

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

June 11, 2013

Civic Center - Demopolis, AL

The Black Belt Commission Executive Committee met Tuesday, June 11, 2013, at the Civic Center in Demopolis, Alabama with Mayor Mike Grayson hosting the meeting. The following were in attendance:

Ron Sparks, Director, Alabama Rural Development Office
Mike Grayson, Mayor of Demopolis and Host
Jason Phelps, Build Alabama (Speaker)
Dr. Daniel Boyd, Chair, Education Committee
Donald Mills, Small Business Committee
David Hale, Communications Committee
Noopie Cosby, Chair, Infrastructure Committee
John Zippert, Chair, Agriculture Committee
Dr. Carol Zippert, Chair, Cultural and Youth Committee
Chad Nichols, Co-Chair, Health Committee
Shirley Worthington, Chair, Transportation Committee
Dr. Nick Stinnett, Families Committee
Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Regional Commission
John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission
Carolyn Powell, Liaison, Congresswoman Terri Sewell's Office
Ginger Rue Stewart, Project Manager and children, Sabrina and Audrey
Candy Capel, Project Manager
Emily Law, BBC Executive Director

Ron Sparks, Director of the Alabama Rural Development Office, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. Ron thanked Mike for hosting the meeting in Demopolis. **Mayor Grayson** greeted those present and talked about the civic center that was given to the city over 50 years ago. He mentioned that the scenery of the river was shown on channel 8 each night. He also talked about several events taking place in the Demopolis area.

Ginger Rue introduced Jason Phelps with Go Build Alabama. Jason is the *Interim Executive Director of the Alabama Construction Recruitment Institute*

Jason joined the Alabama Construction Recruitment Institute in May 2010. Prior to joining the Institute he served as the Director of Workforce Development and Education with the Mississippi Associated Builders & Contractors (MABC). Jason has more than 15 years' experience in the fields of construction & education. He began his career with Sequoia Construction Company. He completed a carpentry apprenticeship school. After college he taught at West Montgomery High School in North Carolina and later served as the Training Coordinator for the Construction Education Foundation of Alabama.

He is a graduate of Auburn University where he received a bachelor's degree in Education. He is an NCCER certified Master Trainer, an OSHA Authorized Outreach Instructor, and EPA Certified Renovator. He has served on several apprenticeship councils and construction workforce development committees in Alabama and Mississippi.

Jason talked about the Go Build Alabama campaign which is designed to educate young people on the value of learning a trade, dispel their misconceptions about the construction industry and inspire them to consider building a career as a skilled construction tradesman. Through this advertising, public relations and social media campaign, ACRI aims to provide better opportunities for construction tradesmen, more highly skilled employees for construction businesses and enhanced economic development for Alabama and the nation.

Jason reported that our country is suffering from a skills gap. Many of the things that hold the state of Alabama together were built a long time ago, meaning they're in need of more than just a fresh coat of paint. And in the near future, that means big problems for anyone who likes indoor plumbing, electricity, smooth roads, air conditioning, hospitals and every other convenience that modern society enjoys.

Even as the need for these positions has risen and unemployment has continued to grow, fewer people are choosing to embark on a career in the trades. In fact, for every four people retiring from the trades, only one is stepping up to take their place. Career tradesmen and craftsmen – welders, brickmasons, plumbers, electricians and carpenters – are in critical need now more than ever.

So for all those people hoping to make it big as they climb the corporate ladder, that ladder might not have anywhere to lean. It means that until people start to step up and fill this overwhelming skills gap in the immediate future, all of us are in serious trouble. It also means big opportunity for that tough, dedicated group of men and women who are smart enough to learn a trade and help build Alabama.

- Reports there are 2,875 construction job openings in Alabama each year and the average age of the construction tradesmen is 47.
- The average weekly earnings are \$914 for commercial construction tradesmen, \$608 for everyone else.
- The average four-year degree student will have on average of \$23,768 in student loan debt.
- The average annual salary for nonresidential building construction nationwide is \$47,528.
- Skills are learned through pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships or community colleges.

Go Build Alabama commercials were played that emphasized the importance of skilled workers in our state and nation and featured plumbers, electrical workers, weldors, and other specialty skills.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE – John Zippert, Chair, reported –

- Continuing to work on the major project, the Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Center that is to be built on Highway 80 as a marketing outlet for farmers.
- Funding is available through the three land grant colleges with Tuskegee as leader of the group.
- Plans have been submitted to the Alabama Building Commission.
- Farmers are working on crops of peas and watermelons.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE – Dr. David Hale, Chair, Ginger Stewart, Project Manager, reported –

- Working on three initiatives:
- Continuation of broadband mapping, which includes interviews and surveys to determine gaps in support. Concentrating on healthcare education.
- Bird trail app for the state; Black Belt areas to go in this summer.
- Creating website as part of outdoor trails of Alabama (walking, hiking, biking, cycling, equestrian, canoeing)

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

- No report given

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

- The Cultural & Youth Committee in collaboration with the Alabama State Council on the Arts will award grants to 47 community organizations.
- \$102,400 was awarded for the community arts projects.
- Awards program will be held in Selma, June 22, 2013, 11:00 a.m. at Concordia College in the Julius & Mary Jenkins Building. All grant recipients are expected to be in attendance to receive their grant award.

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

- SITE scholarship has been awarded to one student in Perry County for this summer. SITE is the University of Alabama's Student Introduction to Engineering program.
- Nisa Miranda has collected funds and books for Black Belt schools. A full report will be given after August.
- Working with Tuskegee on a proposal to get more science teachers (Tuskegee grads) in Black Belt district. Hoping this will be funded.
- Education summit on June 3 and 4 received positive feedback. Over 275 Black Belt educators attended. Detailed report will be in newsletter.

FAMILIES COMMITTEE – Dr. Nick Stinnett, Chair – Ginger Stewart, Project Manager reported:

- Dr. Stinnett has talked to UA about creating web seminars on building healthy families and distributing these in DVD form to areas without internet access.

HEALTH COMMITTEE — Congresswoman Terri Sewell and Chad Nichols, Co-Chairs, gave update on existing programs:

- Vision: Sight Savers conducted sixth grade vision screening in the Black Belt. Received level funding again this year and will continue statewide K-4 and 6th grades will get vision screening.
- KidCheck Programs: Trying to come up with ways to take program to new levels. Partnering with over twenty nursing schools in state
- Telemedicine in Alabama: Family practice physicians in specialized care will be a huge program.
- Partnering with Capstone School of Nursing to continue this program and track progress.
- The Perry County Dialysis Center is adding new patients on regular basis.
- Lowndes County is beginning their pursuit of a dialysis center in Hayneville.
- Alabama has made huge progress, but Georgia leads the country
- Carolyn Powell and Chad are working together to get other projects going.

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

- The committee met to discuss the past and future direction of the Infrastructure Committee.
- Also met with Bea regarding the future of the Infrastructure Committee.
- Discussed restructuring of Committee. There are only five people listed as members of the committee and efforts will be made to recruit new members.
- Noopie served in the legislature from 1978 to 1993 and he plans to utilize and capitalize on his relationship with the Black Belt area legislative delegation for their input and resources.
- Noopie had previously identified Black Belt issues: 1. Food, 2. Healthcare; and 3. Economic opportunities relative to defense procurement plans and 3% set asides for minorities and handicapped individuals.

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

- **George** has decided to resign as Chair of the Manufacturing Committee and we will actively be searching for someone to continue in this role.

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

- Pam submitted her letter of resignation as Chair of the Marketing and Tourism Committee.
- She will remain a member of the committee and help secure Chair.

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

- The committee continues to work assertively to effect change and help overcome some of the surmountable challenges faced by small business owners and perspective small business owners in the Black Belt area. The committee's agenda continues to target resources that can assist in this area. Gave recap of activities.
- **Small Business Tax Workshop** January 29, 2013.
- Held **Youth Entrepreneurial Summit (YES)** April 30, 2013. Speaker Leanna Archer from Long Island, New York creates and sells line of hair care products. The summit was a resounding success.
- **West Alabama Procurement Seminar** held May 23, 2013 that provided learning opportunities for existing small business owners to become familiar with the procurement process and get an overview of the SBA 8 (a) Program and Certification process, the Alabama Procurement Technical Assistance Program, as well as the DOT's DBE Program.
- Held regular committee meeting on February 22, 2013. Held conference calls on March 12, April 10, and May 14.
- Next regular conference call is scheduled for June 25 and next regular meeting for July 16.
- Looking forward: **Home Grown Small Business Conference** with emphasis on Farming and Agri-Business.
- World's Widest Yard Sale strategy for 2014 to include small business focus.

Candy Capel commented that **WVAS** had broadcast from **Angie's Auction** in Selma the Friday of the sale.

SKILLS TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – Vacant, Chair, Candy Cappel, Project Manager, reported-

- Candy is working on getting new Chair for this committee.

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

- Offered assistance from United Way of Alabama if there is a medical transportation issue.

REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORTS:

John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission:

- Reported time of frustration. Funding needs to be on all our minds regarding The Department of Senior Services meals program.
- Eight years ago, Irene Collins, Director of the Department of Senior Services, asked for people to serve on that committee and Tyson and I did.
- We agreed to the funding being at 2003 levels.
- Formulas worked well until this spring, as money began getting tight.

- All of a sudden, there are all urban people filling positions on the committee and that's where the funding is going. This is not where the program is needed. It's in the rural areas.
- Sen. Orr decided his formula would be good for the state.
- He put in the state budget that the hold harmless figures would be 1. 25% the first year; 50% the second year, 75% the third year and the fourth year the Hold Harmless would be eliminated.
- This will affect Alabama-Tombigbee's budget \$570,000; ½ of the total budget.
- 400-500 meals will be gone because of population figures shift.
- This will negatively affect low-income, extremely poor and people 85 years and older.

Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Development Commission reported:

- Tyson dittoed everything John Clyde said.
- He also reported that South Central Alabama Development Commission would lose \$394,000. Bob Lake will be losing \$250,000.

Meeting adjourned for a delicious catfish lunch sponsored by Mayor Grayson.