



RAPPAHANNOCK-RAPIDAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes – May 24, 2016

Members Present:

Linda Blair	Orange County Representative
Kirsten Dueck	Health Sector Technical Advisory Member
Michelle Edwards	Chair and RRRC Liaison Member
Kenner Love	Rappahannock County Representative
Peter Hujik for Jess Palmer	Farmland Preservation & Conservation Technical Adv. Member
Ray Pickering	Fauquier County Representative
Rebecca Sheffield	Culpeper County Representative
Ken Smith	Production Sector Technical Advisory Member
Clyde Firman	Consumption Sector Technical Advisory Member

Members Absent:

Jill Jefferson	Processing and Distribution Technical Advisory Member
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Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Michelle Edwards, chair, with a quorum present, and introductions were made. Ms. Edwards noted that Jill Jefferson could not be present, and Peter Hujik of Piedmont Environmental Council will serve as Jessica Palmer's proxy while she is on maternity leave.

Education Sector Member Vacancy

Ms. Edwards presented the election results for the Council's Education Sector Technical Advisory Member vacancy (see attachment). Council members submitted three nominees and had one week to vote via email. Ms. Edwards will offer the appointment to the Council's top choice, Taylor Richardson, who teaches Agriculture in the Fauquier County School District. Should Ms. Richardson decline the nomination, the second and then third nominees will be contacted.

Carver-Piedmont Agricultural Center Project Overview

Rebecca Sheffield provided an overview of the Carver-Piedmont Agricultural Center project as requested by Council members during the previous meeting. The Center is located in Culpeper County on Route 15 and is owned by the County. The building originally served as a regional

black high school and later a regional vocational school. After the school's closure, the building has sat mostly unused, while Culpeper County has continued to pay for its upkeep. Although the building is owned by the County, the Center will be operated as a regional facility, benefiting farmers, other agribusinesses, and citizens throughout the Planning District.

RRRC received a grant through the Department of Housing and Community Development to complete a feasibility study of the facility, which was finalized in January 2016. This study indicated the main building is structurally sound, and only relatively minor repairs and upgrades are needed to repurpose the building.

The George Washington Carver Food Enterprise Center, led by Janet Bearden, is planning to operate a food incubator, processing and co-packing business in the Agriculture Center. Freezing, vacuum packaging and high acid foods are intended to be included initially, while high-pressure canning will be a later addition. The Food Enterprise Center consulted with Union Kitchen in Washington D.C. on layout and equipment needs during the feasibility study.

The Food Enterprise Center also has been working on a job skill training project called Stone Soup, in partnership with Virginia Cooperative Extension. Ms. Sheffield heads the Stone Soup project, which teaches food safety, nutrition, and shopping skills. Graduates receive the National Restaurant Association ServSafe Food Handler Certificate of Completion, the Cooperative Extension Customer Service certificate and the Stone Soup Job Skills Training certificate. Through a partnership with Rappahannock Goodwill Industries graduates can also receive paid food service internships. The pilot efforts in Culpeper and Madison, which concluded in late-fall 2015, received very good participation and feedback.

Ray Pickering asked how far off the Food Enterprise Center is from opening. Ms. Sheffield responded that they already have a couple of anchor tenants and are applying for grants to fund preliminary work on the facility. Culpeper County has received a DEQ brownfields grant to remediate asbestos in one classroom, one office and one bathroom, and then restore those spaces. The Food Enterprise Center also received a grant to continue the Stone Soup program and expand it throughout the region.

The George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center is the second major component of the overall project. This non-profit organization will conduct agricultural research and education programs at the facility. Carl Stafford, Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent, heads the research component, while Roger Williams heads development of the beginning farmer training program. The organization's board of directors is chaired by Jim Hoy.

In addition to the land on the school property, the Research Center also has access to farmland at the Inskeeps' Battle Park Farms for test plots and beginning farmer education. The beginning farmer curriculum at the Center is intended to be at a higher skill level than the Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition and incorporate an incubator farm. The curriculum will include both agriculture education and business planning. The Research Center recently received a \$59,000 Ohrstrom Foundation grant for beginning farmer program development, market research and high tunnel construction.

Mr. Pickering asked when the Center's beginning farmer program will start. Ms. Sheffield responded training is expected to begin next spring.

Clyde Firman asked whether the Food Enterprise Center received estimates on kitchen equipment. Ms. Sheffield stated that Union Kitchen provided some estimates and recommendations. She is especially looking for blast freezers, not flash freezers. Mr. Firman recommended purchasing used equipment and offered to provide the name of a vendor in the Shenandoah Valley. Linda Blair offered to provide the link to the state auction site for used equipment.

Ms. Sheffield also mentioned that the George Washington Carver School Alumni Association will be holding a fundraising event in August for the museum that will be added in one the school rooms.

For additional information on the George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center, visit www.gwcarc.org, and for the Food Enterprise Center, visit www.gwcfec.org.

Local Food Marketing Campaign Discussion

Council members continued discussion of creating a brand for the region's local grown food, which began during the April meeting in conjunction with the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program grant application. Ms. Edwards confirmed that she submitted the grant application, but Warrenton Farmers Market declined to participate. The vast majority of the market's board members did not respond in time to grant permission for the market's manager to apply. Piedmont Environment Council and the Culpeper and Madison Farmers Markets partnered with RRRC on the application, with RRRC as the applicant. Grant awards are to be announced in September.

After much discussion on the appropriate name for the regional brand, many Council members preferred the name "Northern Virginia Piedmont Grown," or possibly "Northern Piedmont Grown" rather than "Virginia Piedmont Grown" to differentiate from the larger Virginia Piedmont. Kirsten Dueck and Peter Hujik cautioned making a decision without professional marketing advice. Ms. Edwards also suggested that the consumer surveys proposed as part of the grant project should be used to shape the final choice. The Council agreed to pursue further research prior to making a final decision.

Mr. Hujik asked whether there were sufficient funds in the proposed grant project to fund brand development. Ms. Edwards replied that RRRC staff hours are included for brand development and \$6000 for graphic design for the overall project including logo development, but not sufficient funds to hire a branding consultant to conduct a brand development study. RRRC will need to pursue an additional grant to fund it. Mr. Hujik agreed to provide Ms. Edwards with the name of a marketing professional he worked with in the past and recommends. Ms. Dueck agreed to assist Ms. Edwards in her research.

Future Meeting Scheduling and Agenda Development

To better inform the Council's marketing efforts, Council members requested a summary of the focus group and survey results, which were part of the Rappahannock-Rapidan Farm and Food

Plan. Ms. Edwards agreed to deliver the presentation she gave during the project's final Community Conversation at the next Council meeting.

After discussion, Ms. Edwards stated that the next meeting will be held on June 20, 2016, at 6:30 pm in the RRRC Conference Room.