

Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission Meeting

November, 2015 / 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**W. Paul Martin District Court & Multi-Service Center
115 South Division Street
Salisbury, MD 21801**

Meeting Summary

Members Present:

Jon Laria, David R. Craig, Mary Ann Lisanti, Rick Brush, Boyd Campbell, Deborah Carpenter, Diane Chasse, Jeffrey J. Felker, Howard Freedlander, Alan Girard, Matt Holloway, Frank Hertsch, Leslie (Les) Knapp, Jr., James Kruger, Kevin L. Small, Lee Sobel, Leo A. Vondas, and Jessica Zuniga

Elected Officials:

County Council President John T. Cannon, Delegate Mary Beth Carozza, County Executive Robert L. Culver, Jr, County Councilmember Ernest Davis, Mayor Jacob Day, Senator Adelaide C. Eckardt and City Council President John ‘Jack’ R. Heath

Attendees:

Jack Lennox, Nancy Nunn, Mike Pennington and Dr. Sarah Taylor-Rogers

MDP Staff:

Brandon Wright, Chuck Boyd, Arabia Davis, Tracey Gordy and Keith Lackie

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Chair, Jon Laria, welcomed members and guests to the meeting. Mr. Laria acknowledged and thanked all of the elected officials from the City of Salisbury and Wicomico County for attending the meeting.

Mr. Laria then introduced County Executive Bob Culver and Mayor Jacob Day. The County Executive welcomed the Growth Commission to Wicomico County and spoke briefly about the County Council’s commitment to continuing to bring economic growth to Wicomico County. The County Executive spoke on forging of a strong relationship with the Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission and how this relationship could be helpful as the county moves forward with its plans for growth and the expansion of Wicomico County’s metro corridors. While he acknowledged that there may be challenges in terms of growth and expansion, the County Executive pointed out efforts to incentivize development in the City of Salisbury by waiving building fees for new construction projects and working closely with City officials on various downtown projects.

Mayor Day reiterated the County Executive’s comments and thanked the Commission members for their participation in the tour and coming to Salisbury for its November meeting. The Mayor looked forward to future collaboration with the Commission on variety of revitalization and redevelopment efforts that the city is currently considering. He also encouraged the attendees to visit the local businesses in the areas after the meeting concludes. Mayor Day explained one of the city’s efforts to promote reinvestment in the downtown has been to establish an “EDU Free Zone,” where new development and redevelopment does not have to pay for water and sewer connections. The city has created a water-sewer Equivalent Dwelling Unit (EDU) credit bank to cover the water-sewer connection charges that new downtown development projects would normally have to pay.

Tour of Downtown Salisbury

Mr. Laria commented on downtown Salisbury exemplifying the basic theme of the Reinvest Maryland Report. As highlighted in the Community Profiles section of the report “Downtown Salisbury is the historic heart of the most populous city on the Eastern Shore” and “City officials, businesses and civic leaders are focused on making downtown Salisbury a wonderful place to live, work and play.”

Administrative Matters and Updates

Mr. Laria welcomed the new members and thanked the previous members for their time and commitment on the Commission. Mr. Laria then asked that the new members to briefly introduce themselves:

- **Jessica D. Zuniga** is appointed as a representative of the Housing Community. Jessica D. Zuniga has been appointed vice president of development for Conifer LLC, a Rochester, New York-based leading affordable housing development and management company.
- **Richard R. Brush** is appointed as one of the three representatives from the Washington Metropolitan Area. Richard (Rick) Brush currently works for Montgomery County, Maryland where he serves as the Chief of the Division of Land Development within the Department of Permitting Services.
- **Jeffrey Felker** is appointed as a representative of the Rural Community. Mr. Felker is the Vice President of Landesign, Inc. He is a Professional Engineer and Professional Land Surveyor.
- **Lee Sobel** is appointed as a representative of the Smart Growth Community. Lee Sobel is RCLCO’s Director of Public Strategies, a position that blends his expertise in real estate and finance with his knowledge of land use and transportation policy.
- **Leo Vondas** is appointed as one of the three representatives from the Washington Metropolitan Area. He is the principal of Bethesda Properties, LLC and the managing member of Capital Management & Development, LLC.

Overview of Wicomico County

Mr. John F. Lenox, AICP, Director of Wicomico Planning & Zoning welcomed the Commission to Wicomico County. Mr. Lenox provided an overview of the City of Salisbury and Wicomico County.

Wicomico County is 400 square miles of which 26 square miles are water bodies. All planning and zoning responsibilities are shared jointly by the county and City of Salisbury. Mr. Lenox noted that the Planning Department also works closely with the Tri-County Council in facilitating regional economic development and planning efforts for Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester Counties.

The county has (8) municipalities with Salisbury being the largest and oldest municipality. The county is mostly rural and considered to be one of the top agricultural producers in the State of Maryland. While the majority of the municipalities performs its own planning and zoning duties and is in charge of its own water and sewer services; the county closely coordinates planning efforts with each jurisdiction.

Mr. Lennox highlighted the county’s long-range planning goals and the Planning Department’s role as the Metropolitan Planning Organization, which is responsible for the regional transportation needs of various municipalities, the County and portions of Delaware. He talked briefly about some of the projects the Planning Department has been working on: (1) the multimodal plan “Connect 2045, Long Range Transportation Plan which is the result of a partnership formed by officials in the Maryland Department of Transportation and Delaware Department of Transportation; (2) establishing Equivalent Dwelling Units (EDUs) Zone in downtown Salisbury; (3) reviewing their housing and development goals, forest conservation, and agricultural preservation efforts; and (4) the county’s desire to consolidate the permitting process for Salisbury and the county.

Frank Hertsch asked who pays for the credits issued in EDU zone. It was explained that residential and commercial developers normally pay a fee to connect to the water and sewer systems in the city. The connection fee for one EDU is around \$3,500. As part of the city redevelopment efforts, the city purchased a large laundry facility, which historically had a significant water/sewer demand. The city was able to establish a program that transfers the water-sewer credits associated with the laundry facility to other new/redevelopment efforts in the city. The city procured about 330 EDU credits from this brownfield site and is able to move those credits to other projects in the downtown.

Mr. Hertch also asked how the county has waived its impact fees. It was explained that the present impact fee for single family homes is being offset by a grant program approved by the County Council. This grant program has already increased the county tax base by \$400,000. The County is examining whether there is a need to eliminate the impact fee with the anticipated benefit of long term improvements to the tax base. In response to a question, it was reported that the minimum impact fee for a single-family home was \$1,050.

Mr. Lennox also noted that the City has used Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to facilitate economic development, in certain circumstances, and is looking into the potential of establishing a Regional Institution Strategic Enterprise (RISE) Zone in conjunction with Salisbury University to promote economic and community development.

Howard Freedlander inquired what percentage of the county is preserved. Mr. Lennox responded that Wicomico County has a strong land preservation program. About Two-thirds of the county's land is zoned for agriculture and one-third for development. He went on to explain that one-third of the county is within municipalities, one-third is preserved, and one-third of the county is planned for development.

Matt Holloway briefed the Commission on agri-business activities in Wicomico County.

Overview of the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, Incorporated

Dr. Sarah Taylor-Rogers, Interim Director of the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, Inc. provided an overview of the Center. The Center is a 501(c)(3) corporation formed in 1999. It is associated with the University of Maryland College Park and the University System of Maryland. The Center's charge is to work with the agricultural, forestry and environmental communities to retain Maryland's working landscapes and industries, while protecting and improving the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

Dr. Taylor-Rogers cited several projects that the Center has worked on. One project being the Renewable Energy Program and how it helped the farmers in Kent County to grow switchgrass. The purpose of this study was to educate farmers about the plant and its benefit to the environment. Research efforts are continuing on possible uses for switchgrass and the environmental benefits to local watersheds.

Dr. Taylor-Rogers also highlighted a 2007 Center study on Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). One of the Commission members noted that the Rural Economies Workgroup's report on land preservation cited the need to study local TDRs more closely. Chuck Boyd advised the Commission that the Secretary Craig has convened an Ad Hoc TDR Task Force of county representatives to look into improving the effectiveness of local TDR programs. A draft report is being prepared with a number of best practice recommendations that local jurisdictions may want to consider. As soon as that report is finalized, Planning will share it with the Commission and schedule a presentation.

When asked how the Center decides on what issues they will study, Dr. Taylor-Rogers explained that they have an annual vetting process to determine issues of concern / relevance to the mission of

the Center. Several members expressed an interest in receiving the link on the market value study of farmland, as well as the other reports mentioned during Dr. Taylor-Rogers's presentation. Dr. Taylor-Rogers will forward these materials to the Commission staff.

(Please see handout included in the meeting packet for additional information on the Center.)

Overview of the Chesapeake Foodshed Network

Ms. Nancy Nunn, Advancement Outreach and Education Coordinator at the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, Inc. provided an overview of the Chesapeake Foodshed Network. According to the fact sheet, the Chesapeake Foodshed Network is still a new and evolving initiative. The idea was conceived in 2012 by a group of organizations in the Chesapeake region working on food system issues who realized that their goals were interdependent, but that they were not working together as effectively as they could to achieve them. They decided that developing a network approach to their work would help them be more effective and efficient, and could benefit the entire system. Funding from Town Creek Foundation in 2014 jumpstarted the network and it has been rapidly growing and evolving since.

Dr. Sarah Taylor-Rogers and Ms. Nancy Nunn are open to suggestions on issues and topics for possible future research. They also invited the Commission to hold a future meeting at the Hughes Center and would be glad to show the Commission the research projects that were mentioned at this meeting.

(Please see handout included in the meeting packet for additional information on the Center.)

Other Items:

- MACo has an upcoming winter conference that focuses on policing in the modern age and how new technology can enhance communications, coordinated response, and public relations during routine emergencies and regional catastrophes.
- The Commission staff will provide a link so that members are able to access the letters that were sent to the Governor on Land Preservation in Maryland, Secretary of Natural Resources / Chair of the Joint Chairman's Land Preservation Workgroup ("Land Preservation Workgroup") as well as the Sustainable Forestry Letters.

Workgroup Updates

- Education Workgroup – see handouts
- Rural Economies Workgroup Report – see handouts

Public Comments

None.

Chairman Laria adjourned the meeting at 3:33 p.m.