

Meeting Minutes
Alleghany Highlands Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
Committee

December 7, 2006

11:30 AM, Room 502 of the Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Services
Building at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College

Committee Members:

Present: Annette Anderson, Claire Collins, Jack Hammond, Tom Harris, Gail Johnson
(Representing Dr. Teaff By Proxy), David Price, George “Chip” Snead, Mark Taylor, Bill
Zimmerman

Absent: Suzanne Adcock, Glen Anglin, Carolyn Barnette, Don Carter, Stephanie Clark, Robert
Daniel, Butch Kemper, Phil Sparks, Dr. Richard Teaff, Tim Tobin, Alan Williams, John
Williams

Others Present:

Wayne G. Strickland, Executive Director, RVARC
John Hull, Regional Economic Resources Planner, RVARC
Matt Miller, Director of Information Services, RVARC
Courtney Lamie, Office of Congressman Rick Boucher

Proceedings:

· *Meeting called to order* at 11:35 AM

Welcome and Introductions:

Wayne Strickland welcomed the meeting participants and introduced Ms. Courtney Lamie from the Office of Congressman Rick Boucher. He noted that this is the second meeting to be held in FY 2006-2007 and that, as mentioned before, these CEDS Committee meetings will be held on a quarterly basis to discuss project status and to work on the CEDS annual update.

Mr. Strickland asked John Hull to update the committee on a number of ongoing projects and on the grant applications that were reported in the first implementation meeting.

Project Updates - ARC Tourism Trail

Mr. Hull noted that the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), which manages the Virginia Appalachian Regional Commission program, has not yet announced funding decisions for the latest round of funding. He noted that staff applied to the Appalachian Regional Commission Asset-Based Development Initiative program for funds to develop a tourism trail concept for the Greater Alleghany Highlands region. In the meantime, staff is working with the Virginia Cooperative Extension to organize focus groups to gain input on regional tourism assets. He also noted that letters have been sent to previous project supporters, local government officials, and other stakeholders requesting nominations for a group of

stakeholders that can be included in future focus groups. Mr. Hull noted that he hopes a funding decision will be announced in January or February of 2007.

Mr. Strickland noted that in initial conversations some stakeholders stated that the project should grow to encompass some geography in the state of West Virginia. He explained that this cannot be done initially using Virginia ARC money but that the concept may grow to encompass additional, adjacent areas in a later phase. He noted that Governor Kaine and Governor Manchin have met and are looking for partnership opportunities. This and other projects in the CEDS may present such opportunities, and community leaders should contact the Governor's Office, DHCD, and other state agencies to discuss the possibilities.

Project Update – Alleghany Highlands Cluster/Target Industry Analysis

Mr. Hull updated the group on the status of the Alleghany Highlands Cluster/Target Industry Analysis project. He noted that the Alleghany Foundation awarded the project \$22,500 and that the Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Corporation is dedicating an additional \$2,500 to the project. He explained that these funds will serve as the local match for a grant application to be submitted to the United States Economic Development Administration (EDA) for an additional \$25,000 for a total project budget of \$50,000. He explained that a pre-application for federal assistance has been developed. He stated that the Roanoke Valley – Alleghany Regional Commission will be considering a resolution authorizing the Commission's Executive Director to make application to the EDA for the funding and that the pre-application will be submitted within days of the passage of this resolution. He explained that if the pre-application is successful, the EDA will invite the Regional Commission to make full application. He explained that the additional work involved in making a full application is minimal and that submittal of the full application could occur very quickly once EDA has considered the pre-application. He stated that the EDA usually takes 2 – 4 months to consider a pre-application.

Project Update – Entrepreneurial Seminars

Mr. Hull also discussed the progress of the team organizing the entrepreneurial seminars. He stated that currently the project leader, Sandy Ratliff with the Virginia Department of Business Assistance, is searching for sponsors for lunch and stated that if any Committee Members are interested in sponsoring lunch for the seminars that they should contact him after the meeting and that he will put them in touch with Ms. Ratliff.

Mr. Hull asked if the Committee Members were aware of other CEDS projects that are currently being pursued. Committee Member Hammond stated that as incoming Chamber President he knew that there were a number of board members on the Alleghany Highlands Chamber that want to make the MLS initiative a priority.

Discussion of Annual CEDS Update Process

Mr. Hull noted that the next two meetings will focus heavily on determining the next fiscal year's project priorities and on reexamining the project package for any additions and any projects that need to be deleted due to changing conditions, more urgent needs, etc.

In regards to general CEDS administration, Mr. Hull discussed the need for bylaws and a membership structure. He noted that there have been losses to the membership structure through staff attrition in various regional institutions and that there is not currently an official process for replacing committee members who have moved on to other areas or are no longer attending meetings. He also stated that recently released EDA regulations have changed CEDS Committee requirements and that now a private sector majority for the CEDS Strategy Committee is mandated by EDA regulations, necessitating a change in the committee structure. He stated that he and Wayne Strickland will start working on developing bylaws for the CEDS Committee and that a draft set of bylaws will be shared with the committee in advance of the next meeting so that thorough discussion can be held at the meeting in March.

ACTION ITEM: Develop draft bylaws and membership structure and circulate prior to next Committee Meeting (*John*).

John asked Matt Miller to discuss telecommunications issues.

Discussion of Alleghany Highlands Regional Telecommunications Planning

Matt Miller with the Regional Commission started by discussing some of the key findings from the Alleghany Highlands Telecommunications Plan from 2004. One of the most interesting findings was that the DSL 'take rate' according to NTELOS was very low, meaning that of those who have the opportunity to purchase DSL services very few opt to purchase the service. He noted that the projects recommended by the Alleghany Highlands Telecommunications Plan have been included in the CEDS document.

Mr. Miller noted that some localities are proceeding on individual, local initiatives. He stated that Congressman Boucher's office has offered assistance to the region in regards to broadband planning and that Laura Lee of the Congressman's staff has suggested the formation of telecommunications group to meet and discuss these issues.

Committee Member Snead noted that Alleghany County has been awarded \$16,000 by the Alleghany Foundation to work on a County-wide telecommunications plan.

Committee Member Collins noted that the City of Covington has been in discussions with the Governor's Office in regards to telecommunications and creating a better web presence. She noted that the State provides a service that helps local governments determine what is needed to improve web presence. She further stated that State employees are going to meet with the City's IT Director on December 20. Ms. Collins explained that improving the City's telecommunications capability is a strategic priority of City Council.

Mr. Miller noted that a community portal was also part of the County's application to the Alleghany Foundation. He noted that a portal usually does not create new information; it merely brings community information together in a central place. Some portals allow community institutions to create pages and email accounts off of the main community portal. He explained

that it is a very inexpensive project to implement and can be important in jumpstarting a community's web presence.

Mr. Strickland noted that a regional portal is a strategic initiative of the Regional Commission in its draft Strategic Plan. Mr. Strickland explained that education may be one of the most important initiatives in regards to the broadband issue. The low rates at which individuals take advantage of broadband services is indicative of a need to convince people of the capabilities of the internet for business applications. He noted that previous educational sessions held by the Regional Commission staff in 2004 had very low turnout.

Committee Member Price noted that Bland and Dickenson Counties in Southwest Virginia had broadband initiatives that have been very successful. He stated that Bland implemented Wi-Fi without utilizing grants. He also noted Dickenson implemented some broadband initiatives using federal and state funding. Mr. Price stated that he does not believe the region will be able to implement any broadband improvements without federal funds and the support of the Congressman's office.

Ms. Collins noted that funding streams exist if a master plan exists. She stated that a major resource for knowledge in this area is Dr. Andrew Cohill, who is a top-notch expert.

Mr. Snead mentioned that Dr. Cohill visited him in the last few weeks and is interested in working with adjacent counties including Craig, Bath, Botetourt, etc. His credibility enhances any proposed initiatives from the Highlands region.

Mr. Miller noted that DHCD has \$375,000 available state-wide for specific planning work related to broadband. He stated DHCD is focusing on locality-specific plans with this round of funding and that he encourages all of the region's localities to make application to DHCD.

Ms. Collins stated that it would be nice if the localities could make a regional application for funding to DHCD for locality specific plans within the region. Mr. Miller stated that he would contact DHCD to determine how such an application would be received.

ACTION ITEM: Contact program staff at DHCD to determine how a regional application for multiple locality-specific broadband plans would be received (*Matt*).

Mr. Strickland stated that the formation of a telecommunications subcommittee needs to be considered by the group. A number of potential nominees were noted including Committee Member Price, Ray Leitz, Kim Woodson from the City of Covington, and Mac Beard from the C&O Historical Society. Ms. Lamie from Congressman Boucher's office explained that Laura Lee's role would be to call meetings and coordinate meetings. Mr. Strickland suggested that all members submit nominations to Laura Lee for the broadband subcommittee.

Ms. Lamie agreed that the Congressman's Office would send out an email asking for nominations to the subcommittee some time after the New Year.

ACTION ITEM: Solicit nominations for Broadband/Telecommunications Subcommittee
(*Congressman Boucher's Office*)

Mr. Price noted that broadband is increasing in importance as an issue noting that more and more people are telecommuting, working in their homes. Mr. Harris noted that this is why localities should have the power to tax business personal property separately from residential personal property.

Mr. Miller reiterated that he will check with DHCD and let the localities know how DHCD will receive a regional application for multiple locality-specific plans.

Future Meeting Schedule

Mr. Strickland said that the entire CEDS group will be invited to the tourism trail stakeholder focus groups and that Mr. Hull will send out meeting notices soon. He also noted that the focus groups will reach out to a diverse set of stakeholders including the Arts Council of the Blue Ridge. He noted that the concept of the tourism trail may grow to include adjacent regions (for ex. West Virginia) in later phases.

The next two meetings were tentatively scheduled for March 15th and for June 14th. Time and location to be announced at a later date. Mr. Hammond announced that the Chamber annual dinner has been set for March 10th.

Comments/Questions

Mr. Strickland encouraged the members to pursue positive coverage of the CEDS process through the local paper. Mr. Snead noted that if someone were to write an article, the local paper would surely run it. Mr. Hammond suggested that the paper (staff, editor, or publisher) be represented on the CEDS body to improve the level of coverage of the process.

Mr. Snead and Mr. Hammond noted that one sign of the success of the CEDS process is the level to which people continually refer to the document. It has not been forgotten and work towards implementation continues. Mr. Hammond noted that all of the various bodies should continue to refer to the CEDS when making application to various funding agencies.

- Meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.
- Minutes submitted by John M. Hull, Regional Economic Resources Planner.