

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

Tri-County Council Meeting Minutes
September 18, 2019

Larry Dodd, Chair, called the meeting of the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland to order on Wednesday, September 18, 2019, in the Worcester Room in Tri-County Council Multipurpose Center, Salisbury, MD at 6:00 p.m.

Voting Members in attendance: Charles Laird, Randy Laird, and Eldon Willing, Somerset County Commissioners; John Cannon, Larry Dodd, and Josh Hastings, Wicomico County Council; Diana Purnell and Ted Elder, Worcester County Commissioners; Dennis Williams, Princess Anne; Doug Gosnell, Sharptown; Esther Troast, Pocomoke City; Delegate Wayne Hartman, and Delegate Charles Otto, and Pat Schrawder for Senator Mary Beth Carozza. A quorum was present

Non-Voting Members in attendance: Laura Hurley, Wicomico County Administrator.

Staff in attendance: Greg Padgham, Kim Whayland, Sharon Jones and Brenda Howard

Guests in attendance: Ryan Snow, Office of the Governor, Melissa Kelly, Senator Van Hollen's Office, Scott Warner, Mid-Shore Regional Council, Weston Young, Wicomico County,

Guest Speakers: Chris Jarboe and Melanie McGinnes, Atlantic Test Ranges Sustainability Office; Drew Van Dopp and Tyler Patton, Maryland Broadband Cooperative

Larry Dodd thanked everyone for attending and introductions followed.

Greg Padgham introduced Melanie McGinnes and Chris Jarboe who shared information about the Naval Air Warfare Center's (NAWC) Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program. This program is an initiative by the Navy that enables cost-sharing partnerships between military services, private conservation groups, and state and local governments to purchase land interest or easements from willing landowners below the 2300 square miles of airspace in the Atlantic Test Inner Range. All Navy and Marine Corps aircraft come to this Atlantic Test Range for testing, and it is part of the Department of Defense (DoD) Major Rand and Test Facility Base (MRTFB).

The Navy's goal of this land preservation partnership is to avoid incompatible development, reduce safety concerns, and address regulatory or environmental restrictions that could inhibit military activities. Benefits to the region are many, including preserving the rural character and agricultural lands, protecting natural

resources, creating recreational opportunities in parks and maximizing conservation dollars and programs. There are currently seventeen conservation partners in Maryland, including the Department of Natural Resources, working with willing landowners who live under restricted air space to preserve their land from future development. The landowner continues to co-own the land with the partner, and is still able to use the land with the restriction of future development.

There is currently land protected in five Maryland counties, including Dorchester and Wicomico, with a total of fifty parcels totaling 9,814 acres.

Ms. McGinnes also discussed the Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape program that spans portions of the Maryland, Delaware and Virginia area. This is one of seven nationally designated areas of working or natural lands important to the Nation's defense that have been officially designated as such by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Defense and the Interior. This designation creates opportunities to enhance partnerships between federal agencies and local partners, advance mutual priorities and leverage financial resources, as described in the brochure shared with the group. More information is available at their website: Sentinellandscapes.org.

In our second presentation of the evening, Drew Van Dopp and Tyler Patton from the Maryland Broadband Cooperative updated the attendees on their membership, which is currently at seventy-two partners, and fielded questions regarding operational and legislative efforts to bring about broader broadband coverage for rural parts of Maryland. Maryland Broadband supplies the middle mile trunk for broadband service and partners with Internet Service Providers to supply the "last mile" service to individual homes and businesses. They discussed the successful crossing of fiber optic cable under the bay. The life expectancy of this new cable is forty years.

Maryland Broadband presented Larry Dodd, Chair with a 2019 updated map detailing Maryland Broadband Cooperative's service throughout Maryland.

Ryan Snow from Governor Hogan's Office advised Governor Hogan has committed \$10,000,000 over five years to assist underserved counties, and encouraged counties to apply.

Old Business:

The Tri-County Council minutes from June 19, 2019 were presented for review. A motion was made by Diana Purnell and seconded by John Cannon to vote, and the minutes were unanimously approved as written.

Shore Transit – Sharon Jones

Funding:

- FY19 grants have been expended with the exception of two medium buses that have been awarded. A request was sent to MTA to change the capital bus award from two medium buses to one medium and one small.
- FY20 FTA/MTA Operations and Capital grants are currently being reviewed by the Tri-County Council attorney.
- The Maryland State Department of Human Services (DHS) grant paperwork is at the Attorney General's Office.

Facility

- The bus wash is working well.

Vehicles

- Revenue Fleet currently stands at forty-two.
- Shore Transit has been authorized to order three small buses from the FY20 grant award. Those buses, along with the FY19 award should be ordered this week.
- A used small bus has been purchased to help with the Origin to Destination (OTD) demand.

Service

- OTD demand continues to grow.
- BEACON is gathering data for the MPO funded study on increasing ridership.
- SU Routes – Three routes operate Monday – Friday with an average ridership of 420 rides per day.
- Fixed route service:
 - Service reduction begins Monday, September 23rd. Regional routes will transition to the Fall/Winter schedule (nine trips will reduce to seven trips daily)
 - Route 155 serving East Salisbury and Fruitland Monday – Friday, will be eliminated effective September 23rd. This route has low ridership because it is largely duplicative; many stops along that route are served by other routes. Several stops that were utilized on that route are being absorbed by another route.

Ridership

- We have seen our ridership not only stabilize but grow. Frequent Fixed Route service changes several years ago in an attempt to offset rising costs of the OTD side caused a drastic reduction in ridership, due to the perception of the system being unreliable because of frequent changes. Ridership gained through the partnership with Salisbury University helped to offset the drastic reduction in general ridership. In January 2018, we redesigned routes to address gaps in service and offer a system that was more “rideable”. We returned Regional Routes and began a seasonal approach, offering more service during months that ridership peaks and decreased service when it ebbs. Since then, we have

made very minor changes and the perception of our systems' reliability is beginning to return. We are seeing that in our ridership:

- July ridership was up 2,000 from last July, even though hours of service were decreased by approximately 200 hours from the year prior.
- September ridership averaged 638 riders per day Monday through Friday and 683 averages per day on the weekends.

Staffing

- Shore Transit currently has ninety-two employees, of which fifty-six are drivers. This includes a new CSR and four drivers in training.

Ms. Jones shared a heartwarming story as a testimony to Shore Transit employees going the extra mile, as well as to the supportive relationships formed by the network of riders and service providers. A senior who uses the OTD service regularly did not show for pickup for a second day in a row. They did not call to cancel either ride, so the driver and call center employees became concerned and reached out to neighbors and then police to have a well check made by police as a precautionary step. Police discovered the senior had fallen and laid there for two days. They were transported to the hospital, and is now recovering. We are proud to be a part of a professional yet compassionate team serving our local communities in impactful ways.

Status of Grant Applications – Greg Padgham

Mr. Padgham reported that the EDA, Department of Commerce, County and RMPFIF grants have been awarded and funds forthcoming.

FY20 Final Budget Adoption – Kim Whayland

Ms. Whayland presented the final FY20 Tri-County Council Budget and a motion was made to bring it for a vote by Diana Purnell and seconded by Charles Laird. The FY20 Budget was approved unanimously.

With no other business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Hartman to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Gosnell and the meeting adjourned at 7:50.