



AGRICULTURAL WORKING GROUP

Meeting Minutes –May 20, 2014

Attendees:

Jenny Biche'	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Ramona Chapman	Department of Housing & Community Development
Ben Cooper	Fauquier Farm Bureau
Kirsten Dueck	Fauquier Health Foundation
Ed Dunphy	CFC Farm and Home
Michelle Edwards	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Betty Grayson	Madison County
Hal Hunter	RappFLOW
Kit Johnston	Rural Madison
Thunder Lane	Culpeper County farmer
Kenner Love	VA Cooperative Extension – Rappahannock County
Maggi MacQuilliam	Piedmont Environmental Council
Leigh Mawyer	Orange County
Ray Pickering	Fauquier County
Carl Sachs	Culpeper County
Michael Sands	Rappahannock County farmer
Carl Stafford	VA Cooperative Extension – Culpeper County

Regional Food System Grant Update – Michelle Edwards, RRRC

Michelle Edwards provided an update on the Regional Food Systems Grant, which is comprised of three phases:

1. Conduct an economic analysis of the region's food system (consultant)
2. Conduct surveys and interviews of the region's agricultural producers to fill any gaps in existing data found during the economic analysis (RRRC)
3. Develop a Food System Plan for the Rappahannock-Rapidan Region through a series of focus group and public meetings, which will include a community vision for the region's agricultural economy, a detailed list of goals and specific priority projects for achieving that vision, and indicators for measuring success (RRRC)

On behalf of the region, Culpeper County submitted a Letter of Intent to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Regional Planning grant. At DHCD's request, project partners completed several preliminary grant proposal activities in Fall 2013, including two public meetings, two Steering Committee meetings and development of a draft Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Economic Analysis. On April 3, 2014, the County received a grant approval letter from DHCD for the full amount requested of \$40,000. While the grant funds have been earmarked, final approval is conditional on participating in this Facilitated Planning Strategy Session, and submitting a Management Plan within seven days of the meeting. Ramona Chapman, DHCD Capacity Development Specialist, will be assisting this committee with the development and implementation of the project.

Review of Draft Management Plan – Ramona Chapman, DHCD

Ramona Chapman provided copies of the Draft Management Plan (attached), explaining in detail the components of each section and answering questions as needed. The Draft Management Plan includes a list of key activities to be completed and provides a framework for the project. Ms. Chapman has worked on other regional agri-economic planning grants including Fields of Gold, and is currently working with the New River Valley PDC. The Draft Management Plan is a fluid document that should be updated and changed as needed.

Project partners have seven days to finalize the draft, at which time Michelle Edwards will submit the Management Plan to Ms. Chapman. The Management Plan should include as many specific details as possible. The CDBG grant is a performance based grant and therefore funds will only be dispersed for completed grant activities. DHCD expects to see buy-in from local farmers, and the project should be community driven.

Committee members expressed concerns with the June 2015 deadline, given the ambitious scope of the project. Ms. Chapman responded that the timeline is flexible and can be adjusted if needed. Ray Pickering stated that Fauquier County's Economic Impact Analysis would be completed in two weeks, at which time he will forward the information to Ms. Edwards to share with the Ag Working Group. Ms. Dueck, Fauquier Health Foundation, also stated that their Community Needs Assessment will be completed by June, at which time she will forward the information to Ms. Edwards.

Ms. Chapman encouraged the committee to consider:

1. Is the timeline reasonable?
2. Assign specific people, not just organizations, to the Responsibility Chart
3. Who will sustain project as it grows and expands?
4. If PDC is overseeing project, who will oversee the outcomes moving forward?
5. How will the outcome of this project tie into the Agri-Tourism Trail project?
6. Provide a detailed road map—schedule of meetings, major events, etc.

When reviewing the budget, Mr. Pickering stated he thought the \$5,000 figure for the Regional Food System Plan and Implementation Strategy seemed low. Ms. Chapman stated that the budget was flexible. Ms. Edwards stated that the estimated \$5,000 is only for writing the plan.

The focus group and public meetings that will occur as part of the strategic planning process are included in the \$9,000 line item.

Carl Sachs expressed concern that most consultants ask for money up front. Ms. Chapman said she would look to see whether DHCD would allow for that. Mr. Pickering stated that Weldon Cooper, the consultant who developed Fauquier County's agricultural economic impact study, did not require money up front.

Mr. Sachs asked whether Culpeper County or RRRC would issue the RFP for the consultant to conduct the economic analysis. Ms. Chapman stated that Culpeper County would need to, but RRRC can provide assistance.

In seven days, Ms. Edwards will forward Ms. Chapman a revised Management Plan, stakeholder analysis and project road map. Ben Cooper inquired whether DHCD had any templates for those items that they could send. Ms. Chapman said they did and that she would send them to Ms. Edwards.

Kit Johnston expressed the need for the focus group meetings to be held in each county, rather than one regional location, to insure greater participation from farmers and the community. Ms. Edwards stated that RRRC will be working closely with the Farm Bureau, Cooperative Extension Agents and others to piggyback on events around the region. Ms. Chapman encouraged committee members to attend the focus groups and assist RRRC.

Ms. Chapman engaged attendees in a dialogue to determine what was important to them about the project, asking them to identify what value the project had to them. Comments included:

- Preserve open spaces
- Invigorate farming
- Economic development for the region
- Meaningful results
- Data from farmers
- Health & wellness of the community
- Open new markets to farmers
- Food pantries
- Production
- Capacity
- Stress the value of agriculture to local officials
- Local data to show value
- Include the users in the process
- Engage the farmers in the middle

Michelle Edwards will send Ramona Chapman the required documents within 7 days. Once approved, Ramona will send Culpeper County a grant contract.

Regional Agri-tourism Trail Update – Jenny Biche’, RRRC

Jenny Biche’ from RRRC provided an update on the regional agri-tourism trail and distributed a draft of the potential participant list (see attached). The Regional Tourism Committee, comprised of the Directors of Tourism from each of the five counties, has agreed upon a name and tag line for the Trail – Tween the Rivers Trail: Grown & Crafted in The Foothills.

In the fall of 2013, RRRC was awarded an Agricultural and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Planning Grant to develop and implement a regional agri-tourism trail to support and expand agricultural and forestry related businesses. It will also be used to help brand the region, distinguishing it from other neighboring areas such as the Shenandoah Valley. The grant will be developed by the Regional Tourism Committee and overseen by RRRC’s Agriculture Working Group to insure that the end result benefits the agricultural and forestry related businesses in the region.

The Regional Tourism Committee spent a great deal of time determining the framework of the trail—who would be included, who would not, definition of a trail site versus a supporting trail site, definition of an agri-artisan, etc. focusing on consistency throughout the five counties. Handouts were provided (see attached) that listed the potential participants and their categories, participate benefits, definitions, etc. The Working Group was asked to review the information and send any comments, edits, questions, concerns, etc. to Jenny Biche’ before the next meeting.

Once the list of potential participants and other information has been approved, the Regional Tourism Committee will begin inviting the participants and vetting their information. Additionally, development of the brochure, website, signage and other marketing material will be initiated. Other components of the two-year grant, including a regional agri-tourism event and development of data collection on the economic impact of the project will also begin.

For more information about the AFID grant, please contact Jenny Biche’ at jbiche@rrregion.org.

Next Meeting

The next Steering Committee will be held on June 24, 2014, at 1:30-3:30pm in the RRRC Conference Room.