

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

Tri-County Council Meeting Minutes
September 23, 2020

Joseph Mitrecic, Chair, called the meeting of the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland to order on Wednesday, September 23, 2020 at 6:15 p.m. The meeting was held physically at the Summit Room of the Black Diamond Lodge and virtually utilizing the GoToMeeting Videoconference Service. In the interest of safety amidst COVID 19, in lieu of a sign in sheet, attendees were checked in at the door. Mr. Mitrecic asked for introductions around the room.

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

Non-Voting Members and guests in attendance: 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, Senator Addie Eckardt, Delegate Chris Adams

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

Guest Speakers: Director Dave Pierce, Deputy Director Bob Jameson and Director of the Office of Communications Jeremy Eggers from NASA Wallops Flight Center. In their 75th year of operation, the team presented on key scientific historical moments beginning in the 1940's to the present. NASA Wallops' mission is to provide agile, low-cost flight and launch range services to meet government and commercial sector needs for accessing flight regimes worldwide from the surface to the Moon and beyond. Mr. Pierce and Mr. Jamison also discussed the exciting initiatives currently underway at NASA. They shared their stats showing the workforce of NASA employees and contractors that bring a significant positive economic impact to the region, breaking down employee residence by State and local Counties. They also explained their outreach efforts to the local schools, colleges and universities to support their commitment to recruit and hire locally. Following the presentation, several attendees followed up with questions about specific projects or initiatives. A pdf copy of their presentation is attached to these minutes.

Minutes:

Mr. Mitrecic asked for a motion to bring the minutes from June 17, 2020 to a vote. Delegate Charles Otto made the motion and Delegate Wayne Hartman seconded the motion. The quorum voted unanimously to approve the minutes as written.

Old Business

Shore Transit – Brad Bellacicco

Funding: Although revenue from ridership significantly decreased during the initial stages of the economical shutdown during COVID 19, Shore Transit finished out Fiscal Year 2020 with a small surplus. This surplus was the direct result of strategic reduction in some services, lower fuel prices and implementation of smaller busses while demand for ridership was decreased.

The 2021 Department of Human Services Grant total 1.6 Million has been approved. Mr. Bellacicco advised more would be discussed about TCC funding concerns later in the evening.

Routes: During COVID 19, we continued to operate essential fixed route service. Drivers and riders are still required to wear masks. The driver area is enclosed and the buses are disinfected regularly throughout the day. Ridership fell to thirty percent but currently climbed to seventy-one percent. All routes that were previously suspended are now running. Although a lot of workers used Shore Transit to commute to Ocean City throughout the summer, those numbers are declining with the end of the summer season. SU routes started August 10th, and UMES students returned August 1st. We will move to the winter schedule on October 5th, due to the slowing demand in overall ridership.

The OTD ridership is currently fifty percent of the norm as senior enters and non-profits are still closed.

Vehicles: The fleet is currently at thirty-seven with six vehicles on death row. Six of the seven small buses that were on order have been received and are in operation, with delivery of the last one expected in the end of October. The seven mediums are due in the spring.

The FY21 grant will provide two small and two medium buses. They will be ordered when the grant paperwork is received. These new buses should allow us to retire our last seven diesel buses.

Staffing: Shore Transit currently has eighty-three employees with fifty drivers. Staff are still working through adjustments to the workload and COVID concerns. Three new

drivers were hired recently. We are looking for three to four more to replace the Board of Education drivers currently with us, as we anticipate their leaving when school reopens.

Senator Carozza asked Mr. Bellacicco to elaborate on the movement of workers to Ocean City. He explained that ST staff worked with Ocean City to identify where the workers needing transportation were located. Route frequency to and from Ocean City was increased and travel trainers worked with individuals planning their trips to ensure they had viable first and second options to get back and forth to work. He has received no complaints to date as a result of those interventions and adjustments.

New Business:

Grant Funding

Executive and Economic Development - Greg Padgham

The Executive Department of the Tri-County Council is focused on the economic planning of the region, and writes annual updates to the five year CEDS to ensure the Lower Shore maintains its status as an Economic Development District (EDD). The Economic Development Administration (EDA) has approved Tri-County Council's \$70,000 planning grant funds for operation and planning expenses to administer the CEDS process again for FY21.

The opportunity for EDDs to apply for a supplemental EDA grant became available as part of the COVID 19 CARES Act and the Tri-County Council applied for and received \$107,000, to be disbursed in quarterly increments over a two year period. The Mid-Shore Regional Council received \$399,000. The two councils will partner with the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Center (ESRGC) at Salisbury University and various economic development directors and develop economic dashboards to help decision makers throughout 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 five Regional Councils in the State of Maryland for operational expenses. In anticipation of budget shortfall and reduced funding in FY21, the Department of Commerce (DoC) approved \$20,000 supplemental FY20 funding in late June to each regional council in response to the economic situation across the state. DoC funding for FY21 was approved in the amount of \$180,000, resulting in the average amount over the two year period remaining at \$200,000.

For the last two years, the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) has funded at approximately \$410,000 to each of the regional councils. FY21 was initially cut to \$390,000 due to the economic impact of COVID 19 across the state. We have just learned of an additional cut in FY21 that is being taken before the Rural Maryland Council Board. If approved, this will bring each council down from \$410,000 to \$367,000 this fiscal year. These RMPIF funds are granted to each regional council, but mostly dispensed to subrecipients, who also go through a vetting process to apply for funds and report on their measurable goals and outcomes. The Tri-County Council planned ahead by putting some money aside for economic development, which could be used to grant additional funds if needed by a subrecipient later in the grant cycle or a developing economic project. Consequently we will be able to absorb FY21 cuts without impacting the funding to our subrecipients, such as the Worcester County STEM program and the Summer Youth Program. However, there is additional pressure on RMPIF funding from the Department of Budget and Management to be elaborated upon by Charlotte Davis, Executive Director of the Rural Maryland Council RMC).

Additional RMPIF Updates – Charlotte Davis, Executive Director, Rural Maryland Council

Ms. Davis thanked Governor Hogan and the members of the Maryland Legislature for their support that resulted in RMC being fully funded for FY21. On July 1st, due to the economic climate in the state, the Board of Public Works cut RMPIF funding across all sectors by five percent. The RMC review board moved forward to review grants in August and did make decisions. We have one slight wrinkle from the Department of Budget and Management about the distribution of funds, so the RMC Board is meeting about that on September 25, and we hope to have decisions about by September 28. We have been getting a lot of phone calls from folks asking about the funds, so we hope to have an answer Monday.

RMC started with funding of 6 million for all programs. RMPIF is broken up into sectors, entrepreneurship, infrastructure and healthcare. The Eastern Shore had thirteen RMPIF awards this year totaling 1.4 million. The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) made thirty-nine awards statewide for a total of \$859,542 of which fifteen will be coming to the Eastern Shore totaling \$345,000. We received an unprecedented demand for over 11 million in requests for funding this year and our review board took four days going over the requests. Unfortunately with 6 million, we are unable to fund all the needs out there.

We have already received our FY22 target for the budget which will be another five percent reduction on top of this year's five percent reduction. We are asking our legislators to help us protect that funding as we know there will be a lot of pressure to put those funds toward other needs. We are hopeful to make it through and be able to get the funds out there to the organizations that need it.

Shore Transit and Local Match Funding – John Donegan

On the subject of funding, Mr. Donegan reported that Wor-Wic has applied for funding for training in electronics and technology and approached Tri-County about offering that training in our building.

Mr. Donegan discussed the regulations surrounding match funding and gave examples of how those funds leverage Shore Transit's ability to draw down federal and state funding. In summary, local funds are critical and each \$1 of local funds leverages \$3 of state and federal funding. Key points have been attached to the end of these minutes.

Additionally, Mr. Donegan explained that Shore Transit manages the regional transportation system collectively on behalf of the three counties with oversight with by Executive Committee, the Full Tri-County Council, the Shore Transit Advisory Board, and the Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization. The Tri-County Council does not own Shore Transit and the counties have not voted away their rights to county run transportation systems. As always, we want every bit of advice and counsel you can give us in running this system for you.

Lower Shore Workforce Alliance (LSWA) – Becca Webster

Ms. Webster explained that there were no CARES workforce related funds. Workforce grants come in on a two year cycle, and LSWA is currently in the second year of that cycle. We often have first year money that carries into the next year. This year that carryover is much higher than usual because we lost a whole quarter of providing services to the public. Active program participants could not finish the sessions they were in and new programs were delayed. We are now beginning to see that interest in services increase a bit. Out of school youth programs were managed by another subcontractor, but they experienced the same problem of decreased participation. Summer Youth Programs actually ran pretty well, but we did experience a cut in funding

LSWA is still not open to the public, but we are still serving folks remotely. We have developed a way to interview them, collect their information and determine their eligibility remotely.

We have hired a person to operate the new Mobile Unit, and we are waiting for the appropriate time to take it out.

COVID-19 Updates – Senior Management

Mr. Donegan advised the Multi-Purpose Center is in good shape. None of the local tenants are seeing public right now except for Child Support Enforcement Services. Everything else is being handled virtually. All of the agencies have limited staff in the building and protocols are in place to safely have that happen. The entire Tri-County Council staff is operational, either on site or remote. Interestingly enough some units are running more efficiently working virtually from home than if they were in the office. We are working on how to keep that quality of work product up once this is over.

We have now finished renovating our Space 116 which is about 1800 square feet that is available for a tenant fit-out for another agency. Please let us know if you are aware of an agency looking for space to rent.

Other Business:

Becca Webster mentioned DLLR is a tenant in the building, and she and other employees often encounter people in the parking lot attempting to make contact with a live person regarding unemployment concerns. Website and phone number contact information is posted on the door for every agency housed in the building, so customers are given that information, however, she understands the legislative representatives are also getting these questions and wanted some direction on how to be of more assistance. The legislators in our meeting collaborated on giving the person contact information for their respective Senator or Delegate in addition to contact information for DLLR. There is a website that allows you to find your local representative by your address. Ask customers to contact one of their representatives by email including their name, last employer and the last four digits of their social security number, along with their contact information. There is no need to contact both legislators, as the lists are shared and would be inundated with duplication.

Senator Carozza requested a build-out of the workforce partnerships at a future meeting to help navigate the intertwined partnerships between the agencies at the Tri-County Council. Mr. Donegan reinforced that suggestion, elaborating that Tri-County Council works with over fifty different agencies. Ms. Webster stated she does that annually for her new Workforce board members and will be happy to present at a future meeting.

With no other business, Mr. Mitrecic entertained a motion by Delegate Wayne Hartman and seconded by Eldon Willing to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.