

Local Government Council meeting
September 20, 2018
828 Main Street, 8th Floor, Lynchburg

RE: Meeting with representatives from the SouthEast Regional Directors Institute, Jim Youngquist and Chris Bickely

Local Government Council members present:

Susan Adams
Carl Boggess
Kenneth Campbell, Chair
Sara Carter
Ben Cline
Paul Harvey
Bruce Johanssen
Frank Rogers
Dean Rodgers
John Sharp
Bonnie Svrcek
Russell Thurston
Dwayne Tuggle
Charlie Watts

Welcome

Chairman Kenneth Campbell called the meeting to order with a moment of silence. He welcomed the Board members and thanked them for participating in this worksession with the SERDI consultants.

Survey

Gary Christie explained that a staff developed survey was sent electronically during the month of August. There were two surveys, one for Council members and all of the elected City and Town Council and Board of Supervisor members in the region. 81 people were invited to take that survey and 29.6% responded.

A second survey was sent to 197 Local Government Staff, state agency leaders and non-profit stakeholders with a 39.6% response rate. Staff judged both response rates as satisfactory

The surveys went to SERDI who kept the results anonymous.

Gary presented the following observations from the survey results:

- 1) Council/Electeds and the Staff/community agree on two of our most important services (grant writing/management & regional services) but disagree on the next two most

important services. Council/Elected ranked Economic Development and being a Regional convener/Sharing Best Practices higher whereas Staff/Community ranked Workforce Development and Transportation Planning higher.

- 2) Council/Electeds gave us “A & B” marks for meeting our mission statement and had a greater number of “C” marks on providing regional services. Staff/Community on the other hand drew opposite conclusions, rating us higher in providing excellent services
- 3) Very few Council/Electeds said they are receiving “Low” value for their membership. Most were “Medium”, some were “High”
- 4) Most of the Council/Electeds completing the survey had served on the Local Government Council less than 5 years or had not served on the LGC at all. Few had served on the MPO.
- 5) When asked to rate the statement, “What’s good for the neighboring jurisdictions is good for my jurisdiction”, 43% of Council/Elected respondents said it was “Mostly True” and 43% said it was “Sometimes True”. Only 3% said it was “Always True”.
- 6) Staff/Community ranked smart planning things like “Better Streets” and “Smart Growth” as more important for the PDC to pursue in the future than the Council/Electeds did. Council/Electeds thought the LGC should work on:
 - Broadband
 - Environmental programming
 - Cost Sharing Regional Programs
 - Technology-data collection for decision making
- 7) Both the Council/Electeds and the Staff/Community agree that the LGC should use discretionary time to focus on:
 - Seeking revenue streams for localities, like grants
 - Improving the quality of life to make the region more attractive
 - Developing infrastructure for transportation and economic development

However, 50% of the Staff/Community indicated that discretionary time should be used to work with community stakeholders to leverage ideas and resources.

- 8) Only 3% of the local government staff/community thought that LGC staff was not responsive or valuable to their project
- 9) Only 37% of council/elected members thought their participation in the LGC was a valuable use of their time although 74% thought that the decisions contributed to the region. Whereas 97% of the staff/community who answered the question thought their participation with the PDC was a valuable use of their time.

SERDI Preliminary Report

Mr. Jim Youngquist and Mr. Chris Bickley introduced themselves. Jim is a former regional director who has assisted over 100 regional organizations with assessments such as this since 1993. Jim serves as SERDI's Executive Director. Chris is a former local government manager and regional director from the Beaufort, South Carolina area.

SERDI is an organization of over 100 regional development agencies in the Southeaster portion of the country.

Jim presented the following preliminary assessment:

- There is almost unanimous agreement that the existing Virginia's Region 2000 Local Government Council's (LGC) geographic makeup of local governments is the true region.
- The LGC is a good local government convener and has no competition for that role.
- The Virginia's Region 2000 organizational umbrella has outlived its usefulness and needs to go away.
- Most smaller jurisdictions rely on the LGC for grants administration and planning services, although some have had problems.
- Overall, the LGC staff is seen as competent and committed, although again, there have been some problems.
- The LGC is strong financially.
- Most LGC board members, both elected and appointed, are not fully engaged and haven't taken ownership of the organization.
- The LGC is a floundering organization without public identity, shared vision or strong leadership. While the LGC is a regional organization, it is not seen as a strong advocate for multijurisdictional approaches.

Preliminary Recommendations

- In order to take any actions to situate the organization in a relevant and supportive role for the localities that own it, the chief elected officials of the four counties and the City of Lynchburg have to make a commitment to make it THEIR PDC and use it to convene

and address the opportunities, challenges, and issues the region and thus the localities face to enhance their futures.

- If there is a commitment, then the following preliminary ideas should be considered by the localities and its Board of Directors:

Preliminary Recommendation #1

- Immediately, there should be a work session scheduled with the chief elected officials of the four counties and the City of Lynchburg to go over the enabling legislation that put the PDC in business and clearly define what the localities can do with their PDC.

Preliminary Recommendation #2

- Following #1, there should be a half-day orientation session for the Board of Directors to go over enabling legislation, the current Board and council structures, funding sources, current projects, staffing and responsibilities, etc. Time should be allowed for feedback and questions. This should, in the future, be an annual event...Note, some regional councils conduct “new board member orientation.” There should be annual orientation for all regardless of time served.

Preliminary Recommendation #3

- There should be a Chief Elected Officials Council formed. Regardless of the governing body structure of the LGC/CVPDC Board of Directors moving forward, The Executive Director of the LGC/CVPDC should host a regularly scheduled chief elected official’s council meeting.
- A structure needs to be designed that would enable the mayor of Lynchburg, mayors of the region’s towns and the chairs of the county board of supervisors to come together to get to know each other, find out what is happening in the respective jurisdictions, to discuss common opportunities and challenges, and to be updated on the latest rules, regulations, etc., from Richmond and Washington. The council would also be able to be used as an advisory committee to the LGC/CVPDC Board of Directors.

Preliminary Recommendation #4

- There should be an Annual Meeting with each County's Board of Supervisors, City and Town Councils, and Administrators. At least once per year, the LGC/CVPDC Executive Director, LGC/CVPDC Chair, and Vice Chair plus policy board members of that county or the City of Lynchburg should host a meeting at a site determined by the county and the City with that county's Board of Supervisors and City and Town Councils. County and, City and Town Administrators should also attend.
- The purpose of the meeting would be to provide an overview of *their LGC/CVPDC* including a historical investment result of LGC/CVPDC efforts in that county or city, a programmatic overview, etc.
- Second, and perhaps most importantly, the meeting would give the locality elected officials the opportunity to discuss and share their thoughts on the challenges and demands facing the county and its towns, and the city in the upcoming year, and, perhaps how the LGC/CVPDC could support the localities in addressing them.
- If there are challenges and/or opportunities that are found in common with the City of Lynchburg and the four counties, it could be a LGC/CVPDC project and could lead to the localities pooling financial resources to support the effort.

Preliminary Recommendation #5

- Today in 2018, it is difficult for a regional council anywhere in the country to be truly relevant if they are not seen as "The Convener of the Region."
- The focus group sessions revealed a confirmation that it is logical for the localities to use the LGC/CVPDC in this role being a regional organization owned by the local governments in the region, thus representing all of the people of the region, to convene the region to discuss and consider the challenges and opportunities facing the region. But, at this time most of the localities don't see it as "theirs."
- By taking steps to enhance and build communication between the LGC/CVPDC and the localities, the LGC/CVPDC can become the public convener of the region.
- This does not mean that the LGC/CVPDC has to or will be the lead entity on all efforts, however, by convening, and bringing all the appropriate bodies together to discuss and address the issue of the day, the LGC/CVPDC will stand ready to support an effort as appropriate.
- In addition to facilitating the regional conversation of the localities, in a convening role, the LGC/PDC could organize regional summits on key subject areas with all appropriate partners and collaborators, and, regional strategies and plans including the

development of an inclusive meaningful Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) for the region.

- The LGC should work towards being designated as the EDA district for central Virginia. It should be noted that in the case of some regional summits/initiatives, the region might include the Go Virginia region or other adjacent regions in the Commonwealth.

Preliminary Recommendation #6

- While it is our understanding that the locality administrators get together on a regular basis, the focus groups revealed that their particular group of regional professionals, i.e., planners and economic developers would like to have the same arrangement.
- The big emphasis here is for there to be a strong two-way communication going on so that both LGC/CVPDC staff and localities' staff can be up to date and have strong collaboration and cooperation opportunities. This was of particular interest by the planners who said such an arrangement had existed in the past and it was missed.

Conclusion

- The preliminary recommendations are based on what we, the SERDI staff were told in interviews and focus group sessions; and, what we have seen strengthen regional councils across Virginia and our other SERDI states.
- These preliminary recommendations can only work if there is a commitment by the owners (localities) and abilities of the executive director and his/her staff to help support the localities and the Board of Directors in carrying out their desires and directives.

Discussion

There was good discussion between the Council and the SERDI Consultants. Many agreed that communication was important, but several questioned whether additional local meetings with elected officials would be beneficial. There was also some questioning about whether an advisory committee of Chief Elected Officials would be practical.

There was general agreement that the LGC should be more pro-active, but the discussion focused on the role of the Council itself or staff regarding setting priorities, work plans and service levels.

LGC staff reported that we have discussed federal Economic Development District designation since 2013 and that it is included in the current year's work plan. We have a better chance of receiving the designation since the board make up rules have been changed. We have to wait until the official approval of the 2016 Comprehensive Economic Development Plan is received.

One comment observed that these seemed like "cookie-cutter" recommendations that could apply to any regional commission and didn't fit a PDC whose Board was made up both of elected officials and Managers/Administrators.

In general, some of the observations that seemed to be agreed to include:

- Communication continues to be important
- The name change to PDC is important to help give the organization identity and ownership by electeds
- We should continue discussions on whether there is a next regional project out there and the timing. The electronic survey results may be a place to start
- Staff, especially the Executive Director, may need to take a more aggressive role in identifying opportunities to help localities. Ideally, staff should work with localities not just when a project becomes available, but be more involved in the identifying needs and preparing for a local initiative.
- We should continue the work began in 2013 exploring Economic Development District designation
- We should get the planners together for lunch periodically and other local government network group as appropriate.

Jim said that this meeting was an important part of the feedback process and SERDI would continue to work on their recommendations.