



MEETING SUMMARY

Carver-Piedmont Feasibility Study

September 24, 2015 | 1:30pm
RRRC, 420 Southridge Parkway, Ste. 106, Culpeper, VA 22701

Meeting Attendees

Patrick Mauney, RRRC
Jenny Biche, RRRC
Michelle Edwards, RRRC
Ramona Chapman, DHCD
Becky Sheffield, VCE
Deirdre Clark, John Marshall SWCD
Ren LeVally, Rural Madison
Ben Craig, VAFEC
Janet Bearden, VAFEC
Don Hearl, ESS
Betty Dixon, Rural Madison
Carl Stafford, VCE
Tim Mize, VCE
Tim Ohlwiler, VCE

1. Welcome and Introductions

Meeting attendees provided brief introductions.

2. Review of Regional Food System Plan Draft

M Edwards provided an overview of the draft Rappahannock-Rapidan Farm & Food System Plan, developed based on information collected from public meetings, farmer/producer surveys, focus group sessions, and economic analysis compiled by Crossroads Resource Center. The draft plan includes a summary of the project methodology and results, and presents recommendations for the regional Food System Vision and priority projects.

The committee discussed issues with data sourced from the USDA Census of Agriculture and potential inadequacies for certain areas. M Edwards reminded the committee that the long-term trends are important, and that the multiple methodologies used during the research process help provide a local component to the report.

Additional background information can be found at <http://www.rrregion.org/carver.html>

This project was funded in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Virginia's Building Collaborative Communities Program.

T. Mize raised a number of points from the draft report, specifically about the importance of recognizing large producers in the region who control a majority of the active farmland and generate significant revenues and benefits to the region, whether or not their products are sold locally. T Mize also questioned whether the recommendations and strategies affect the existing system that operates efficiently within the context of the larger market. M Edwards agreed that scale determines the market for each producer, but that there are opportunities to provide additional, needed resources to all producers in the region, including marketing and distribution options.

R LeVally identified a need for a disclaimer early in the report about the importance of goods produced in the region that leave the area for future processing, and are not consumed in the region. The value of these products is important and should be recognized in the report, with the caveat that the report focuses on opportunities for promoting the regional food system.

M Edwards asked that committee members provide further feedback on the draft report via e-mail following the meeting. The report is slated for release at the RRRRC Annual Meeting on October 20th, and the RRRRC Board will consider adoption at its October 28th meeting.

3. Facility Assessment Update

P Mauney stated that the facility assessment contract was signed off in early September, and was awarded to Spectrum Design based in Roanoke. The project team will have its initial site visit with Spectrum representatives on Wednesday, September 30th, and hope to have preliminary findings and recommendations regarding the structural condition, water, wastewater, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, by late October. A further update will be provided at the next committee meeting.

4. Stone Soup Training Program

B Sheffield shared that the first training class for the Stone Soup project was held last week. There are 14 participants signed up for the Culpeper session, which will be held over a six-week time period through late October. R LeVally is assisting with the training and education sessions and stated that the level of interest and engagement from the participants was a pleasant surprise at the first session. A repeat session in Madison County will begin in November.

The partnership with Culpeper Human Services, and the Head Start program, provided many of the registrations. The program has also partnered with Rappahannock Goodwill Industries to look at potential workforce transition opportunities following the completion of the six-week certification session. Rappahannock Goodwill has various paid internship programs based on income that may be a match for some of the Stone Soup participants.

5. Multi-Use Processing Feasibility

B Craig stated that the feasibility research was wrapping up and that VAFEC had requested letters of intent from producers and entrepreneurs that would be interested in utilizing a kitchen incubator in the region. The purpose of the letter of intent is to help VAFEC develop specific equipment and training needs for potential users, in anticipation of producing cost estimates for future funding requests. The response has been positive thus far. VAFEC's final feasibility report will include budget and return on investment projections, and will incorporate information from both the facility assessment and the Union Kitchen D.C. partnership.

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J Bearden indicated that two anchor tenants have indicated significant interest in utilizing the facility, once up and running, and are excited about the possibilities of having such a facility in closer proximity than their current options.

6. Ag Education/Research Inventory

P Mauney provided the committee with a handout of existing education and training programs in the region. The committee agreed that the geographic scope of the education/research/training programs should be the Rappahannock-Rapidan region. The inventory of programs will be utilized to identify gaps in available offerings, areas for collaboration between existing programs and the available land and building space at the facility, and key opportunities for agricultural development at the site. The committee asked that P Mauney also reference the available land at the site and the importance of not only the parcels owned by Culpeper County, but the surrounding agricultural land.

C Stafford indicated that it is important to remove duplication from proposed efforts at the Carver-Piedmont site with other ongoing efforts. As an example, he cited the potential for large plot test sites that would differentiate this site from research plots currently utilized by Virginia Tech and others.

T Mize discussed the recent addition of agriculture programs at Lord Fairfax Community College. P Mauney indicated that the classes offered by both community colleges in the region, as well as the high school agriculture courses, would be included in the inventory.

R Chapman referenced the potential availability of an agribusiness incubator at the site. Committee members agreed with this importance of such an opportunity, as a parallel to the food incubator possibilities associated with the multi-use processing option.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for October 29th

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