produce in-state to get the tax dollars. Mr. Ford expects his food forest demonstration will provide concrete examples to farmers that the concept works and pays off. The food forests would help create jobs on the Eastern Shore.

Expanding Business/Increasing Exports — George Bryon with the Small Business Development Administration (SBDA) told the Committee about SBDA's products and services. The SBDA's contributes to the Eastern Shore's growth and economic development by counseling and by providing small business training – at no cost – to Eastern Shore companies. The SBDA offers a 10 week certified course geared to help entrepreneurs set pricing, develop strategy, market effectively, break even, and write a business plan. The SBDA also helps advance the Governor's and the President's efforts to increase exports by counseling companies on tactics to expand markets and manufacturing footprint through sales of Eastern Shore products abroad.

Discussion

Discussion ensued about the natural gas pipeline; the prime importance of infrastructure development on the Eastern Shore; the installation of a lift for large boats at the Harbor South Port; and progress on the bridge.

Public Participation

A-NPDC staff introduced two visitors: Ms. Kerry Allison from the ES Tourism Commission, and Bill Barnes with the Eastern Shore Manufacturing Association. Ms. Allison announced the Tourism Summit's strategy to make tourism an economic development generator, noting that tourism is highly competitive and the two-county, publicly funded commission is working hard to bring more tourists to the region. Mr. Barnes told the Committee his regional, tri-state association was created to help manufacturers grow. The association's current focus is on Wallops, off-shore wind development, and other projects.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:37 PM.