



Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission
Thursday, November 3rd, 2022
Approved Minutes

- SMADC Members:** Joan Bearden, Dan Donohue, Edward Goodman, Kayla Griffith, Bill Hitte, Linda Jones, Martin Proulx, Dan Rider, Elizabeth Robinson, Charles Sasscer III, Donna Sasscer, Russell Shlagel, Tresor Thomas, Deana Tice, Steve Wall, Lucille Walker Vice Chair and Mary Wood Chair
- Members Absent:** Senator Jack Bailey, Lisa Barge, Eddie Bowling, Steve Connelly, Willie Goddard, Delegate Rachel Jones, Ronald Marney, Hagner Mister, Barbara Polito, Charles Rice, Dan Rider, Brian Russell
- Staff:** Sophie Brauns, Tori DiVincenzo, Susan McQuilkin, Rachel Norris, Craig Sewell, Kelly Swann and Shelby Watson-Hampton
- Guests:** Gretchen Hardman – Office of the Governor, Kim Rush-Lynch – Urban Agricultural Conservation Planner Prince George's Soil Conservation District and Kellie Hinkle – Deputy Director St. Mary's County Department of Economic Development

Minutes

Chairwoman Mary Wood called for a motion to approve the minutes from October 6th, 2022. Linda Jones made a motion to approve the minutes. Dan Donohue seconded the motion. All approved.

Vacant At Large Position Filled – Tori DiVincenzo introduced Elizabeth Robinson, the new At Large Commission member and gave a brief overview of her background and accomplishments. Ms. Robinson stated she is excited to be working with the Commission and to expand awareness and help connect urban farmers with SMADC's programs. Chairwoman Mary Wood extended a warm welcome on behalf of the Commission.

Guest Speaker - Kim Rush-Lynch, Urban Agricultural Conservation Planner Prince George's Soil Conservation District – presented on the Urban Farm Incubator Project at Watkins Regional Park "Growing New Farms and Good Food in Prince George's County." The urban farm project is anticipated to reduce barriers for small acreage and urban farmers to engage in sustainable farming enterprise and is a partnership with Eco City Farms, Prince George's Food Equity Council, The Capital Market and Prince George's Parks and Recreation. Proposed project elements include land access for small, new, beginning and established urban farmers with limited capital resources to half acre plots, shared equipment, onsite irrigation, cold storage, high-tunnels, wash/pack facilities, access to training and cooperative sales mentoring, and more. The project is funded by in-kind support from MD National Parks and Planning Commission, USDA NRCS, and USDA UAIP Grant – Eco City Farms. SMADC members expressed

enthusiasm for the project and recognized potential for keeping farmland in production, affordable and preserved.

Staff Program Reports

Maryland Market Money

Giving Tuesday – Cristina Berthelot reported on the 2022 Giving Tuesday campaign which launches on November 29. Giving Tuesday is a global day of giving that unleashes the power of radical generosity to transform lives and enrich our communities. Through the end of the month, SMADC will be releasing a social media campaign as well as a series of newsletters celebrating MMM as a food access program that feeds Marylanders and supports farmers. Commission members are encouraged to consider sharing the information throughout their networks to amplify our outreach. Follow the MMM program social media @MDFarmersMarket and subscribe to the monthly newsletter via the MMM website: <https://www.marylandmarketmoney.org/>

Community Fridge Project – In partnership with Christ Church La Plata, the La Plata Farmers Market, and Lifestyles of Maryland, SMADC is excited to further our mission to support farms and the future of agriculture through access to healthy, locally grown food by way of mutual-aid community fridges in Southern Maryland. With support from the Rural Maryland Council, SMADC can help farmers reduce food waste by purchasing produce to stock the fridges, increasing sales opportunities, especially as markets close for the winter. To find out more and engage the Southern Maryland agriculture community contact Sophie Brauns @ sbrauns@smadc.com

Holiday Farm Guide

Kelly Swann reported the Holiday Farm Guide, SMADC's most popular mini guide, is in development with anticipated launch the second week in November. The guide will be available online. 4,000 rack cards have been distributed region wide through libraries, welcome centers, etc. Additional 1,000 rack cards were printed/funded by MMM program and distributed through participating markets.

Member Updates – Members shared news and updates.

Director's Report

Director Watson itemized the main points of her report to address members' concerns regarding the progress of the RAC and the recent convening of a meeting of the RAC Committee.

RAC Status – At the time of October Commission meeting, the project was moving ahead according to the agreed timeline. Despite the good work and intentions of both St. Mary's County Government and SMADC, again there appear to be issues with the anticipated project cost that are causing delay. SMADC Staff has worked diligently to bring the RAC project to fruition; all communications and associated work completed thus far has been at the direction and approval of the SMADC Chairs (Mary Wood and Lucille Walker) and TCCSMD Ex. Director John Hartline.

RAC Committee – RAC Committee protocols are to support and advise the progress of the RAC project; members on record are: Mary Wood, Chair, Lucille Walker, Vice Chair, Bill Hitte, voting member, Eddie Bowling ex-officio member, SMADC Director and Craig Sewell RAC project lead.

An emergency meeting of the RAC Committee was convened following a call from St. Mary's County stating costs for the RAC construction had again increased (from the original \$1 million to \$5.7 million) to the current estimate of potentially over \$8 million dollars; modifications and 'downsizing' of the floor plan are suggested. Director Watson Hampton emphasized SMADC is resolute in its desire to build the

RAC for the farming community but cautioned downsizing the floor plan has serious implications; the RAC business plan supports the butcher shop with strategic components (commercial kitchen, classes, storage, etc.) designed to ensure the viability and profitability of the RAC and meet long term threshold goals. The RAC Committee requested all project work (design and consultant) is put 'on hold' until all parties can meet to discuss the situation. A meeting is scheduled for November 14, 2022.

Chairwoman Mary Wood assured SMADC has done everything in its power to keep the project moving forward with transparency throughout. St. Mary's is the best location for the project, and it is hoped the strong partner SMADC needs to complete the RAC. She expressed her hope that the forthcoming meeting with the county will resolve issues and encouraged positive support from Commission members.

Lothian Grain Elevator – Two preliminary meetings have taken place regarding the Grain Elevator, which is facing closure, to investigate options to keep it open and support 148 farmers in the five-county region who use the facility. Parties involved in discussions providing information and support include, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Anne Arundel Economic Development, Maryland Farm Bureau, Grain Growers Association, SMADC and legislative representatives Senators Jack Bailey, Michael Jackson, Sarah Elfreth, and Arthur Ellis. It was suggested that SMADC as a five-county organization may be best suited to run the elevator if the State purchases the facility. It should be noted that SMADC does not have expertise in this area, therefore expert staff/management must be hired and funded. There are no actions or decisions at the time of reporting. Any recommendations resulting from ongoing discussions will be communicated directly to the Commission and the TCCSMD Executive Board for consideration.

SMADC 'Farmers Open House' – Staff will hold an open house for the farming community on Monday January 23 from 12 noon to 6 p.m., offering SMADC resources, one-on-one meetings with staff, and assistance on relevant topics. Commission members are encouraged to attend. More information will be forthcoming.

SMADC Equipment Grant Review Committee – Commission members are needed to volunteer to sit on the committee to review applications for the Equipment Grant to be launched later this month. Prior experience with heavy farm equipment is preferred. \$100,000 in funding is budgeted. Joan Bearden, Kayla Griffith and Russell Shlagel volunteered. Other interested members are invited to contact Director Watson-Hampton.

SMADC Mini Grant Round 10 – Director Watson Hampton sought approval to offer another round of the popular SMADC Mini Grants. A total of \$40,000 is available in funding. Grant awards are up to \$2,000 per applicant and are a one-to-one match. **Chairwoman Mary Wood called for a motion to approve a tenth round of SMADC mini grants, \$40,000 in funding with \$2,000 match. Joan Bearden so moved to approve \$40,000 in funding for SMADC Mini Grant Round 10. Kayla Griffith seconded the motion. All approved.**

Commission Member Term Renewals – two members are up for renewal, Dan Donohue and Linda Jones; both have agreed to continue serving for another term.

Adjournment

Mary Wood made a motion to adjourn. Joan Bearden so moved. Bill Hitte seconded the motion. All approved.

Next SMADC Meetings (first Thursday of the month):

Thursday, December 8th, 2022- Second Thursday

Thursday, January 5th, 2023