

RMC/RMF Joint Planning and Development Committee
September 11, 2014
Mid Shore Regional Council Offices
8737 Brooks Drive, Suite 101, Easton, MD 21601

Participants:

Mike Thielke, Chair, ESEC
Bill Barnes, Eastern Shore Manufacturing Council
Doris Mason, Upper Shore Regional Council
Lisa Purnell, USDA
Scott Warner, MidShore Regional Council
Dan Rider, DNR

RMC Staff:

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director
Kathy Vernacchio, Administrative and Communications Assistant

Call to Order

The meeting convened at 10:10 am. Mr. Thielke welcomed participants. Introductions were dispensed with as all the participants were attendees of the July 31 meeting.

Minutes

Mr. Thielke reviewed the minutes of the July 31, 2014 meeting.

Priority Issues

Mr. Thielke asked the members of the Committee to provide their thoughts as to what actions the RMC and RMF should take to make a substantive contribution on each of the priority issues identified during the July 31 meeting.

Broadband:

With regard to broadband and internet connectivity, the group agreed the RMC and RMF should focus their efforts on advocacy and work to enable proposed legislation for State funding in support of county/municipal last mile efforts. RMC can play a part in organizing planning and programming activities to help educate counties on options available and their role in last mile solutions.

Agriculture:

Mr. Thielke asked for further comment on the topic of Agriculture, developed as a priority item in the last meeting.

Ms. Mason suggested the RMC and RMF could reach out to the agricultural community through collaborative efforts to promote programs to create and provide assistance to new farmers.

Ms. Purnell suggested we pursue USDA programs to lead in conservation assistance.

Mr. Rider suggested the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program is a great opportunity for RMC to explore as end user organizations may not have the capacity to apply themselves or administer the funds; however, the RMC could act as the access point and administrator.

Youth

Ms. Mason updated the group on the status of the Youth Assessment Study in progress on the Upper Shore. The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship hosted an introductory webinar to engage members of economic development, the Chamber of Commerce, local management board, and the school board to participate as youth champions for the study. The RMC and USRC are hoping some action steps result from this study; how to move forward in each of the counties to engage youth within the systems that already exist. To hear find out what they want to see in their community to either entice them to stay in the community or to come back after they receive their education.

It is the intent of the RMC to replicate this study in other areas of the State once this initial study is completed. Mr. Thielke suggested the collective priorities that each of the Regional Councils establish for their immediate areas would give direction for what the RMC should think about doing statewide.

Ms. Davis said there is interest to complete the next survey in Southern Maryland. She suggested we might design a grant proposal to get funding. For strategic planning purposes, the Upper Shore study would be the end of 2014, the beginning of 2015. The RMC would conduct studies in the other four regions during 2015-2016; funding to be determined – each survey costs approximately \$40,000.00.

Mr. Thielke suggested we limit youth activity to this project for the near future.

Energy

Mr. Rider suggested the RMC should focus their efforts to championing biomass. There is a dearth of energy policy on thermal. There is a lot of education going on, but there is not a concerted effort as most individuals associated are volunteers doing outreach.

The RMC would do outreach to facility owners to educate them that wood thermal biomass is an option to consider. However, it is not feasible for every facility so a feasibility study is required. Candidates for this technology would be hospitals, schools, other large institutions. RMC would provide the engineering for these feasibility studies. MEA will be launching a very small program to fund these

studies. We could solicit funding and expand MEA's reach. We could target educational facilities that can double as learning labs for students.

Mr. Thielke summarized the discussion saying biomass and geothermal are our two focus areas. In focusing on biomass, we possibly could promote utilization in educational facilities in order to create learning labs and promote these energy alternatives.

Workforce/Economic Development

Mr. Barnes suggests we investigate projects that assist manufacturing growth. There was discussion among the members. Ms. Mason asked us to think how the RMC can affect policy at the State level in terms of how the Department of Labor and Licensing Regulation utilizes its resources in rural areas.

Additional suggestions include ways to link students that are not going to college, maybe a systematic approach such as an app on a phone to target students and connect them with opportunities.

Mr. Rider suggested the Committee look at programs like WoodLinks, an industry education partnership based in Canada. WoodLinks allows students acquire the skills and knowledge that will prepare them for direct entry into the wood industry after graduation or for a smooth transition to post-secondary education and training programs. WOODLINKS® offers a solution to the ever-growing concern of skilled worker shortages and connects job-seekers with employers.

Mr. Barnes expanded on these comments suggesting we explore mobile labs that can efficiently provide soft/hard skills training throughout all rural areas for students not going on to college. Mr. Thielke suggested we possibly apply for a future EARN grant in order to outfit a bus or semi-truck that would rotate to Regional Councils periodically; we could just change the skill set focus.

Ms. Mason suggested we could also consider supporting business retention strategies. Many economic development teams at the county level do not have enough staff to visit businesses regularly.

Health

Ms. Purnell suggested the RMC consider focusing on nutrition and obesity. The USDA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) has potential to provide nutritious food to low income communities in rural areas year-round (even though it is called a "summer program," the funds are applicable to programs all year around. If you have a site that has a minimum of 12 youth, for as little as four weeks, we could provide three healthy meals a day. We could partner with the Maryland Food Bank.

Other ideas considered: higher education and nutrition training, and reaching out to school systems to educate local communities.

Criteria used to evaluate projects or initiatives

Mr. Thielke asked members to provide suggestions for criteria in evaluating RMC/RMF projects or initiatives. The following recommendations were made:

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- a. Must have a measureable outcome or accomplishment which can be generated within a 12-month period
- b. Must address a Priority Issue which is of importance to funders
- c. Must address a Priority Issue which is of importance to Rural Maryland
- d. Must have a meaningfully unique impact on a Priority Issue

Strategic Plan

At its October 22, 2014 meeting, the Committee will strive to finalize at its 2014-2015 Work Plan for presentation to the RMC/RMF at the November 13, 2014 annual meeting.

New Business/Recommendations

The Committee recommends that all members of the Joint Committee, RMC Executive Committee, and RMF Board of Directors personally contribute \$100 each in order to establish 100% financial support participation from RMC/RMF leadership in order to establish credibility for upcoming requests and application to funders.

The next meeting is at The Richard A. Henson Center, Room 2122 (second floor, President's Reading Room) at UMES, 906 Backbone Road, Princess Anne, MD 21853 on October 22, 2014.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:00 noon.