

Meeting Minutes
Alleghany Highlands Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
Committee

March 16, 2006

12 Noon, Room 509 of the Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Services
Building at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College

Committee Members:

Present: Suzanne Adcock, Annette Anderson, Doris W. Baker (Representing Gary Partridge by Proxy), Bernard "Mac" Campbell, Don Carter, Stephanie Clark, Allen Dressler, Butch Kemper, David Price, George "Chip" Snead, Mark Taylor, Dr. Richard Teaff, Tim Tobin, Christine Visscher, John J. Williams, Bill Zimmerman

Absent: Glen Anglin, Carolyn Barnette, Robert Daniel, Jack Hammond, Thomas Harris, Phil Sparks, Alan Williams

Others Present:

John Hull, Regional Economic Resources Planner, RVARC
Wayne G. Strickland, Executive Director, RVARC
Eddie Wells, Senior Planner, RVARC

Proceedings:

· *Meeting called to order* at 12:10 Noon.

Welcome and Introductions:

Wayne Strickland welcomed committee members to the March meeting of the Alleghany Highlands Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee Meeting. Mr. Strickland thanked Committee Member Butch Kemper for providing the food for the meeting. Mr. Strickland asked the committee members, staff, and others present to introduce themselves.

Presentations:

- John Hull gave a presentation on the upcoming public comment session to be held on March 22, 2006 at the meeting hall in the Clifton Forge Fire Dept. He stated that the meeting will be advertised in the *Virginian Review* on March 16th, 18th, and 21st and that the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce is helping to distribute the meeting flyer. Mr. Hull asked committee members to please distribute the flyer to any group that might be interested in the region to promote community involvement in the plan.

Mr. Hull asked the committee members for any last comments or suggested changes to the goals and objectives sent out in the last mailing. No changes were suggested. Mr. Hull then asked Eddie Wells to present the proposed project listing.

- Eddie Wells presented the proposed project listing developed from committee suggestions, from the Highlands Regional Enterprise Business Plan, the previous CEDS document, suggestions from staff, and relevant projects from other plans.

Discussion of Proposed Project Listing:

- A proposed project listing was distributed to the committee prior to the meeting. Committee members were asked to comment on the project listing to determine if any projects should be deleted. The committee began by discussing those projects suggested in earlier CEDS committee meetings.

- Several committee members commented that the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce, the Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Corporation, and Dominion Power are all currently working on producing printed collateral, community profile information, and web sites for economic development marketing.

- Mr. Bernard "Mac" Campbell commented that it is still important to include the 'community profile/printed collateral/and web sites' project because it reinforces the need for this effort. Mr. Wells commented that it is also beneficial to include activities that are known to be underway so that the region can demonstrate momentum towards meeting overall goals and objectives when CEDS annual reviews are to be completed in subsequent years.

- Wayne Strickland asked the committee to speak on what specific type of rail infrastructure is desired in the region, as the development of more rail infrastructure was listed in the proposed project listing.

- Committee Member Kemper mentioned that an intermodal facility had been looked at in the Clifton Forge area in the past.

- Committee Member Snead commented that the region should also seek to preserve existing rail infrastructure and work cooperatively with rail companies to promote investment in short-line railroads in the region.

- Discussion moved to the Multiple Listing Service project. Committee Member Tobin commented that this is a major issue in the region as it is difficult for new employees at the hospital to find housing in the region. Mr. Strickland asked if the MLS project is something that the public sector can realistically pursue. Mr. Snead commented that the public sector can press the issue.

- Several committee members mentioned that realtors in the region have been resistant but that encouraging an MLS is still a worthy project.

- None of the projects previously proposed by committee members were removed from the listing.

- Discussion moved to the list of projects taken from the Highlands Regional Enterprise Business Plan. Mr. Strickland explained that the Highlands Regional Enterprise Business Plan was adopted by the local governments in the region. No changes/deletions were proposed.

- The committee began discussing the projects proposed under the previous CEDS document. In discussing the annual rail festival project, it was suggested that all the festival and festival related activities be combined into one festival and festival-related activities project. Committee Member Anderson noted that the annual rail festival, 'Rail Days', had been implemented in the past, and is now being included in the 'Magic in the Mountains Festivities'. Ms. Anderson spoke in favor of considering a separate rail festival that would be larger in concept and be held separately from 'Magic in the Mountains'.

- In discussing the East End Retail Project, Committee Member Snead noted that it is an important item and is tied to the public sector's ability to propose and build public water and sewer infrastructure. He noted that retail development will not occur in the eastern portions of Alleghany County without substantial investments in infrastructure.

- It was agreed that the Sam Snead Golf Trail should be removed as the committee mentioned that it is no longer a viable project.

- Mr. Strickland asked the committee if the 'High-Tech/Communications Firms' project should be a separate project or if it could be folded into another similar project on the list. Committee Member Adcock suggested that it should be combined with the 'Broadband/Fiber' project.

- In discussing the School of Forestry concept proposed in the original CEDS document, Mr. Campbell explained that the school of forestry was originally visualized as an expansion of the wood science and forestry programs at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College. Discussion indicated that committee members are interested in a school of forestry concept that would be located in the Highlands region and that would be a branch campus of the forestry program in a four-year forestry school. Mr. Snead mentioned that it is important to remember that the state legislature is considering cuts to the Virginia Community College System and that it might be unrealistic to suggest that Dabney establish an entirely new program. Committee Member Visscher suggested that there might be ways to change DSLCC's program so that it is compatible with more four-year forestry programs and there might be the possibility that a four-year institution would locate a satellite office and program that would allow local students to continue taking most of the required classes for a four-year program on the Dabney S. Lancaster Community College campus. Ms. Visscher agreed to look into this possibility.

ACTION ITEM: Investigate the possibility of expanding the forestry/wood science programs already being offered at the Dabney S. Lancaster Community College and the possibility of establishing a partnership with a four-year institution and its school of forestry. (*Committee Member Visscher*)

- Discussion moved to the 'Time of Day Shopping Pattern Study'. Mr. Wells explained that such studies are often important to Downtown Revitalization efforts because they are useful instruments in helping to encourage shop owners to lengthen shop hours past 5 PM since such studies often find that those interviewed would prefer to do shopping in the evening hours. After discussion, the committee indicated that this project should be combined into the downtown revitalization project and that the downtown revitalization project should include the further development of the Downtown Covington Farmer's Market and the development of other attractions and amenities that would draw visitors and residents to downtown in the evenings.

- Ms. Adcock suggested that all retail development projects should be rolled into one larger project.

- In discussing the projects proposed in other plans/documents, Mr. Strickland noted that the broadband/fiber projects will be combined with other fiber projects into one project on the CEDS and mentioned that the Clifton Forge Town-Wide Housing Strategy is currently on the Commission's work program for completion next year.

- The committee began discussing the projects proposed by staff. Committee Member Price asked how the region might approach establishing a Business Retention and Expansion program. Ms. Visscher noted that a BRE program could be a resource to both small and large businesses and might be combined with the small business development assistance, business incubator, and entrepreneurial seminars into one regional business assistance project.

- Mr. Strickland asked the committee to prioritize the projects on the project listing. Committee members were asked to work individually and to identify all projects that could be completed in the short term (1 – 2 years) by writing the number 1 next to them. Committee members were asked to identify long-term projects (3 – 5 years) and mark them with the number 2.

- After the prioritization session, staff collected the project listings from committee members and promised to tabulate and share the results of the prioritization exercise with committee members.

ACTION ITEM: Tabulate and report on the results of the prioritization exercise. *(Staff)*

- Mr. Strickland asked for any other comments. Committee discussion focused on the lack of a Multiple Listing Service in the Alleghany Highlands region. It was resolved that the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce would organize a meeting between regional realtors, major local employers, and local governments to discuss the need for a MLS in the region.

ACTION ITEM: Organize a meeting between regional realtors, major local employers, and local governments to discuss the need for a MLS in the region. (*Committee Member Kemper and the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce*)

Mr. Strickland thanked the group for their continued interest and participation.

- Meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.
- Minutes submitted by John M. Hull, Regional Economic Resources Planner.