

LOWCOUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
January 22, 2015
6:30 p.m.

MINUTES

PRESENT:

ABSENT:

BEAUFORT COUNTY:

Philip (Phil) Cromer
Gerald Dawson
Brian Flewelling
Marc A. Grant
Mary Beth Heyward
Alice Howard
Bill McBride
Joseph McDomick
Jim Outlaw
Jerry Stewart

Lisa Sulka

COLLETON COUNTY:

Esther S. Black
Bobby Bonds
Joseph Flowers
Thomas (Tommy) Mann
Evon Robinson

Jane Darby
Gene Whetsell

HAMPTON COUNTY:

Frankie Bennett
James (Pete) Hagood
Charles (Buddy) Phillips
Nat Shaffer

Travis (Pete) Mixson

JASPER COUNTY:

Henry Etheridge
Carolyn Kassel
Henry Lawton, Sr.
Joey Malphrus
Gwen Johnson Smith

GUESTS: Celia Price, guest of Esther Black; Brad Samuel, CED & Local Government Representative, SCANA Corporation; Lisa Wechsler, CPA, Crowley Wechsler & Associates

STAFF: Hank Amundson, Sabrena Graham, Michelle Knight, Ginnie Kozak, Sherry Smith, Carol Stonebraker

Chairman Nat Shaffer called the January 22, 2015 Lowcountry Council of Governments regular board meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Evon Robinson gave the invocation. The Chairman welcomed new members, City of Beaufort Council Member Phil Cromer and Beaufort County Council Member Alice Howard. Noting that both brought significant experience to the Board, Chairman Shaffer asked them to introduce themselves. Mr. Cromer retired after 23 years as a Risk Management Consultant for the Municipal Association of South Carolina, previously served as Town Manager for Port Royal, and before that worked for LCOG as its Economic and Community Development Coordinator. Ms. Howard worked for a regional planning agency, similar to the COG, early in her career. She was 10 years with the United States Army and another 20 years at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort,

retiring recently as Community Plans and Liaison Officer. Introduction of guests and staff followed. The Executive Director reported there were no proxies submitted; however, non-voting Board Member Jane Darby sent notice she could not attend. Chairman Shaffer presented the Revised Agenda that added one non-voting item under the Call to Order. It was approved with all in favor. The meeting proceeded after determining a quorum was present. Minutes of the October 23, 2014 meeting were unanimously approved on motion by Joe Flowers with a second from Beth Heyward. Chairman Shaffer presented the 2015 LCOG Board Meeting Schedule, which was unanimously approved on motion by Brian Flewelling, seconded by Tommy Mann. Retiring Board Member Tabor Vaux was out-of-town and unable to accept his Board Service Award. It will be sent to him.

Chairman Shaffer called for Old Business and recognized LCOG Planning Director Ginnie Kozak for an update on the SC68 and US17 transportation projects. A summary was in meeting packets and Ginnie presented the information.

Ginnie reviewed how changes in standards had delayed and affected environmental assessment and right-of-way acquisition on the SC68 project. The US Army Corp of Engineers permit is under review; wetlands mitigation and CSX drainage concerns must be agreed to; and assuming no major issues arise, SCDOT projects the contract will be let December 2015 with construction beginning around January or February 2016. Ginnie responded to questions saying it is the most definitive schedule to date. The project is funded by LCOG Guideshare dollars and has a current project cost estimate of \$9.5M, which could increase. The Board will receive updates.

Ginnie continued with the US17 project update. She reviewed required approvals, anticipated schedule, funding, and cost estimate—now at \$54M. Currently it is funded with LCOG Guideshare and LATs MPO allocations. SCDOT manages the project. Preliminary roadway plans are developed and environmental studies complete. The environmental document and alternative analysis is under development, and a value engineering study is planned for March—it is a complex project involving serious environmental issues. SCDOT projects the environmental document should be complete this fall, design field review by December 2015, right-of-way acquisition by March 2016, and construction should begin spring of 2018. Ginnie said it is a very realistic schedule. The information is current as of January 21, 2015. She will request quarterly updates from SCDOT. Ginnie and SCDOT are closely watching for potential grants—such as Tiger Grants—to apply for that may increase funding. Chairman Shaffer thanked her for the information.

The Chairman addressed New Business and recognized Michelle Knight to conduct the Lowcountry Regional Development Corporation (LRDC) Annual Meeting. Other LRDC meetings are called as needed. A summary was in meeting packets. Michelle presented background information about LRDC, the COG's affiliate nonprofit formed to support regional economic development primarily through building projects funded with public and private resources. LRDC operates on the federal fiscal year, October 1 – September 30, and is required to hold an annual meeting. LCOG board members and officers serve in the same capacity for LRDC. LCOG Executive Director Sabrena Graham is LRDC Managing Agent, and Michelle is Recording Secretary. Michelle reviewed past and current projects. LRDC currently does not generate a lot of income and had little activity during the year. One Beaufort County project paid its loan in full in October, and staff is working with the funding agency to determine how those funds may be reused; a recommendation will later come before the Board. Funds from a prior Jasper County project payout are still being held in escrow to be used for a new project that can meet grant requirements—the last effort did not. Negotiations are underway with SCDOC regarding a Jasper County industrial building where the tenant is interested in purchasing the building. Agreements with SCDOC must be reached before a sale can be finalized. The Chairman thanked Michelle for the information.

Lisa Wechsler was recognized to present the LRDC Audit for fiscal year ended September 30, 2014. Ms. Wechsler is a partner with Crowley Wechsler & Associates, the COG's independent auditor. Copies of the audit report were sent to board members prior to the meeting and also included in meeting packets. Ms. Wechsler stated that LRDC is a non-profit corporation that stimulates regional economic development through attractive leasing or financial arrangements. She reviewed current LRDC projects and significant areas of the audit report including the Statements of Financial Position, Activities, Cash Flows, and Notes to Financial Statements. The most noteworthy action was a negotiated loan payoff finalized shortly after the new 2015/16 fiscal year began. During questions, she confirmed that LRDC does not pay taxes as it is a non-profit corporation. Joe McDomick asked if she found anything specific during the audit process that the Board needed to know. She said there was nothing more, it was a good year with one negotiated loan payoff. The Chairman thanked Ms. Wechsler for the information.

Chairman Shaffer called for Reports and recognized Sherry Smith for the December Finance Report. Sherry submitted the report with comments. It represents 50% of fiscal year, and Revenues over Expenditures and Operations are near target. The Dues, Subscriptions & Publications line item is higher than usual because most are renewed/paid before calendar year end and should balance by fiscal year end. Sherry drew attention to Unrestricted Cash and Accounts Receivable reviewing that most COG services are performed and paid as they occur and then submitted for reimbursement. Reimbursement now averages about 60 days, which has become the norm. Timely invoicing continues.

Michelle Knight was recognized for the Community & Economic Development Report. Michelle submitted the report and reviewed its new format, which had been revised for readability and information improvements. Responding to a question, Michelle said the HOME Program has experienced difficulty identifying qualified applicants for down-payment assistance and that Barbara Johnson may request moving those funds at the next Affordable Housing Committee meeting. Michelle said EDA Title IX Loan Program Reports will be presented to the Board as they are received from Catawba Regional Planning Council.

Sabrena Graham was recognized for the Director's Report, which she submitted with comments. She reviewed four vacancies on the Board noting that appointing jurisdictions have been contacted about their seats. A 2014 board attendance record was included in meeting packets for review. A new member orientation will be held the same day of the next board meeting, and all members are welcome. Members wanting to receive pre-meeting documents by email instead of mail can switch on request. Sabrena also reviewed her activities since January 5th, her first day as LCOG Executive Director, and spoke about COG goals. Regular staff meetings are being held with department directors to exchange information and ideas. Although the COG has high quality accounts receivables, early focus will be on reducing the amount and increasing the fund balance to offset lagging program expenditure reimbursements from State. The counties will be kept up-to-date on progress. She and department directors are discussing ways to publicize the COG, including developing a new website, in meetings with the counties and municipalities, and at other public meetings. Sabrena asked that board members contact her with recommendations. Members interested in having the COG present to their council or affiliated organizations were asked to let her know. Sabrena reported attending several meetings: she and Hank Amundson met with TCL President Dr. Richard Gough to talk about workforce development; the COG Directors participated in two meetings regarding COG funding, one with Senate President Pro Tem Hugh Leatherman and another with House Ways & Means Committee Chairman Brian White. Both went well. She attended the regular COG Directors meeting and gained more information on COG programs. Strategic planning for LCOG's future will be ongoing. Sabrena again thanked the Board for welcoming her.

Chairman Shaffer submitted the 208 Reports and Regional Unemployment Chart for information. Sabrena said Ginnie Kozak compared Nov/Dec 2014 208 activity to the same period in 2013, and the data indicated considerable upturn in economic development.

During Council Time, Pete Hagood spoke about attending a groundbreaking for a new tenant coming to the Hampton County Industrial Park.

With no additional business to address, and on motion duly made, seconded and approved, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 7:20 p.m. Copies of the agenda were distributed prior to the meeting. The original meeting notice/agenda was posted on the LCOG bulletin board January 16 and replaced by the revised agenda on January 20.

Respectfully submitted,

Sabrena P. Graham
Executive Director

Attachments