

The Mid-Shore Regional Council (MSRC) held a scheduled meeting on March 4, 2021. This meeting was held virtually via web conference due to COVID-19. The meeting was facilitated from the Mid-Shore Regional Council office with two MSRC executive board members (Walter Chase and Chuck Callahan) and MSRC staff (Scott Warner and Terry Deighan) present.

MSRC members in attendance included: Carolyn Spicher, Lenny Pfeffer, Frank Divilio, Kurt Fuchs, Kelley Cox, Bill Christopher, Dan Rider, Jerome Stanley, Joyce Harrod, Chuck Callahan, Walter Chase, Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Anthony Casey, and Dan Franklin. Guests in attendance included: Congressman Andy Harris' Community Liaison Mike Arntz; Shore Gourmet Program Director Roxanne Wolf; Chesapeake Culinary Center Executive Director Beth Brewster; Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative (ESRGC) Senior GIS Analyst Logan Hall and Project Managers Erin Silva and Mary Buffington; Chesapeake College President Clifford Coppersmith; Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland (TCCLES) Executive Director Greg Padgham, Executive Coordinator Stephanie Wilkins, and Regional Communications Developer Monique Snyder; Choptank Electric Cooperative Vice President of Government Affairs and Public Relations Val Connelly and Government Affairs Manager Matt Tefteau; U.S. Senator Ben Cardin's Field Representative Kim Kratovil; U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen's Eastern Shore Regional Director Melissa Kelly; Rural Maryland Council (RMC) Executive Director Charlotte Davis; USDA Rural Development Business & Cooperative Acting State Director Scott Kessel and Program Director Letitia Nichols; Caroline County Economic Development Director Debbie Bowden; Dorchester County Economic Development Director Susan Banks, Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism Director Cassandra Vanhooser; Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center (ESEC) Executive Director Mike Thielke; Maryland Department of Commerce Senior Business Development Representative Mindie Burgoyne; Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) Executive Director Steve McHenry; Delmarva Community Services (DCS) Deputy Director Andy Hollis; Maryland Cooperative Extension Educator Shannon Dill; City of Cambridge GIS Specialist Scott Shores, City of Cambridge Housing Specialist Jeannie Bellina; and Habitat for Humanity Choptank Neighborhood Revitalization Manager Rhodana Fields. MSRC staff present was Scott Warner and Terry Deighan.

Action Items

Chairman Chase called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m., after Mr. Warner took a roll call of all persons attending the meeting. Mr. Warner was in possession of electronic votes from James Redman who could not attend in person due to other obligations.

Approval of December 9, 2020 Minutes

The first order of business was to obtain approval of the December 9, 2021 minutes. Ms. Spicher made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Fuchs seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second, any further discussion; all opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion approved unanimously.

Ratification of revised CEDS document

The next order of business was to ratify the revised CEDS document. Mr. Warner stated that all MSRC voting members and County Administrator/Managers are part of the CEDS Committee (28 people, make up 52% of the CEDS Committee). There are 54 total members on CEDS Committee.

The full CEDS Committee met on October 28, 2020. At the meeting the committee was reminded that the first CEDS document was submitted to EDA on October 16, 2002.

The committee received updates of the 26 projects in the Action Plan. The GPRA Data Collection period FY20 (7/1/19 to 6/30/20) reported:

- 16 projects reported funding, jobs, and/or investment activity
- 195.25 estimated number of jobs created or retained

During the meeting the committee reviewed and revised the CEDS Goals and Objectives and reviewed the progress status of CEDS Action Plan.

The CEDS Executive Committee met on December 17, 2020. They evaluated 5 proposed projects.

On January 6, 2021 the full CEDS Committee held their second meeting of the year. During the meeting the committee approved modifications to update Goals and Objectives.

- Goal 2, Objective 1
- Goal 3, Objective 2
- Goal 4, Objectives 8 and 9

Five projects were unanimously approved for inclusion in the CEDS.

- Chesapeake Bay Region Water Treatment and Environmental Restoration Program (WTER)
- Choptank Community Health System, Inc. – Federalsburg Construction Project
- Ferry Point Project
- Easton Utilities Water Treatment Plant (WTP)
- Easton Utilities Windmill Pump Station Relocation and Forcemain Upgrades

31 projects are included in the revised CEDS Action Plan.

Mr. Warner thanked the following organizations/people for their assistance in revising the CEDS document. He mentioned the specific sections each assisted.

- Chapter 1 – Analysis and Appendix E – Commuter Stats
 - ESRGC Project Manager Ryan Mello updated the statistical sections
- Section 1.2 – Demographic, Socioeconomic and Labor Force Data
 - USWIB Executive Director Dan McDermott
- Appendix B – Tax Credits
 - Maryland Department of Commerce Senior Business Development Representative Nancy LaJoyce

Provided with all this compiled information the MSRC revised the CEDS document updating all sections as needed.

Additional updates were made to the Introduction and Appendix A – CEDS Committee.

Mr. Warner stated that the revised document was e-mailed to everyone on March 1, 2021 with this meeting's agenda. The MSRC will submit the updated CEDS document to the EDA Philadelphia office once ratified and posted on the website for public comment for 30 days. The updated document can be viewed on the MSRC website www.midshore.org, click on "About", "Documents", then "Download CEDS".

Mr. Fuchs made a motion to ratify the CEDS document. Ms. Spicher seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second, any further discussion; all opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Kurt Fuchs presented three reports to the Board.

MSRC Operating Budget

The first report was the MSRC Operating Budget. He stated that all expenses are on track and a request for a third reimbursement from EDA will be made soon. MTA is running behind on their reimbursements for this fiscal year; we will receive funds in the near future and the receipt will be shown on the June report.

Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) Budget

Next, Mr. Fuchs addressed the RMPIF budget reporting that there has not be a change since the MSRC meeting on December 9, 2020.

Eastern Shore Economic Recovery COVID-19 Project Budget

Mr. Fuchs then presented the Eastern Shore Economic Recovery COVID-19 budget. He again stated there has not been any change in this budget since the MSRC meeting on December 9, 2020.

Mr. Fuchs offered Mr. Warner to provide additional information.

Regarding the RMPIF budget, Mr. Warner then reminded the attendees that the Regional Marketing funds have not been disbursed because the Taste of the Eastern Shore legislative event was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan is to utilize these funds to support the Regional Marketing Project the MSRC is facilitating with the mid-shore counties.

Mr. Warner also reminded the Council that DBM (Maryland Department of Budget & Management) asked the RMC to hold \$400,000 until the FY21 fourth quarter. If the RMC is permitted to release the funds (if the State does not need to make further FY21 budget reductions), the MSRC would receive \$25,965. The MSRC would disburse these funds in accordance of how it reduced this funding to meet the reduction.

- Special GIS/COVID-related projects \$20,350
- Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center \$926
- Shore Gourmet/Chesapeake Culinary Center \$970
- Annie's Project \$2,000
- Regional Marketing \$1,719

Regarding the Eastern Shore Economic Recovery COVID-19 Project budget, Mr. Warner was happy to share that the issue the MSRC and TCCLES have been working on to get a grant administration issue resolved since November 16, 2020, was resolved last week. Mr. Warner thanked Senator Cardin's office for their assistance in this matter.

Mr. Stanley made a motion to accept all three reports. Mr. Rider seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second, any further discussion; all opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion approved unanimously.

Updates

Eastern Shore Economic Recovery COVID-19 Project

- *Supported by EDA's CARES Act Recovery Assistance*

Mr. Warner stated the MSRC and TCCLES are working together to oversee this project. The MSRC and TCCLES have an advisory committee made up of representatives from the following organizations.

- Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative (ESRGC)
- Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board
- Lower Shore Workforce Alliance
- Caroline County Economic Development Office
- Dorchester County Economic Development Office
- Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism

The committee has held fourteen meetings, five meetings since the last MSRC quarterly meeting.

Projects currently under construction:

- Sales Tax GIS-centric tool/dashboard. The ESRGC is utilizing sales tax data from the Maryland Comptroller's Office.
- Eastern Shore Economic Recovery Central Website. This site is being developed to make it an easy location for local partners to get valuable assistance. This website will house all GIS-centric tools developed through this Economic Recovery COVID-19 Project. It will also house other helpful tools/dashboards that are already in existence. Many of these existing platforms are able to be launched through this website with Eastern Shore data already highlighted. Additionally, counties have sent local pictures to be included on the website. Logos of the regional councils, ESRGC, and the mid-shore counties will be included on the website.
- Survey of mid-shore businesses. The advisory committee is working through several items as the survey(s) is developed, such as, questions to be asked, interval on how often to survey, determining the group or groups of businesses to survey.

The Eastern Shore Economic Recovery COVID-19 Committee provided a presentation on the progress of this EDA funded project to U.S. Senator Ben Cardin. Attendees at the meeting were the entire Advisory Committee and the following:

- U.S. Senator Ben Cardin
- Kim Kratovil, Field Representative
- Andrew Perlstein, Legislative Assistant for Environment and Public Works Committee
- Mike Thomas, Legislative Assistant for Special Projects
- U.S. Economic Development Administration
- Linda Cruz-Carnall, Regional Director
- Angela Ewell-Madison, Director of Legislative Affairs
- Alma Plummer, Economic Development Representative
- Christine Frost, CARES Act Director
- Mathew Magargee, Economic Development Specialist

Mr. Warner thanked Ms. Kratovil for all her effort in establishing the meeting.

Ms. Kratovil commented that she appreciated the committee's efforts to share the progress that is being made to develop the tools to assist in the economic recovery. She also praised the partnership of the EDA Economic Development Districts MSRC and TCCLES on working together to utilize significant federal awards to benefit the Eastern Shore.

Annie's Project

- *Supported by Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund*

Shannon Dill, Maryland Cooperative Extension Educator, provided an update on Annie's Project. There is continued interest in the program and online courses are being created. It has taken some time to reformat the program and create electronic resources.

Ms. Dill also highlighted other Women in Ag activities that have been executed: Facebook live farm tours, monthly webinars (2 a month), and the conference (virtual 145 participants).

Ms. Dill stated that people seem to be embracing online learning and she intends on keeping it as a choice even after in person learning is allowed. It has allowed people to attend from all over the county; even a person from Ireland has participated.

Housing Quality Studies

- *City of Cambridge*

Mr. Warner stated the MSRC funded 17 Housing Quality Studies that covered all municipalities in the mid-shore region. The MSRC utilized FY18 and FY19 RMPIF funds. They were a \$25,000 per year investment covering two years. The studies were conducted by the ESRGC.

The City of Cambridge was the initial jurisdiction that created the idea and partnered with the ESRGC. On December 7, 2017 the City of Cambridge representatives Scott Shores and Brandon Hesson and ESRGC representative Logan Hall presented the newly completed City of Cambridge Housing Quality Studies to the MSRC.

Mr. Warner wanted the ESRGC and City of Cambridge to provide an update. He introduced the following representatives to provide an update.

- Logan Hall, Senior GIS Analyst, ESRGC
- Scott Shores, GIS Specialist, City of Cambridge
- Jeannie Bellina, Housing Specialist, City of Cambridge
- Rhodana Fields, Neighborhood Revitalization Manager, Habitat for Humanity Choptank

Mr. Warner and Ms. Bellina also mentioned Pat Escher, Division Planning Manager, City of Cambridge, who was unable to attend today's meeting.

Logan Hall addressed the meeting attendees, providing the following overview.

In an effort to collect a baseline database of property conditions and substandard housing, the City of Cambridge partnered with Salisbury University's Department of Geography and Geosciences and the ESRGC in the Summer of 2016 to conduct a housing study survey in Cambridge's Ward 3. Following success from that initial pilot study, with funding provided by the MSRC through the RMPIF, the ESRGC completed and delivered 17 additional survey databases for the remaining portions of Cambridge and 16 additional jurisdictions across the Mid-Shore region.

- 17 studies were completed in the Mid-Shore (Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties)
 - FY2018 (13 studies): City of Cambridge, East New Market, Hurlock, Secretary, Vienna, Federalsburg, Greensboro, Preston, Ridgely, Oxford, St. Michaels, Tilghman Island, and Trappe
 - FY2019 (4 studies): Denton, Easton, Goldsboro, Henderson

Next, Jeannie Bellina stated that the City of Cambridge had focused its housing activities on the Pine Street neighborhood. Cambridge faces many challenges, with the primary one being economic. The Pine Street neighborhood, adjacent to the historic downtown core, is the main neighborhood in Cambridge that is characterized by poor housing and other indicators of economic distress.

These residents can be assumed to be living in economic distress and are likely to have adverse health conditions. Estimated 2017 statistics show: City median household income of \$39,674 vs. \$80,776 for Maryland. Per capita income was \$24,411. In comparison, Pine Street Historic District (PSHD) neighborhood statistics indicate: Number of households is 397. Median household income is \$12,894. Median house or condo value is \$159,100 versus \$273,300 in adjacent neighborhood. Population is 89.9% black, and 10.1% white. Median resident age is 60. Unemployment is 18.7%, while 27.6% residents live below poverty line (City-data.com). Many PSHD residents are renters, not homeowners.

- November 2016 GIS field survey of 953 properties in Ward 3 by Salisbury University students
 - 76% of homes are 92-111 years old.
 - 56% homes in satisfactory condition
 - 14% homes at risk
 - 30% homes substandard
- City of Cambridge was awarded Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to do Phase 1 housing activities. The amount is \$647,953. The focus is on the Pine Street neighborhood.
 - Acquisitions of 19 properties (14 by the City and 5 by Habitat for Humanity Choptank)
 - Demolitions of 6 properties
 - 3 newly constructed homes (1 has moved in, 2 qualified homeowners are awaiting final home construction)
 - 5 owner-occupied home repairs (2 have been completed, 3 in process pending additional funding and/or required documentation)
 - 1 rehabilitated home (rehab scheduled to start this spring)
- City of Cambridge has applied for another CDBG in the amount of \$540,000. If awarded, the Phase 2 housing activities will be:
 - Acquisitions of 8 properties (based on County land availability and prices)
 - Demolitions of 4 properties
 - 1 newly constructed home (home construction being funded by Habitat for Humanity Choptank as demonstrated match to grant funding)
 - 6 owner-occupied home repairs
 - 1 rehabilitated home

Rhodana Fields and Pat Escher co-managed the majority of these CDBG-funded housing activities from July 1-December 31, 2020, while Jeannie Bellina was the third project co-manager conducting administration. If there are any questions on any of these housing activities, please feel free to contact Rhodana Fields, Neighborhood Revitalization Manager, at rfields@habitatchoptank.org or (410) 476-3204 x. 303; Pat Escher, Division Manager at pescher@choosecambridge.com or (410) 228-1955; and/or Jeannie Bellina, Housing Specialist at jbellina@choosecambridge.com or (410) 901-3291.

Mr. Hall concluded the presentation by stating the measurable successes from the Cambridge study have drawn attention in other regions as well. Graduate students in the Master of GIS Management at Salisbury University are working on various strategic plans for implementing GIS technologies in municipalities across the country. One location in particular, Signal Hill, California, is interested in modeling a similar housing study from the collection efforts in Cambridge. The ESRGC has provided assistance to students working on various graduate research projects in an effort to further expand upon the success of this revitalization initiative.

Chairman Chase asked how the City acquires the properties. Ms. Fields answered that properties are purchased for the County through tax sale, while others are purchased from private owners.

Mr. Pfeffer asked where he could see the Housing Quality Studies reports. Mr. Hall said each municipality was provided their respective reports. He also stated that he could provide the reports directly to Mr. Pfeffer. Additionally, Mr. Hall offered that the GIS Circuit Rider program funded by the MSRC could be of assistance regarding supplemental information as needed.

Maryland General Assembly

2021 Legislative session

Chairman Chase introduced Charlotte Davis, Rural Maryland Council Executive Director, to provide updates.

Ms. Davis stated that right now the Regional Councils are fully funded at \$200,000 each in the Governor's FY2022 proposed budget.

Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) is a key step forward in addressing disparities in the State's rural areas. RMPIF supports Rural Maryland Council's activities, the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF), the state's five regional councils, regional infrastructure projects, rural entrepreneurship development, and rural health care organizations. RMPIF is funded at \$5 million in the proposed FY2022 budget, a \$1 million reduction. Ms. Davis stated that the RMC has submitted a supplemental budget request for level funding.

Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) provides grants to rural-serving nonprofit organizations that promote statewide and regional planning, economic and community development, and agricultural and forestry education. Also eligible are rural community colleges that support small and agricultural businesses through enhanced training and technical assistance. MAERDAF's goal is to increase the overall capacity of rural-serving nonprofit organizations and community colleges to meet a multitude of rural development challenges and to help them establish new public/private partnerships for leveraging non-state sources of funding. MAERDAF receives funding through RMPIF as well as a separate line item. The MAERDAF line item in the FY2020 proposed budget is \$118,000, a slight reduction in funding from last year.

Ms. Davis then explained the Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families (RELIEF) Act of 2021 (Senate Bill 496 / House Bill 612)

- Economic impact payments to individual (\$450) and families (\$750) filing for EITC.
- Exempts unemployment payments from state income taxes.
- \$13 million to volunteer fire depts.
- \$10 million to Maryland Food Bank
- \$9 million in emergency energy assistance
- \$26 million to restaurants and bars
- \$10 million to hotels
- \$2 million for rural broadband
- \$1.5 million for rural and agribusiness development
- \$3.5 million to MARBIDCO for rural and agribusiness grants
- \$5 million for Main Streets
- \$1 million for tourism marketing
- \$25 million in emergency housing

Ms. Davis then highlighted broadband legislation and funding initiatives.

- FY2022 Capital Budget includes \$15 million in the Local Government Infrastructure Fund for the Office of Rural Broadband

- Codification of the Office of Rural Broadband into the Office of Digital Inclusion (HB97/SB66)
- Joint Trenching (Maryland Association of Counties bill) (HB1328/SB824)

Ms. Davis concluded her remarks by stating that police reform is currently moving through the legislative process.

Presentation

Forestry industry progress and expansion

Chairman Chase introduced Dan Rider, Stewardship Manager, Forest Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), to give the presentation.

Mr. Rider utilized a PowerPoint in giving his presentation. He started by saying there is much progress to report since the MSRC Forestry Tour in 2015. Additionally, throughout the presentation he emphasized how crucial his involvement with the MSRC and other regional councils has been to bring awareness to various stakeholders of the importance of the forestry industry to Maryland. He stated that some bad events happened to the industry, but Maryland responded. The MSRC assisted DNR with the initial communication with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) to apply for grant support to conduct an Economic Adjustment Strategy (EAS). This was followed by many other positive actions:

- Department Commerce “Energy & RBI position”.
- Western Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) engagement and EAS grantee
- Inclusion or expansion of forestry in Mid-Shore and Lower Shore CEDS
- ESRGC forest Industry platform, now bigger and better. Initially funded by MSRC.
- Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) recent market activities: 2 videos, 1 directory, Buy Local.
- Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) grants and loans specifically for the forest industry
- Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) supporting emerging technologies in forestry with RMPPIF grant funds
- Recent MAERDAF grants awarded to Maryland Forests Association (MFA), RC&D, SMADC, and Maryland Forests Foundation
- United States Forest Service (USFS) grants supporting tours, publications, conferences, and analyses

Mr. Rider stated he cannot overstate the importance of the support the forestry industry is receiving throughout the state. Some results are:

- TCCLES will be hosting forestry tour with MFA, Society of American Foresters, and DNR
- St. Mary’s County Career & Tech expanding curriculum
- Serious investment likely at Luke, high potential for exports
- Cropper Brothers Lumber in Wicomico County restarting as Delmarva Lumber
- New piling operation starting at former Chesapeake sawmill in Somerset County
- PJJ: Existing piling operation in Snow Hill, Worcester County, massive expansion
- ESFP: new pellet mill; expanded production in Wicomico and Somerset Counties
- Polo Pallet in Cecil County: new wood product (erosion socks) from waste
- 2 shavings mills showing interest in developing new plants on Mid-Shore
- New kiln and new mill at Chesapeake Wood in Cambridge, Dorchester County

Mr. Rider finished by stating none of this would have been possible without the assistance of the Mid-Shore Regional Council.

Mr. Warner then introduced DNR Secretary Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio by thanking her for all her support of the MSRC and the forestry industry.

Secretary Haddaway-Riccio stated her appreciation for the support of the MSRC, the leadership of the Governor, partnership with Maryland Department of Commerce and Maryland Department of Agriculture, and the many other partners. She is looking forward to the future of the forestry industry as this positive momentum continues.

Announcements/comments

There were no comments.

Adjourn

Ms. Spicher made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Cox seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:22 a.m. by unanimous consent.