

The Mid-Shore Regional Council held a scheduled meeting on September 11, 2025, in conjunction with their annual field trip. This year the council went to establishments in Caroline County including Knaggs Guitars in Greensboro, Clayton Farms in Denton, Wharves of Choptank Visitor & Heritage Center in Denton, James Webb Cabin in Preston, and Choptank Marina in Preston. We would like to thank Bob Zimberoff and Kendall Teague for arranging the day's festivities.

MSRC members and guests met at the Council's office at 8:00 a.m. to board the bus and head to our first meeting spot, Knaggs Guitars. Additional Council members and individuals who drove separately due to their work schedules and other commitments met us there. A big thank you to Delmarva Community Transit (DCT) for providing the bus and bus driver Wayne Wilson.

MSRC members in attendance included: Walter Chase, Carolyn Spicher, Joyce Harrod, Travis Breeding (Knaggs Guitars, Clayton Farms, and Wharves of Choptank Visitor & Heritage Center), Dan Rider, Debi Sewell, Kurt Fuchs, Lajan Cephas (lunch meeting), Maria D'Arcy, Rose Potter, Mike Detmer (Wharves of Choptank Visitor & Heritage Center and lunch meeting), Caroline County Administrator Kathleen Freeman (lunch meeting), Dorchester County Manager Jerry Jones (lunch meeting), and Talbot County Assistant County Manager Jessica Morris (lunch meeting).

Guests in attendance were: Caroline County Economic Development and Tourism Director Bob Zimberoff and Business Coordinator Kendall Teague; Dorchester County Economic Development Director Susan Banks; Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Director Cassandra Vanhooser; Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland (TCCLES) Executive Director Greg Padgham; CareFirst Blue Cross Blue Shield External Affairs Manager Melissa Kelly Carels; Advantis principal Sarah Guy; Governor Wes Moore's Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Madison Bryce; Caroline Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Tracey Snyder; Comptroller of Maryland Public Engagement Officer – Eastern Shore Mary Handley; Town of Trappe Commissioner Mike Sullivan; Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative (ESRGC) Project Manager Mary Buffington; U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen's Eastern Shore Regional Director Alyssa Hastings; U.S. Senator Angela Alsobrooks' Eastern Shore Regional Director Kim Kratovil; USDA State Director for Delaware and Maryland Paul Ellington; Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center (ESEC) Executive Director Mike Thielke; Choptank Electric Government Affairs Manager Matt Teffeau; TEDCO representative Bill Bernard; Rural Maryland Council Executive Director Charlotte Davis; Chesapeake College President Clifford Coopersmith; Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board Executive Director Ellen LaFrankie; Director of Rural Economic Strategy Carl Anderton's Special Assistant Kendall Calva; University of Maryland Shore Regional Health External Affairs & Community Liaison Director Lara Wilson; Maryland Broadband Cooperative Vice President of Business Development Wayne Howard; Greensboro Town Manager Cindy Yost; and guest Michele Mitch-Peterson. MSRC staff present were Scott Warner and Terry Deighan.

The first stop was in Greensboro.

Knaggs Guitars - 213 Church Street, Greensboro, MD 21639
<https://knaggsguitars.com>

We were welcomed by Caroline County Economic Development Director Bob Zimberoff and Business Coordinator Kendall Teague, who planned and arranged the days itinerary. Joe Knaggs, owner of Knaggs Guitars, soon joined us outside and gave us a detailed timeline of how he started as a musician and after many years came to own and operate Knaggs Guitars. The guitars they produce are used by not only musicians in the United States, but they are also extremely popular in Europe. Mr. Thielke stated that Joe Knaggs and his partner Peter Wolf were clients of ESEC for over 15 years. When they first started out, they came to ESEC for a loan, which helped them purchase materials to get started.

We were all invited inside the facility where Mr. Knaggs walked us through the many steps involved in the process for creating a beautiful custom guitar, including the “ring” that is heard when a piece of wood is thumped, which is a very important part of choosing the perfect piece of wood to use.



After the tour in Greensboro, we traveled to Denton for our next stops.

Clayton Farms - 24380 Shore Highway, Denton, MD 21629
<https://www.instagram.com/claytonfarmsmarket/#>

Upon arriving at Clayton Farms, we were introduced to the owner Eileen Simmons. She stated that they are a 3rd generation family-owned business that has proudly operated in Denton, MD since 1977. Ms. Simmons has taken over the day-to-day operations. Along with her family she has added several additional buildings to the property, including a new green house to go along with the original store full of fruits, vegetables, and seasonal items. They grow their own produce, including

mushrooms, and are ready for the holiday season with Halloween pumpkins, gourds, and mums. Additionally, they have decorations for Halloween and Christmas in beautiful displays in their new greenhouse. Eileen's daughter handles social media for the business and information can be found on Facebook and Instagram!



Wharves of Choptank Visitor & Heritage Center - 3 Crouse Park Lane, Denton, MD
<https://visitcaroline.org/listings/wharvesofchoptank/>



This Center has recently been renamed to the Wharves of Choptank J.O.K. Walsh Visitor & Heritage Center in honor of local resident and historian J.O.K. Walsh, who passed away in 2023. This project was very dear to him, and he spent an extraordinary amount of time getting the building established. The full-pane glass windows allow guests to view the vast outdoors while also providing ample light so special items on display can be enjoyed by all who visit. Currently, J.O.K. Walsh's collection of

replica model boats is on display in the great room. There is a telescope on the outside deck so all can enjoy the scenery and wildlife along the river.

Caroline County Economic Development Director Bob Zimberoff provided updates on two projects funded by the Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund. The first being the West Denton Feasibility Study. The study gathered data and information on the potential impact of West Denton development, including the impact to county services. It encompassed a preliminary engineering study of wastewater and municipal water needed for sustainable development. The next project is the Denton Industrial Park Improvement. This project provides infrastructure improvements to the land directly adjacent to the Denton Industrial Park in an effort to expand and augment the existing commercial zone. Commissioner Breeding stated that work is finally getting ready to start as certain

permitting was not known to be needed by certain parties and the necessary documentation is due to be received very shortly.

The next stop was at the Market St. Public House - 200 Market Street, Denton, MD

The MSRC meeting was held prior to lunch. Chairman Chase called the meeting to order at 12:27 p.m. and introductions were made. Chairman Chase was in possession of proxies from Senator Johnny Mautz, Delegate Chris Adams, and Delegate Tom Hutchinson. Mr. Detmer was carrying a proxy for Lenny Pfeffer. Mr. Jones was carrying a proxy for Ricky Travers. Ms. Freeman was carrying proxies for Frank Bartz and Larry Porter. Ms. Morris was carrying proxies for Chuck Callahan and Lynn Mielke. Mr. Warner was in possession of electronic votes from James Redman, Bill Christopher, and Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio.

Action Items

Approval of June 12, 2025, Minutes

Mr. Fuchs made a motion to approve the June 12, 2025, minutes. Ms. Spicher seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All in favor signify by saying aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion carried unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Kurt Fuchs presented the following report.

MSRC Operating Budget

- Mr. Fuchs stated all expenses are on track for this time of year and we should be receiving funds from the Maryland Department of Commerce shortly.

Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) Budget

- Mr. Fuchs stated that this chart shows all of the projects previously approved by the Council to be funded when RMPIF funds are released.

Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund Budget

- Mr. Fuchs stated that this report has not changed since the last report with the exception of payments to the project consultant and the attorney.

Mr. Warner stated that two figures have changed on the RMPIF budget since the last MSRC meeting. At that meeting the Council voted to allow the Executive Board to shift funds from the Summer Career Enrichment Program (SCEP) to the Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center (ESEC) if more SCEP sponsorships were secured. More financial support was secured so funds were shifted from the SCEP line item to the ESEC line item.

Mr. Rider made a motion to approve all three reports as presented. Ms. Spicher seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated that we have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All in favor signify by saying aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion carried unanimously.

Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund (RMEDF)

Scott Warner, MSRC Executive Director and Sarah Guy, Principal, Avantis gave the following updates.

On August 27 Mr. Warner and Dr. Guy met with the mid-shore economic development directors Bob Zimberoff, Susan Banks, and Cassandra Vanhooser. The meeting was to prepare for the final months of the RMEDF grant period and discuss open/active projects. The current grant agreement with Maryland Department of Commerce and the subsequent MOUs between the MSRC and the counties call for the projects to be completed by December 31, 2025, with final reports due January 31, 2026.

The following project status was provided.

Caroline County – 7 total projects

- 5 projects were included in the grant extension. 2 of those projects are currently open.
 - Choptank Marina Infrastructure Improvement
 - Denton Industrial Park Improvement

Dorchester County – 7 total projects

- 3 projects were included in the grant extension. 3 of those projects are currently open.
 - Cambridge Harbor Streetscape Design and Partial Construction
 - Rails to Trails
 - Incumbent Worker Training

Talbot County – 14 total projects

- 4 projects were included in the grant extension. 3 of those projects are currently open.
 - Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe Phase II Planning and Implementation
 - Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Plan
 - Goldsborough Neck Culvert Improvements

Summer Career Enrichment Program (SCEP)

Mr. Warner stated that this years' program has been completed. It was a tremendous success. Talbot County was the host county this year. The program was held at Easton High School.

The SCEP was conducted Monday through Thursday from 9:00am - 1:00pm Session 1 (July 7-10 and July 14-17) and Session 2 (July 21-24 and July 28-July 31).

There were 9 tracks offered: Animation, App Development, Careers in Healthcare, Chess, Cyber Security, Drones, Media Arts, Presentation/Video Design, and Robotics.

This year's SCEP targeted rising 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th graders.

Total attendees were 359.

- Session 1: 259 enrolled and assigned a class
 - 195 attended
- Session 2: 241 enrolled and assigned a class
 - 164 attended
- The goal was 330 attendees
- Of the 500 (259 + 241) that enrolled, 141 did not show or withdrew their registration, that is 28% registration loss rate. This is right on target as we know from prior years the average loss rate is approximately 30%.

7 tours were conducted, including one with Comptroller of Maryland Brooke Lierman.

There is a video of this year's program being produced.

On July 30, a luncheon meeting was held for the SCEP instructors, teacher assistants, and public-school administrators. For the first time sponsors were invited to attend. MSRC and People for Change Coalition (Sandy Pruitt and Jerry McLaurin) representatives thanked everyone for their work, dedication, and funding support to bring this wonderful program to the students of the mid-shore region.

Mr. Warner thanked all the funders for supporting this year's SCEP.

First, was the MSRC who utilized Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund monies to contribute a large portion to the budget. The MSRC made the SCEP its largest funding priority again this year. Mr. Warner also thanked the county school systems (Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot) for their financial commitments to the program. He thanked Talbot County for the use of the building.

Additionally, he thanked the community sponsors for supporting the SCEP. The sponsorships this year were double what they were last year. It is great to see the community's support. The funders were:

- Lead Sponsors
 - Mid-Shore Regional Council
 - Rural Maryland Council
 - Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund
- Foundational Sponsors:
 - Caroline County Public Schools
 - Dorchester County Public Schools
 - Talbot County Public Schools
 - Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center
- Platinum Sponsors
 - Caroline Human Services Council
 - M&T Bank
 - Moving Dorchester Forward
 - Neilom Foundation
 - Truist
- Gold Sponsors
 - Burke & Herbert Bank
 - Choptank Electric Cooperative
 - Dock Street Foundation
 - Mid-Shore Community Foundation – George B. Todd Fund
 - Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board

- Silver Sponsors
 - CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield
 - Horizon Farm Credit
 - Maryland Broadband Cooperative
 - Shore United Bank
- Bronze Sponsors
 - American Legion Caroline Post 29
 - Chesapeake College Foundation
 - Easton Velocity
 - Mid-Shore Community Foundation
 - Pep Up
 - RAUCH, inc.
 - Tom & Marge Wolf Education Foundation
 - U.S. Wind
- In-kind sponsors
 - Ava's Hospitality Group
 - Chick-fil-A (Easton)
 - Meoli Companies
 - Playa Bowls (Easton)

Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center (ESEC)

Mike Thielke, ESEC Executive Director, stated F3 Tech began in 2017. Currently, the F3 Tech Biomanufacturing Facility is almost complete. The labs have been installed and final additions are being made to outfit them with equipment. Companies using the facility will mostly perform work dealing with plant and animal cell technology. All of this has been made possible with an initial grant from Talbot County via the Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund through the MSRC. These funds were then matched 1-to-1 by an EDA investment. Additionally, ESEC secured a TEDCO Equitech Growth Fund grant to support the prior commitments. Emphasis will be put on later stage start-up companies to help them commercialize. The ultimate end game is to help them get established and hopefully remain in Maryland rather than moving to another state.

Upcoming Events

Mr. Warner reminded everyone of the upcoming meetings.

- Mid-Shore Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Meeting
 - October 22, 2025 (Wednesday) at 12:00pm at the Easton Firehouse.
- Mid-Shore Regional Council meeting
 - December 10, 2025 (Wednesday) at Hyatt, Cambridge in conjunction with the Eastern Shore Regional Councils Joint Luncheon Meeting.

Announcements/comments

There were no comments.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:59 p.m.

After lunch, the tour continued, with a drive by Double Hills Road (Denton Industrial Park Improvement, a Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund project). This was one of the projects discussed at the Wharves of Choptank Visitor & Heritage Center. Mr. Zimberoff pointed out various items that had been discussed during the morning session.

We then made our way to the next stop, the James Webb Cabin in Preston.

James Webb Cabin – Grove Road, Preston, MD 21655

Pre-construction



Renovated



We were met by Mike McCrea, who is one of the remaining original renovators of the cabin. He gave us a great bit of history of the area, including his home nearby that was also part of the underground railroad. Mr. McCrea explained the renovations that have been made to the cabin as well as the materials used on the original structure.

James H. Webb, a free African American farmer, built this hand-hewn log home around 1852 and lived here with his enslaved wife, their four children, and Webb's father. The Webb Cabin is one of more than 30 sites on the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway. It still sits on its original ballast-stone foundation from ships that plied the Chesapeake Bay. (sited from the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway, <https://harriettubmanbyway.org/webb-cabin/>)

We then traveled to our last project site visit of the day, Choptank Marina.

Choptank Marina Infrastructure Improvement - Water Street, Preston, MD 21655

This is also one of Caroline County's Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund projects.

We were greeted by Mark Lasocha (Parks and Capital Project Manager, Caroline County Recreation and Parks). He explained the sustainable improvements to this key visitor waterway facility in Caroline County, including seawall repair/replacement, slip and pier repair and reorientation, and pier utility updates. Mr. Lasocha shared how this spot was a vital element in slaves fleeing for their freedom. If they could make it across the waterway then they could make it north to freedom.



The consensus of the group was that it was a highly informative, enjoyable day visiting sites in Caroline County and being able to see the positive impact the Rural Maryland Economic Development Funds have had on so many worthwhile projects in the county.

The bus arrived back at the Mid-Shore Regional Council office at 4:03 p.m.