

**MINUTES OF THE BLACK BELT COMMISSION
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

February 12, 2013

Selma, AL

The Black Belt Commission Executive Committee met Tuesday, February 12, 2013, at the Oasis Restaurant in Selma Alabama with the Black Belt Community Foundation hosting the meeting. The following were in attendance:

Ron Sparks, Director, Alabama Rural Development Office
Mayor Sheldon Day, Co-Chair
John Zippert, Chair, Agriculture Committee
Dr. Carol Zippert, Chair, Cultural and Youth Committee
Dr. David Hale, Chair, Communications Committee
Shirley Worthington, Chair, Transportation Committee
Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Regional Commission
Samuel Greene, Liaison, Congresswoman Terri Sewell's Office
Candy Capel, Project Manager
Emily Law, BBC Executive Director
Dave Dagastino, Black Belt Community Foundation
Ronald Barnett (Guest of Candy Capel)

Mayor Sheldon Day, Co-Chair, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. He then asked for Dave Dagastino, host, Black Belt Community Foundation to say a few words. Dave welcomed everyone on behalf of Felecia Jones, Executive Director, BBCF.

Ron Sparks, ARDO Director, gave his comments:

- Thanked Dave for BBC hosting the meeting and invited him to begin attending future Commission meetings.
- Talked about the Dialysis Center opening in Perry County. Approximately 100 people were present, along with news media.
- Also went next door for the ribbon cutting ceremony of the Perry County Nursing Home Rehab center.
- Talked about Lowndes County getting a dialysis center next.
- The Governor came and stayed the entire time and spoke at the opening. He also presented Frances Ford with a resolution for her work on the project.
- Discussed the World's Widest Yard Sale Project May 31 – June 2, 2013. We are growing the yard sale this year to include all of the Black Belt area and beyond.
- Continuing to move Telehealth in this state. Stated there is such a need as hospitals are closing in rural areas of the state. Opp hospital just closed. This makes it more crucial than ever to get Telehealth in the state.

John Zippert stated he is concerned with the Governor's position on not extending Medicaid which will have a lasting effect on rural health care. He is being urged to reconsider his position. The benefits outweigh the costs. There are conversations taking place as we meet.

Ron stated we could give everyone a car but they don't have access to medical treatment they need. He reminded everyone of the program held in Demopolis, Selma and Hayneville. 7,000 were expected and 29,000 showed up in the three areas. He reminded everyone that Bea, along with DRA, was behind that initiative. The problem is putting these together: Health and Medicaid access. You have to be able to afford the care and have access. Ron stated that 15% of households don't have automobiles in the State of Alabama. Because of the work we all do, we are helping people live longer healthier lives and the demand for healthcare increases.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE – John Zippert, Chair, reported –

- Continuing to work on the major project, the Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Center.
- Everything is in hands of the Alliance - Tuskegee, Alabama A & M and Auburn.
- Processing center will be for produce processing, research and for education.
- We are getting farmers who are involved to be a part of this process and who will also assist with operating the market.
- Had meeting with Bell's Food. They have 54 stores in the Southeast. Discussing with them about selling products processed at the Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Center.
- The ribbon cutting will be a huge event for this area and we feel this project will have huge impact to this region.
- Currently working on two additional projects: One that deals with selling beef cattle in lots to get a better price and exploring possible ways to use small timber left from disasters.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE – Dr. David Hale, Chair, Ginger Rue,

Project Manager, reported –

- The committee continues to aid the State's Broadband Initiative in developing and disseminating performance metrics. This includes the development of a
 - A new web-based dashboard displaying the demand, and service availability.
 - Integrating results from community based broadband projects within each of the State's ten broadband regions, and
 - Creating an economic build-out impact model that incorporates cost, and demand based on healthcare, public safety, education and commercial impact.
- The committee continues to assist the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Tuscaloosa reach out to Vets in the Black Belt to gain access to care through the VA Mobile Care Unit. The goal is to increase the number of vets who make use of their medical benefits for which they are entitled. Traditionally, less than 40% of those vets that are eligible for medical assistance are taking advantage of the services.

- The committee assisted by the University of Alabama has developed the Alabama Bird Trail mobile Ipad App. This app allows birders to have access to bird, bird trail, and local business (such as restaurant, lodging, gas station) information while in the field, not connected to the internet.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - Felecia Jones, Chair, Thomas Moore, Program Manager-

- Met with Felecia Jones on January 18, 2013 to discuss plans for our next meeting.
- Will place focus on the Black Belt Leadership Programs enhancement.
- The committee would like to come up with taking this program a step further in helping to decide what to do after the leadership program is over. How can participants put this knowledge to work for them and their communities.
- The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday February 26, 2013 in Livingston. Ken Walker with UWA has joined the CD Committee and will host the meeting.
- The goal is to meet once a quarter.

Candy Capel reported on March 14th, HUD is planning a VASH working summit to look for real solutions to housing and other logistics for housing Veterans through VASH in a more efficient and time effective manner. This is an effort to bring resources together in a more concerted effort.

CULTURAL AND YOUTH – Dr. Carol Zippert, Chair, Thomas Moore, Project Manager, reported –

- Talked about the grant from the State Council on the Arts.
- Funded again for \$155,000, \$100,000 of which is earmarked for arts education.
- This is funding for community-based arts projects.
- Funds are used for several festivals in the Black Belt.
- Funds also serve as leverage for additional resources.
- Will have guidelines to apply for funding.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Dr. Daniel Boyd, Chair, Ginger Rue, Project Manager, reported-

- Dr. Boyd is in Washington, D. C. regarding the National Science Foundation grant they received.
- The Committee has a meeting Monday the 18th in Selma.
- The Committee is planning another Education conference in Montgomery again in June.

FAMILIES COMMITTEE – Dr. Nick Stinnett, Co-Chair – Ginger Rue, Project Manager:

- No report.

HEALTH COMMITTEE — Congresswoman Terri Sewell and Chad Nichols, Co-Chairs, reported:

- Samuel Greene talked about how pleased The Congresswoman is with the Dialysis Center opening in Perry County.
- Good news regarding KidCheck program, it is going well throughout the state.
- We will be partnering with more nursing schools in this region: Bullock, Macon, Thomasville City, Selma City, Wilcox County.
- We will be making a presentation in Washington at a health summit about KidCheck and the technology we are using.

Samuel Green, Congresswoman Sewell's office – People of Perry County are excited about this. He reported the CEO Vaughn Hospital last week to do health clinic.

INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE – Noopie Cosby, Chair - Thomas Moore, Program Manager, reported:

- Noopie Cosby and Thomas are working on scheduling a meeting with Bea Forniss, the former chair of the Infrastructure Committee to discuss the past and future direction of the Infrastructure Committee. After meeting with Ms. Forniss, they will set up a committee meeting in March, 2013.

MANUFACTURING COMMITTEE – George Alford, Chair, Candy Capel, Project Manager, reported-

- **George** continues to be busy with work on the **Golden Dragon site** and several other Chinese projects in Wilcox County.
- **Sheldon** reported there are 300 to 400 workers headed to work on site. This is a huge boom for Thomasville and surrounding areas.
- Sales tax was up in January 23%.
- Two new small businesses are opening in Pine Hill and Sunny South because of this influx.
- The impact of this project is expanding.
- Also looking at this location for bamboo factories.

Sheldon reported that **John Clyde** is working with Dr. Bice and AIDT Alabama Career Centers on a Workforce Development Program. This group met in Camden, AL and came up with a model for developing a workforce for the area to supply workers for the impending businesses that are coming to this area. We are applying this model to anyone at any level of education from dropouts with Adult Education all the way to ready to work programs. The goal is to get these people in the “box” to get picked for a job. Sheldon stated that sixty percent of kids do not have an aspiration to go to college to get a four year degree and we need to take advantage of this group of kids and direct them toward the training for these jobs. This will keep the workforce local.

Carol Zippert asked about the dual degree program. Wallace Community College Participates but Shelton State does not. Ron stated that he did not know if it's a funding problem or something else that is needed to provide these courses. He thinks these are funded by Workforce Development funds, but not sure about this.

Shirley stated that it seems Congresswoman Sewell's office could speak to this issue through the Department of Labor. **Sheldon** stated that job training is the #1 issue and focus in the Black Belt right at this time.

Ron reported that **Mark Curl, Chair of the Wilcox County Commission**, had passed away. He also reported that the Conservation Department had proposed to extend deer season which would extend date of deer hunting.

MARKETING & TOURISM –Pam Swanner, Chair, Thomas Moore, Project Manager, reported –

- The proposed legislation on the National Heritage Area Designation has been well received. The designation will not provide funding but will provide approval from Congress. The Task Force will seek other funding sources.
- Signs for Payne Lake are finished and signs for the Alabama River are in process. An audio tour workshop was held in December and others will be held in the spring in Tuskegee. Self guides will be developed for Downtown Walking Tours.
- The Black Belt Heritage Area calendars have been completed and distributed.
- Black Belt Heritage area grants for the cycle have been selected and awarded.
- Working on the 2013 “**World’s Widest Yard Sale.**” The Committee has had its first meeting and a map is being drawn to expand this year’s sale to include all of the Black Belt counties and others surrounding the region.
- Black Belt media itinerary – Doc Lawrence will be hosted by Linda Vice. He is interested in the food area of the Black Belt and loves to write about colorful characters. The visit is planned for the first weekend in April, 2013.
- Black Belt Adventures has been awarded a grant from the Delta Regional authority. A contract will be signed with MSU to host four seminars in the Black Belt for land owners and lodge owners. The goal is to secure 100 participants per region. The grant is designed to develop ways to diversify income for the land owners and lodge owners
- City of Eufaula and Black Belt Adventures are working on a bid to host the Southeastern Outdoor Press Association Conference. \$30,000.00 has been contributed toward this effort.
- Linda Vice reported the BB Heritage Sites’ list is being updated because of next year’s voting and civil rights tour.

SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE – Donald Mills, Chair, Ginger Rue, Program Manager, reported:

- The committee met January 22 via conference call and meeting in person in Livingston face to face February 22nd.
- The Small Business Tax Workshop was held January 29th in Demopolis.
- The National small Business Month Activities will include –
 - the Youth Entrepreneurial summit (YES) scheduled for April 30 and
 - the National Small Business Week Seminar will be a result of partnering with the SBA Lenders’ Conference May 6-7 in Prattville.

SKILLS TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – Dr. James Mitchell, Chair, Candy Cappel, Project Manager, reported-

- No report

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE – Shirley Worthington, Chair – Candy Capel, Project Manager, reported -

- She was pleased to hear the discussion about transit.
- Reported she is at a loss as to the direction to take with this issue. At this time, there is not an emphasis on transit and it's hard to make a case for transportation.
- Everyone assured her she is the right person to continue with this focus due to her knowledge of the issue.
- We continue to address this issue in hopes that we get people who don't have access to see it as a problem.
- It's at a point where we don't know how to move to a better place.
- Tyson stated the right people are in the mix; we have all met with ALDOT and they are making concessions. Funding is the problem. It will continue to be a problem until we get some funding specifically for this.
- He also stated we just need to keep transportation in the conversation and in the big picture. Leadership changes every day. Transportation is a rural issue.

REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORTS:

John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission: (Absent)

Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Development Commission:

- Reported his office is extremely busy with the Medicaid Waiver Program from the Department of Public Health which all regional councils contracted with the Alabama Department of Senior Services.

Bob Lake, West Alabama Regional Commission: (Absent)

Sheldon and Ron gave closing remarks before the meeting adjourned for a delicious lunch provided by Felecia Jones and the Black Belt Community Foundation in Selma.