

The Mid-Shore Regional Council (MSRC) held a scheduled meeting on March 5, 2026. It was held at the Easton Firehouse, Easton Maryland.

MSRC members in attendance included: Bill Christopher, Carolyn Spicher, Kurt Fuchs, Frank Bartz, Maria D'Arcy, Dan Rider, James Redman, Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Rose Potter, Walter Chase, and Caroline County Administrator Katheleen Freeman.

Guests in attendance were: Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative (ESRGC) Project Manager Erin Silva, Dorchester County Economic Development Director Susan Banks, Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism Director Cassandra Vanhooser, Caroline County Economic Development and Tourism Director Bob Zimberoff, Rural Maryland Council Executive Director Charlotte Davis, Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism consultant Ryan Snow, CareFirst Blue Cross Blue Shield External Affairs Manager Melissa Kelly Carels, Town of Trappe Commissioner Mike Sullivan, Maryland Department of Commerce Office of Regional Development Senior Director Tamar Osterman, Maryland Department of Commerce Senior Business Development Representatives Mindie Burgoyne and Bridgette Peters, Chesapeake Culinary Center Executive Director Beth Brewster, Tri-County Council of the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland Executive Director Greg Padgham, BEACON Director John Hickman, Advantis principal Sarah Guy, Chesapeake College President Clifford Coppersmith, Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board Executive Director Ellen LaFrankie, Chesapeake College Director of Development and Executive Director of the Chesapeake College Foundation Amber McGinnis, Chesapeake College Director of Skilled Trades Charles Davis, and KFH Group Principal Planner Joel Eisenfeld. MSRC staff present were Scott Warner and Terry Deighan.

Chairman Chase called the meeting to order at 5:29 p.m. and introductions were made. Chairman Chase was carrying proxies for Delegate Chris Adams, Delegate Tom Hutchinson, and Senator Johnny Mautz. Katheleen Freeman was carrying a proxy for Larry Porter. Mr. Warner was in possession of electronic votes from Ricky Travers, Lenny Pfeffer, Chuck Callahan, and Lynn Mielke.

Action Items

Approval of December 10, 2025, Minutes

Mr. Christopher made a motion to approve the December 10, 2025, minutes as presented. Ms. Haddaway-Riccio 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.

Ratification of revised CEDS document (view at <https://ceds.midshore.org>)

Mr. Warner stated that all MSRC voting members and County Administrator/Managers are part of the CEDS Committee.

The CEDS Committee met on October 22, 2025. At the meeting they reviewed intent of the CEDS process (to ensure eligibility for EDA funds and serve as regional forum) and MSRC's purpose in the process (MSRC is the United States Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) designated Development District and as such facilitates and constructs the Mid-Shore CEDS). They were reminded that the 1st CEDS document was submitted to EDA on October 16, 2002. They were also informed of the following:

- 35 projects are part of the Action Plan
- GPRA Data Collection period FY25 (7/1/24 to 6/30/25) reported
 - 22 projects reported funding, jobs, and/or investment activity
 - \$24,065,542 funding total
 - \$416,725 EDA
 - \$328,415 USDA
 - \$425,192 Other Federal
 - \$21,288,506 State
 - \$1,606,704 Local
 - 338.00 estimated number of jobs created or retained
 - \$18,770,667 estimated amount of private sector investment generated
 - \$1,440,914 estimated amount of public sector investment

During the meeting, the committee reviewed and revised the CEDS Goals and Objectives and reviewed the progress status of the CEDS Action Plan receiving updates of each project.

The CEDS Executive Committee met on December 8, 2025. At this meeting they evaluated proposed projects. One project did not make it through the evaluation process. Two projects were unanimously supported to be forwarded to the CEDS Committee for consideration. The CEDS Committee also reviewed and edited CEDS Goals and Objectives as requested by the full CEDS Committee.

January 7, 2026, the full CEDS Committee had their second meeting of the year. During the meeting the following occurred.

- Modifications were approved to update Goals and Objectives
 - Goal 1
 - Goal 1, Objective 2
 - Goal 2
 - Goal 2, Objective 3
 - Goal 3, Objective 5
 - Goal 4, Objective 1
 - Goal 5, Objective 2 (new)
- Two projects were unanimously approved for inclusion in the document
 - Aaron's Place – Food Hub and Innovation Campus
 - Eastern Shore Energy Needs Analysis

- Removal of existing projects from CEDS Action Plan
 - Choptank Community Health System, Inc. – Federalsburg Construction Project (completed)
- In the Action Plan there are now 36 projects under the heading “Ongoing”
 - 11 projects are under the heading “Completed”
 - 16 projects are under the heading “Removed”

Mr. Warner then thanked many for their assistance in revising the CEDS:

- USWIB Executive Director Ellen LaFrankie assisting with Unemployment data found under “Our Region”
- Maryland Department of Commerce Senior Business Development Representative Mindie Burgoyne assisting with Tax Credits and Incentives found under “Resources”
- ESRGC GIS Analyst Nastya Suprunova assisting with Dashboard updates including language for updating the CEDS online and printable version, including the statistical sections
- ESRGC Project Manager Erin Silva for all the projects updates, data updates, printable version, and the overall management of the CEDS online update process

Updates made to the online Mid-Shore CEDS

- Goals & Objectives (as stated above)
- Action Plan (as stated above)
- About
 - “Investments” section
 - “History” section
- Our Region
 - “Demographic & Socioeconomic” section
 - Population
 - Minority Population
 - Education
 - Public School Ratings
 - Income and Poverty
 - Wages
 - Unemployment
 - Labor Force
 - Mobile Workforce
 - Business Establishments
 - Housing
 - “Geographic” section
 - Forest and Farmlands
 - “Major Industry Clusters” section
 - Manufacturing
 - “Quality of Life” section
 - Public Safety
- Economy
 - “Factors Affecting Economic Performance” section
 - Opportunity Zones
 - Business, Personal, and Property Taxes
- Resources
 - “Tax Credits and Incentives” section

Mr. Warner stated that the link to the revised CEDS online was e-mailed to you on March 2, 2026, 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:

- through the MSRC website www.midshore.org
 - Click on "About," "Documents," then "Visit CEDS online"
- or the direct link <https://ceds.midshore.org>

Mr. Fuchs made a motion to ratify the CEDS Document. Ms. D'Arcy 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 approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Reports

Chairman Chase stated that Treasurer Kurt Fuchs will be presenting three financial reports and that we will hold off on making a motion until they have all been presented.

MSRC Operating Budget

- Mr. Fuchs stated that all income and expenses are on track for almost being $\frac{3}{4}$ (three-fourths) of the way through this fiscal year. He did note that MTA should be on track soon with reimbursements as they recently sent the grant agreement to MSRC.

Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund Budget

- Mr. Fuchs stated the only changes since the last report were under Capacity Building Coordinator as those charges are billed monthly and to the Entrepreneurship Training Program which the second half of that payment will be made upon the completion of the program. All other categories have been fully expended.

Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund Budget

- Mr. Fuchs stated changes since the last report incurred to MSRC attorney, MSRC accountant, and Project Consultant as all other monies have been fully expended.
- Mr. Warner did make a note that four projects that have been completed have small remaining fund balances. They are:
 - Dorchester County's Incumbent Worker Training (\$6,242.00) and the Edwin Murphy Community Purchase (\$3,465.00).
 - Talbot County's Building Digital Literacy and Employment Skills at the Talbot County Free Library (\$87.92) and the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe Phase II Planning and Implementation (\$99.84).
 - Total balance of all four projects \$9,894.76.
 - These funds will be returned to the MSRC to use for administrative expenses associated with administering the projects over the expanded timeline (original timeline was 2 years. We are now over

3½ years.) The total administrative expenses will remain well below the 3% cap established by the grant guidelines.

Mr. Christopher 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 in favor signify by saying aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion carried unanimously.

Authorizing Resolution to file an application with the MTA for a FY27 Statewide Coordination and Technical Assistance Grant (SCATA)

Mr. Warner stated that the MSRC received an email on January 29, 2026, from the Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA) regarding solicitation information for a Statewide Coordination and Technical Assistance Grant (SCATA).

- The solicitation encompasses the 12-month period for FY2027 (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027).
- The grant application submittal deadline is April 24, 2026, at 1:00pm.
- The MSRC has been applying for and administering this grant for many years to support the Maryland Upper Shore Transit (MUST) program.
- The grant request amount is \$40,000. (The same amount it has been since FY08.) These funds are matched by county funds (Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot).
- The MTA process requires an authorizing resolution.

Mr. Warner informed the council that the Resolution was included in the meeting materials, please see the resolution that allows the MSRC Executive Director to file an application with the MTA. This is a standard resolution that the MTA has requested over the past several years that the MSRC has applied for the grant.

Mr. Fuchs made a motion to approve the authorizing resolution. Ms. Spicher seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated that we have a motion and a second. Any further discussion? All those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it, motion passed unanimously.

Additional grant – Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF)

Mr. Warner stated that a FY26 RMPIF grant award was unable to be utilized and it was returned to the Rural Maryland Council.

- The Rural Maryland Council Executive Board voted during their last meeting to distribute the funds equally to the five regional councils.
- The MSRC is able to apply for a \$50,000 RMPIF grant.
 - The beginning date will be April 1, 2026.
 - The end date will be March 31, 2027.
- The RMC is asking for applications to be submitted by March 31, 2026.

Mr. Warner stated the initial thought is for the MSRC to use these funds to support the 2026 Summer Career Enrichment Program (SCEP). Normally, RMPIF funds are received and used to pay for the program well after the program is concluded. Utilizing this grant the MSRC could pay some of its financial commitment for the upcoming SCEP prior to the program's completion. This would provide the MSRC's partner organization that executes

the program, People for Change Coalition, not to wait to receive such funds until well after the program is completed. The MSRC can pay any balance for the 2026 SCEP with the FY27 RMPIF grant that will be discussed after this legislative session and voted on at the MSRC's June meeting.

Mr. Warner asked the MSRC members how they would like to handle this grant opportunity. They can make a decision during this meeting or they could vote to allow the MSRC Executive Board to decide how to invest this grant in the coming weeks. Any decision made by the MSRC Executive Board will be ratified at the next MSRC meeting in June.

Members discussed whether there was any reason not to approve this additional RMPIF grant to support the 2026 SCEP.

Mr. Rider made a motion to apply for the funds to support the 2026 SCEP. Mr. Christopher seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second. Any further discussion? All those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it, motion passed unanimously.

Ratification of the updated Upper Eastern Shore Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan
(view at <https://marylandcoordinatedplans.com/upper-shore-region/>)

Mr. Warner provided a brief overview of the plan and its history. He stated that KFH Group's Principal Planners Dan Dalton and Joel Eisenfeld conducted the revision with assistance of Transportation Planner II Sarah Lasky. The weblink to the document has been included on this meeting agenda since its distribution via email last week.

He then introduced Mr. Eisenfeld who provided a presentation on the plan.

Highlights from the presentation:

- Coordination Transportation Planning
 - Plans that meet requirements for the federal Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) Program
 - Build upon previous plans last updated 2019
 - Opportunity for local and regional stakeholders to work together on mobility issues and potential improvements, and to go beyond requirements
- Section 5310
 - Improve mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities by removing barriers to transportation services and expanding available mobility options
 - MDOT MTA serves as designated recipient of these federal funds in Maryland
 - Regional plans serve as the basis for selection of projects through a competitive process
 - Eligible applicants are private non-profit corporations
- Section 5310 Subrecipients – Upper Eastern Shore
 - Bayside Community Network, Inc.
 - Chesapeake Care Resources, Inc.
 - Chester Wye Center

- Delmarva Community Services
- Kent Center
- Pleasant Day Medical Adult Day Care
- Shore Up!
- Coordinated Transportation Plan Requirements
 - Assessment of available services that identifies current transportation providers (public, private, and nonprofit)
 - Assessment of transportation needs for individuals with disabilities and seniors
 - Strategies, activities, and/or projects to address the identified gaps between current services and needs
 - Priorities for implementation based on resources

Additionally, Mr. Eisenfeld described the outreach process that utilized in-person workshops and online focus groups, and the overall strategy themes, strategy categories found in the plan.

He explained the regional coordinating body endorsement. It is a required step in the local application process. The MSRC is the regional coordinating body for the Upper Eastern Shore Region and as such is responsible for reviewing local applications before they are submitted to MDOT MTA. They are to endorse only those applications that are derived from or included in the current regional coordinated transportation plan.

Mr. Eisenfeld also explained that the MSRC needs to officially adopt the coordinated transportation plan.

Mr. Eisenfeld ended his presentation by providing Cydney Dickens, MDOT MTA Program Manager, and his contact information.

Ms. Haddaway-Riccio made a motion to ratify the plan. Ms. Spicher seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second. Any further discussion? All those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it, motion passed unanimously.

Updates

Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund

Sarah Guy, Principal, Avantis provided the following updates.

The most recent bi-annual reports were submitted on January 29, 2026. This report encompasses seven months (June-December 2025) compared to the normal six months due to the last grant extension which moved the end date from November to December.

The 4th grant modification was executed between MSRC and the Maryland Department of Commerce on January 12, 2026.

- MOUs between MSRC and the counties (Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot) were fully executed on February 17, 2026.
- The grant modification included an extension of the grant period to May 31, 2026, with final reporting due to Commerce by June 30, 2026.
- One project from each county was included in the extension.

- It included a reallocation of funds for the Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Plan. This project was completed under budget, and the remaining funds have been reallocated to the implementation of a workforce initiative contained within the strategic plan.
- The Rails to Trails project in Dorchester County was extended.
- Choptank Marina Infrastructure Improvement and Denton Industrial Park Improvement projects in Caroline County were extended. Dr. Guy also shared as of today the Choptank Marina Infrastructure Improvement project was completed.

Summer Career Enrichment Program

Mr. Warner provided the following updates.

Sponsorship letters for 2026 SCEP were sent November 12, 2025

- Follow up communications were sent on January 16, 2026. The 2025 video link was shared.
- Follow up communications were sent on February 24, 2026. Tour dates of the 2026 SCEP were shared.

2026 SCEP Committee started meeting on February 10, 2026.

- Thank you to the MSRC members who are on the committee: Walter Chase, Bill Christopher, Kurt Fuchs, and Dan Rider.
- Thank you to RMC Executive Director Charlotte Davis for serving on the committee.
- During the meeting the committee started working to finalize dates and deadlines to support the program. They also reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the partners that execute the program.

Regarding the 2026 SCEP:

- It will target rising 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th graders.
- 8 tracks will be offered:
 - Animation
 - App Development/Gaming
 - Chess
 - Cyber Security
 - Drones
 - Media Arts
 - Presentation/Video Design
 - Robotics
- Each program will have a 2-week track
- Discussing an advanced program
- The SCEP will run Monday through Thursday
 - Session 1: July 6 through July 16
 - Session 2: July 20 through July 30
- The location will be North Dorchester High School.
- Total number of slots (including both sessions) will be 300.
- 6 tour dates have been established.
- Sponsor Appreciation Luncheon date has been established.

Maryland General Assembly

2026 Legislative session

Charlotte Davis, Rural Maryland Council Executive Director, provided the following updates.

FY2027 Budget – Regional Councils, RMC, RMPIF, and MAERDAF

Funding included in the Governor's Operating Budget in the amount of \$6,047,464 for RMC and RMPIF plus \$118,485 for MAERDAF in FY2027. No issues or cuts identified by DLS. Budget hearings were held on February 19 in the Senate and February 26 in the House. Senate budget decisions are expected around March 11.

HB461: Economic Development - Rural Readiness Program and Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund – Establishment

House Bill 461 creates a Rural Readiness program to be administered by RMC. This will be a mostly virtual cohort learning program to assist small towns and nonprofits. Legislation also includes the creation of a Rural Maryland Capacity Building Fund for targeted investments in technical assistance for program participants. Funding is suggested at \$100,000. Hearing was held on February 17 in the House. The Senate companion bill, SB300, was reported favorable with amendment on March 2, (this bill was passed on 3/5/2026). Maryland Matters recently covered the program:

<https://marylandmatters.org/2026/03/01/maryland-lawmakers-aim-to-help-some-rural-communities-get-more-funds-for-projects/>

Other Legislation Issues

- Establishment of a Rural Caucus (comprised of 8 legislators and co-chaired by Delegate Jeff Ghrist and Delegate Natalie Ziegler) in the House. The Speaker looks to rely on this group for input on budget and legislative issues. RMC has been working with them on specific bills. The Caucus voted to support HB 461.
- Land preservation funding is a majority priority after significant multi-year cuts (\$100million total cuts) were approved last year. HB609/SB464 looks to require these diverted funds to be repaid.
- Delivering Economic Competitiveness and Advancing Development Efforts (DECADE) Act of 2026 (SB388/HB498) is a major legislative initiative introduced by Governor Wes Moore to restructure Maryland's economic development, focusing on high-potential "lighthouse" industries. The act extends the Build Our Future Grant Program until 2030, revitalizes the RISE Zone program, and extends the R&D Tax Credit to 2031.

Rural Maryland Day in Annapolis

Ms. Davis and Mr. Warner provided the following:

It was held on February 12, 2026. 10 teams of rural Maryland supporters met with State of Maryland Senators and Delegates. The teams were made up of RMC board members, supporters, and RMPIF and MAERDAF grant recipients. Thanked legislators for their support of rural Maryland and the RMC and expressed the vital importance of the grant programs administered by the RMC. The RMC supports the level funding amount of \$6 million for the RMPIF in the FY27 budget (a 30% reduction from the \$9 million appropriate funding level). RMPIF funds have been reduced in the last two fiscal years. The RMC's budget priorities also include MAERDAF level funding, RMC operating expenses, and regional councils level funding.

Thanked Governor for including RMPIF in the proposed FY27 Operating Budget. This is the 11th year in a row that RMPIF has been included in the state budget.

Regarding specific legislation in this year's session, the RMC provided a list of bills it supports. The RMC Legislative Committee vets the bills. Categories included:

- Economic Development
- Rural Health
- Workforce/Income Support
- Agriculture and the Environment

"Taste of the Eastern Shore" legislative reception

Greg Padgham, Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland Executive Director, gave an overview of the event held on February 12, 2026, at Graduate Annapolis Hotel. It was the reception's 22nd year. It was very well attended by over 350 people. He thanked the MSRC for partnering on the event. He announced they have already paid a deposit, and the event will be held at the Graduate Hotel in 2027.

Maryland Day

Ms. Davis announced that the RMC will be holding a Maryland Day event at Lawyer's Mall in Annapolis on March 25 from 11:00am to 1:00pm. Everyone is invited to attend this annual event.

Presentation

Chesapeake College representatives Dr. Cliff Coppersmith (President), Amber McGinnis (Director of Development and Chesapeake College Foundation Executive Director), and Chuck Davis (Director of Skilled Trades) gave the following presentation on Skilled Trades.

Ms. McGinnis and Mr. Davis stated this was created for students not looking for a traditional 4-year degree, but more of a hands-on approach to everyday trade.

Chesapeake College offerings include:

- Construction Trades Lab at the Wye Mills campus
- Intro to Construction Class at the Cambridge campus

- HVAC training is available at the Wye Mills campus
- Mobile Welding Lab boasting 8 workstations is currently available at the Cambridge campus (next deployment will be North Dorchester and Kent County)
- Advanced Manufacturing Lab at the Wye Mills campus
- SolidWorks class offered
- Advanced Manufacturing – Robotics Training
- Hands-On Marine Lab at the Wye Mills campus

They also described the continuing education from high school CTE to Chesapeake College which include an electrical program, HVAC program, and Marine Technician program. The next closest facility offering the Yamaha Outboard Certification is in Georgia.

President Coppersmith stated that a new Regional Tech Building is on the horizon, opening in January 2029. It will replace the current Queen Anne's County Technical building in Wye Mills. The 25,000 square-foot facility will be the new home to construction trades, electrical, HVAC, agriculture, welding, and advanced manufacturing. It will also contain a new Center for Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Career Services.

He added that all existing courses have been funded by scholarships and private donations.

Member comments/requests

Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Director Cassandra Vanhooser stated earlier this week her office facilitated a visit to the county by Maryland Department of Commerce Secretary Harry Coker, Jr. and took him on a tour focusing on projects funded by the Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund. She conveyed thanks to Ryan Snow for his assistance. Others in attendance including Maryland Department of Commerce staff shared that it was a wonderful, well thought out, visit.

Adjourn

Chairman Chase adjourned the meeting at 7:07 p.m. by unanimous consent.