

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

Tri-County Council Meeting Minutes  
June 17, 2020

Joseph Mitrecic, Chair, called the meeting of the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland to order on Wednesday, June 17, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. utilizing the GoToMeeting Videoconference Service. Roll call was taken and the following were in attendance.

Voting Members in attendance: Charles Laird, Somerset County Commissioners; John Cannon and Josh Hastings, Wicomico County Council; Joseph Mitrecic and Ted Elder, Worcester County Commissioners; Delegate Sheree Sample-Hughes, Delegate Wayne Hartman, Delegate Charles Otto, and Senator Mary Beth Carozza. Commissioner Joseph Mitrecic carried proxy for Commissioner Diana Purnell and Commissioner Charles Laird carried proxy for Commissioners Rex Simpkins, Eldon Willing and Randy Laird. A quorum was present.

Non-Voting Members and guests in attendance: Elizabeth Carven and Mindie Burgoyne, Maryland Department of Commerce, Charlotte Davis, Rural Maryland Council, Scott Warner, Mid-Shore Regional Council, Melissa Kelly, U.S. Senator Van Hollen's Office, and Senator Addie Eckardt.

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

### **Old Business**

#### **Shore Transit – Brad Bellacicco**

**Funding:** The budget is currently balanced due to the reduction in demand for OTD service, lower fuel costs, and the use of smaller buses to make of for lost revenue.

FY21 funding is in question, the state transportation is down Shore Transit was told to expect less funding from the State of Maryland. We have federal funding coming, however, the rules and amount are still waiting for more information about the amount and the rules surrounding those funds.

**Routes:** During COVID 19, we continued to operate the fixed route service. We were allowed to provide essential transit service and continued to run a portion of our fixed routes. We are still requiring masks. The downtown Salisbury and SU routes stopped

in March, but should begin in August when school resumes. Four more summer loops to get back people back and forth to Ocean City will start on Saturday. Ocean City Transit will start picking up the ridership on Saturdays and Sundays from the Park and Ride to Ocean City Inlet to help keep the buses on schedule when the traffic is heaviest. We appreciate their partnership in this effort.

Our fixed route dropped to thirty percent of normal during COVID 19, but we are now back up to sixty percent and growing daily.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, Shore Transit will be passing the SSTAP program over to the Worcester County Commissioner on Aging, and we have been working with them to make that transition as smooth as possible.

**Vehicles:** The fleet is currently at thirty-nine. Three of the small buses on order have arrived and are in service. The rest will arrive sometime in the winter or next spring.

**Staffing:** Shore Transit currently has ninety employees with fifty-four drivers. Staff are still using leave to balance the reduced hours until the demand increases for more hours.

Both Senator Carozza and Commissioner Mitrecic expressed interest in increased direct service to Ocean City because of the J1 students will not be in Ocean City this year and a big need will arise for local workers in Ocean City.

### **New Business:**

#### **FY21 Budget – John Donegan**

Mr. Donegan announced he has recently been told to expect a twenty percent reduction in funding to Shore Transit, and it is not yet been determined if the federal CARES money can be utilized to offset that loss of funding. This may impact Shore Transit's ability to keep full service running and the cuts may be in every area. The TCC draft budget is based on all normal requests made for funding, because we have not received definitive answers to our applications. The reason we ask for a vote on our draft budget is because we need a working budget to start July 1<sup>st</sup>. We will not get all decisions and funding until sometime in September or October.

With no questions about the budget, Commissioner Elder made a motion to bring the budget to approve the budget, and Delegate Hartman seconded the motion. Mr. Mitrecic opened the floor for discussion. With no further discussion, voting members voted unanimously to pass the FY21 Tri-County Council Draft Budget.

#### **Grant Funding: Greg Padgham**

EDA has approved Tri-County Council's \$70,000 planning grant to write and administer the CEDS process again for FY21. An opportunity to apply for supplemental EDA

funding became available and the Tri-County Council partnered with the Mid-Shore Regional Council to apply for a total of \$507,000. The bulk of that grant is for the Mid-Shore's project, but a portion is also for the Lower Shore. The partnership involves working with the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Center (ESRGC) at Salisbury University to provide GIS resources to help decision makers in the Mid and Lower Shores determine the economic development impact of COVID 19, and plan recovery efforts.

Maryland Department of Commerce usually funds \$200,000 to each of the Regional Councils for operational expenses. A portion of those funds are also committed as a match for EDA grants, and a letter of that commitment is usually here by this time each year. However, Department of Commerce has not been able to provide this letter to date inasmuch as they are not sure what funds will be forthcoming. However, they just advised this Friday they will be able to provide each Council with \$20,000 supplemental FY20 funding. Although specified as \$200,000 in our Draft FY21 budget, funding is still undetermined. We have received notification from one of the lower shore counties that funding will be the same as it has been over the last ten years.

As was discussed earlier, Worcester County SSTAP state funding will be turned over to Worcester County. Somerset County currently receives their SSTAP funding directly. Worcester and Wicomico have historically allocated their funding to the Tri-County Council Shore Transit to administer the program. The allocation is based on two steps: Sixty percent of the funds are divided 50/50 between the two counties, and the remaining forty percent is based on population and census data within the counties. BEACON has conducted a study and assisted with the statistics needed to determine the forty percent portion, and the signatures are currently being gathered to finalize the transition. Mr. Donegan added the last signature from Mr. Hart should be obtained on Thursday and the documents will be presented to MTA for their approval. We believe that we are on track to have the transition fully executed by July 1. Shore Transit will continue to administer the Wicomico County SSTAP program.

Lastly, Mr. Padgham stressed the importance of local match funding in order to leverage federal and state resources to the region. He reiterated the importance factoring this impact when determining county funding to ensure transportation services remain available on the Lower Shore.

LSWA Mobile Unit – Becca Webster announced that the American Job Mobile Unit has arrived May 28. We do not expect to be out until after August 1<sup>st</sup> because of COVID-19. We are currently recruiting for an operator. An official public announcement will come out when it is available for use. Funding from MAERDAF and the Weinburg Foundation and Maryland Department of Labor assisted with the budget for the project.

### **COVID-19 Updates – Senior Management**

Mr. Donegan advised he and Becca Webster were working together with the American Job Center and tenants in the building to figure out cleaning schedules as we reopen. Each agency is going to be responsible for how they manage people in their respective

area. We are working with the to determine the transition in the common spaces. We have an indefinite closure currently on the conference spaces due to risk of exposure. Budget constrains do not allow for disinfecting those spaces every time they are utilized throughout each day. When we get guidance that that level of disinfecting is no longer needed, we will of course open them back up. We are basically following the CDC guidance about social distancing. Fortunately, Finance, Executive, and IT staff have been able to effectively telecommute. Some agencies have received direction to allow staff to return to work on a limited basis, but no one has received direction to begin seeing the public as yet. The Welcome Center remains closed to date, and we are putting up plexi-glass barriers around the main entrance in preparation for reopening. As they become available, HVAC systems are being upgraded with appropriate filters, and the systems are being upgraded for the air filtration system that has been prescribed.

Senator Eckard asked the question if the Tri-County Council is the vehicle to assist with the internet access and IT resources for tele-education options in the future. Mr. Padgham explained that the Maryland Broadband Cooperative is the local provider supplying the middle mile backbone to the Eastern Shore. The Governor's Office is providing additional funding to them and ISP providers for expanding the last mile of service to areas without service. Companies are expanding to meet the need. Worcester and Somerset counties have studies in process to determine specific needs that should be complete within the next five months. John Donegan added that as a Regional Council, the Lower Shore Tri-County Council has IT, fiscal and grant management services that may be of resource for projects if needed. However, we are not currently in contact with the Board of Education, but that can certainly be initiated.

With no other business, Mr. Mitrecic asked for a vote to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Elder made the first motion to adjourn and it was seconded by Delegate Otto. With no further discussion the meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.