

RMC Legislative Committee
September 21, 2015
Talbot County Free Library, 100 W Dover Street, Easton
Minutes

Participants: Josh Hastings, Legislative Committee Chair; Josh Fiastro, representing Senator Steve Hershey; Scott Warner; Dan Rider; Tom McLoughlin; Nancy Nunn; Kim Kratovil; Chris Benzing; Paige Bethke; Mike Pennington; John Hartline; Angela Visitainer; Sara Visitainer; Ann Jacobs; Rick Pollitt; Erroll Mattox; Roxanne Hale; The Honorable Wilber Levensgood; Charlotte Davis, RMC Executive Director; and Kathy Vernacchio, RMC staff

The meeting convened at approximately 12:25 pm.

Legislative Chair Josh Hastings welcomed everyone and led introductions.

Mr. John Fiastro spoke on behalf Senator Steve Hershey. They are expecting energy issues to reemerge in the upcoming session particularly renewable energy. Senator Hershey sponsored legislation in the last session targeting the Apex wind project in Kent County requiring local approval of such projects. Natural gas infrastructure is also expected to emerge as Dixon Valve, a large employer in the Upper Shore, is looking at natural gas as an energy source. Gas works great in urban areas because of density but the infrastructure needed requires a six year payback which makes it difficult in rural areas. They are expecting legislation to be introduced that will allow a longer pay back period of at least ten years. As we are looking to encourage manufacturing in rural, we will need to support natural gas expansion. The legislator is expecting health delivery in rural areas to be an issue. Classification of limited services such as ambulatory care centers might be a better fit than traditional care delivery. They expect legislation to relax the mandate on sprinkler systems in new home construction. Medical marijuana is also a hot issue. Current legislation only allows 2 dispensaries in each legislative district, but in rural areas, where legislative districts cover multiple counties, this would mean that some counties could lack a dispensary. There could be legislation to allow more dispensaries.

There was some brief discussion with the Committee regarding telemedicine and nurse practitioners. There was a suggestion to set up a briefing before the Eastern Shore Delegation to educate legislators.

The Committee then reviewed the 2015 Legislative Review white paper. The Augustine Commission, charged with examining the state business climate, will be addressing rural economic development. The Thermal Renewable Energy Credit (TREC) is expected to be reintroduced as well as a proposal to increase the Renewable Portfolio Standard from 20% to 25%. Highway User Revenues are still a challenge to local governments.

The committee briefly discussed the Earned Income Tax Credit proposal supported by Maryland CASH Campaign and the Maryland Center on Economic Policy. The tax credit works well for some segments of the population, but not young workers. There are several ways to reach younger workers including lowering the minimum age limit, increasing income eligibility or setting the state credit at 100% of the federal EITC credit. The committee agreed to support proposals to expand the credit as it is an effective program that encourages individuals to work, gives workers more choices and flexibility, and requires little government infrastructure to administer.

Other issues discussed included advocacy activity. Rural Maryland Day has been set for February 11, 2016. Committee members were encouraged to attend. The Committee also heard an update on activities related to funding the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund.

The Committee reviewed the Program Open Space white paper supporting the current funding formula. There was general approval.

Members mentioned several upcoming events including a workshop on advanced woody biomass on November 19, the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy's conference on renewable energy also on November 19th and the UMES Small Farm conference on November 6th and 7th.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:00 pm

Next meeting: November 2nd from 12:00 Noon to 2:00 pm. Location to be determined.