

Tri-County Council
for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland
Serving Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester Counties

Executive Board Meeting Minutes
May 20, 2020

Joe Mitrecic, Chair, called the meeting of the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, Executive Board to order on Wednesday, May 20, 2020 at the Tri-County Council Multi-Purpose Center in Salisbury, at 6:14 p.m. In accordance with Governor Hogan's orders prohibiting gatherings of ten or more during the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was convened via GoToMeeting Teleconference Service.

Voting Members in attendance: Joe Mitrecic and Ted Elder, Worcester County, Josh Hastings, and John Cannon, Wicomico County and Pat Schrawder, standing with proxy for Senator Mary Beth Carozza.

Guests in attendance: Mindie Burgoyne, Maryland Department of Commerce

Staff in attendance: Greg Padgham, Brad Bellacicco, John Donegan, Becca Webster, Monique Snyder and Brenda Howard.

Upon a motion made to vote made by Ted Elder and seconded by Josh Hastings, the minutes of the January 15, 2020 were approved unanimously with no opposition.

Old Business

Shore Transit Update – Brad Bellacicco

Funding

- Through ten months of FY20, Shore Transit has expended all SSTAP and 5311 Rural grants. We are in the process of finishing the Mobility Capital Grant with all but eight percent spent. Twelve percent of the preventative maintenance grant remains and the Urban 5307 grant has a five percent balance.
- We are running on a very small surplus because of the reduction in demand for the OTD service, which tends to be our costliest service.
- Funding for FY21 is in question. Shore Transit has been told that the State Transportation fund is down and to expect a fifteen to twenty-five percent cut in what we requested in our FY21 ATP.
- Some federal CARES money has been granted, and we are waiting to get all the rules, which are still developing. Those funds should help cover some expenses incurred with the pandemic, and replace some of the lost revenue.

Routes

- We have changed one route in Salisbury to an on demand route to where passengers have to call in identify when they want to travel the day before. That allowed us to save the cost of a driver and a bus and the customer still got their transportation needs met.
- We have not started the summer routes to Ocean City. That would normally happen right after Easter, but we are waiting until the workload grows. We are still going into Ocean City. Normally at this time of year, we would be transferring at the Park and Ride to the Ocean City Transit system, who would be taking people into the Ocean City Inlet and beyond. However, they do not have ridership to justify the expense, so we are continuing into Ocean City for now.
- The fixed route ridership is currently down approximately thirty percent since the removal of the stay at home order. However, at points during the stay at home order, we have seen up to a forty percent reduction in service in comparison to prior years.
- As the ridership demand increases, we will bring back the summer routes and maybe the one we deleted.
- Shore Transit is working with the Worcester County Commission on Aging to possibly have them take over the OTD support that we have been doing for them.

Vehicles

- The revenue fleet currently consists of thirty-eight vehicles. We have seven small and seven medium buses on order. Three of the small buses are due in next week, the rest are in various stages in the completion of manufacturing. We transitioned to using only small buses because of the low ridership, which helped to reduce costs. However, we are now bringing the larger buses out as ridership increases to continue to allow for social distancing.
- The federal grant funded three small and three medium buses.

MTA

We have submitted our FY21 budget to MTA and are waiting to hear back. In a teleconference today, it was discussed that MTA may not have the money to match our federal grant, and we would have to use federal CARES grant to cover the gap. We are waiting to hear more on that.

Staffing

- Shore Transit currently has ninety-three employees, of which fifty-seven are drivers. Adjustments were made in response to the workload demand and COVID-19 concerns. We have enclosed the drivers in plastic sheeting, to give them a barrier if someone coming up the steps happens to cough on their way onto the bus. Each driver has disinfectant, gloves, masks and some of them have bought their own face shield. We believe we are operating safely on the fixed routes. There are challenges with moving people on the OTD routes, especially with moving people from the nursing homes. We have had instances where we moved someone one day and get a phone call the next day advising they were positive for COVID-19.
- With the reduced workload, our staff have been using leave to round out their hours to a normal workweek. Last month, we had as many as twenty-eight people out for various reasons; that number is less this month. If the workload does not increase soon, we have identified four drivers that may have to be furloughed and we would provide them assistance with getting unemployment.

Mr. Elder asked if any staff have contracted COVID-19 to date, and Mr. Bellacicco advised that although some have been tested, active drivers are currently COVID-19 free. One part-time driver who had not been working for a two-week period and went to New York in that period, did contract COVID-19. Shore Transit worked with the Health Department and followed their protocol for COVID-19. Another driver's son got sick. She quarantined for a month while he recovered and she never tested positive. She is now back to work.

Mr. Elder also confirmed that everyone was required to wear a mask or some kind of face covering when riding the bus. As more people started coming out and ridership increased, the bigger buses were bought back out to help facilitate social distancing. So far everyone was working together and has been understanding about the requirements.

Mr. Mitrecic advised that Ocean City is considering not opening the Park and Ride this year, and once they make the decision, they will reach out to Shore Transit to advise. Mr. Bellacicco stated he understands that decision would be reevaluated in July and Shore Transit will be able to accommodate their decision either way.

Administrative Services Update – John Donegan

Audit

As mentioned in prior meetings, the Tri-County Council audit is complete. Greg Padgham, John Donegan and the Finance Office staff met with the auditors from TGM and reviewed the audit in detail. The audit was emailed prior to the meeting and Mr. Donegan asked if there were any specific questions he could answer. There were no

substantive findings, and the audit has been distributed to all appropriate parties and funders as required.

FY21 Tri-County Council Budget – 2nd Draft

The budget was emailed for review prior to the meeting, and Mr. Donegan explained that the 3rd draft would be presented to the Full Council for a vote during the June 17th meeting. It remains a draft at that point because all of the grant funding is not yet awarded in June. Therefore, the final budget will be ratified in the September or October when all decisions on funding have been received. Mr. Donegan asked if there were any questions on the budget for next year.

Mr. Hastings asked if there was anything that may impact the Tri-County Council budget this year as a result of COVID 19. Mr. Donegan advised the predominant impact could be changes in funding sources because of CARES related grants. Shore Transit is hearing to expect fifteen to twenty percent less in normal grants, but will get some amount of CARES funding that will be specific to certain services. FTA, MTA and MDOT are all trying to formulate guidance for those funds. The amount and terms of funding are still unknown, which is why it is not yet reflected in the 2nd draft. However, Mr. Bellacicco is addressing it on a daily basis. Another area of impact will be in the Lower Shore Workforce Alliance (LSWA). Additional funding may become available for job training. Mr. Padgham advised there may a reduction in funding in the Executive Department. Currently we have no concrete answers that we can use to modify the draft budget at this point. Wicomico County has made a significant reduction in match funding for FY21, and TCC is preparing a response to the Wicomico County Executive indicating what federal and state funding would be lost if that reduction actually occurs.

Multi-Purpose Center

As follow-up to earlier discussions, Area 116, which is an unconstructed space left in the MPC of approximately 1800 square feet. We have a contractor on site completing a shell fit-out, basically putting up an exterior wall and doors into the space, so that potential tenants can see it in its shell form and get a visual of its potential use. Once that is finished, we are going to solicit commercial realtors to help us find a suitable tenant.

New Business

Resolution 21-01 – Federal Grant Application

Mr. Padgham advised that this was the document that Mr. Mitrecic signed in the interim when the Full Council was unable to meet in March. This resolution gives Mr. Padgham authority to file for federal transit grants on behalf of the region. Mr. Elder made a motion to bring Resolution 21-01 to a vote and Mr. Hastings made the second. The

following voters voted aye: John Cannon, Ted Elder, Josh Hastings and Joe Mitrecic. Ms. Schrawder did not vote. Resolution 21-01 was approved.

COVID-19 Update

Becca Webster: LSWA offices had to be closed in response to COVID 19. Most of the team is able to work from home. There was limited equipment to hand out, so not everyone has a laptop, so duties were redistributed focusing those without a laptop to making phone calls and contacting customers. The biggest concern at present is there have not had a lot of calls from the public for training. This time of year is normally very busy because people want to get into classes for June. The college is not running continuing education classes right now, and those that were in the middle of a class at the point of the shut-down got delayed, so we are keeping an eye on how they will start back up. The youth provider staff are able to continue to work serving the youth population, however, the concern there is that a lot of those participants have severe needs such as housing or food, making them unable to participate at the level that we would expect under normal circumstances. We are doing whatever we can to support those youths.

John Donegan: TCCMPC is using Wicomico County's guidance for government buildings and modifying it slightly for the TCCMPC. In short, there are identified cleaning stations, sanitation stations and public facing entryways will have signage telling visitors not to enter if they are sick. Plexiglas spray barriers will be installed at points where staff meet the public, and cleaning staff is being trained on doing more extensive disinfecting throughout the day. We are limiting the use of the public conference rooms in the facility for the foreseeable future. We are looking at reducing the amount of administrative staff in the office at any one time when we go back into the office. We are not planning to have staff monitors at the doors taking temperatures and asking questions related to symptoms. We have no indication yet as to when the American Job Center will reopen to the public. Our general target for returning staff on a rotating basis into the building and allowing tenants back into the building is sometime near June 1st.

Mr. Mitrecic asked when the Board will be able to reconvene normally. Mr. Padgham advised TCC is following Wicomico County's policy at present and anticipates the Executive Board will be able to meet in July, but is unsure about the Full Board in June. We normally have twenty-five to thirty-five people attend, and it will depend upon the Governor's directive regarding convening that many people in one place. We should plan to have the Full Council via teleconference.

Greg Padgham: Executive Staff have been telecommuting with the exception of himself, and he has been in the office daily. Department of Commerce and EDA grant reports for the third quarter have been submitted timely, and the FY21 EDA planning grant application has been submitted. We will have our RMPIF grant application filed next month on schedule. Although not attending meetings personally, Mr. Padgham has been participating in teleconferences and telephone calls, including Executive

Committee meetings of Maryland Broadband Cooperative, Rural Maryland Council, and other meetings as asked.

Relative to funding, usually by this time each year Department of Commerce will provide a commitment letter confirming a fifty percent match funding to our EDA grant as part of the EDA grant application. When requested by the TCC again this year, the Department of Commerce advised in early May, due to budget cuts, they were unable at that time to provide a commitment letter. All of the regional councils have met with this same answer. In the interim, Mr. Padgham wrote a letter stating that the Tri-County Council had \$70,000 in unrestricted economic development funds that were held in an emergency fund which could be used as match funding for the EDA grant. When we do receive a letter from Department of Commerce committing to funding, we would revise our EDA application to state that the funds would no longer come from local funds held as a stopgap measure, but from the State Department of Commerce.

Mr. Padgham advised that EDA funds that are being made available for infrastructure or COVID related recovery efforts should entail match funding, and very few of those grants will be 100 percent EDA funded. With regard to RMPIF, the legislature did approve \$410,000 for each of the five Rural Councils this year.

There is a 2.8 billion shortfall expected in the Maryland budget, which is about six percent of the annual budget. If the Governor confirms a six percent reduction in RMPIF funding, the impact would be about \$25,000; if fifteen percent, then the reduction would be \$61,000. Even though we have the full RMPIF funding listed in our draft budget, we have that \$61,000 listed as economic development and given ourselves some leeway should the budget cuts impact RMPIF funding. Sub recipient applications are not approved until the TCCLES RMPIF grant agreement is received.

The sub recipient application process has been standardized this year. Interested parties have submitted a formal proposal and will sign a grant agreement. Although proceeding forward with the process, we are uncertain of final funding total this year. We will be able to discuss this in more detail at the Full Board Meeting.

The Executive Director's Itinerary was introduced at the last Executive Board meeting in January and the most recent ninety-day report was emailed to the Executive Board for review prior to the current meeting. It includes pertinent phone calls, meetings attended, outreach, and even internal activities that reflect the administrative function of this position. If anyone has any questions or feedback, or the Board would like to see the Executive Director to focus on any specific area, he is available and open to suggestions.

With no other topics on the agenda, an opportunity for further discussion was offered, then a motion to adjourn made by Mr. Elder, and seconded by Mr. Hastings. The following voting members voted to adjourn: John Cannon, Ted Elder, Josh Hasting, and Joe Mitrecic and the meeting ended at 6:57 p.m.