

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

August 13, 2013

Gee's Bend Ferry Terminal – Camden, AL

The Black Belt Commission Executive Committee met Tuesday, August 13, 2013 at Gee's Bend Ferry Terminal in Camden, Alabama with John Clyde Riggs hosting. The following were in attendance:

Ron Sparks, Director, Alabama Rural Development Office
John Clyde Riggs, Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission
Donald Mills, Small Business Committee
Deana Watkins, for Dr. David Hale, Communications Committee
John Zippert, Chair, Agriculture Committee
Mary Catherine Barganier, Co-Chair Marketing and Tourism Committee
Wimberly Comer, Co-Chair, Marketing and Tourism Committee
Shirley Worthington, Chair, Transportation Committee
Major Ken Phillips, Priority Soldier
Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Regional Commission
John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission
Frank Dobson, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission
Bob Lake, West Alabama Regional Development Council
Ginger Rue Stewart, Project Manager
Candy Capel, Project Manager
Thomas Moore, Project Manager
Emily Law, BBC Executive Director

Bea Forniss, Co-Chair, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. She then recognized **John Clyde Riggs**, Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission, host for the meeting. John Clyde gave a history of the building and welcomed everyone to Camden.

Ron Sparks talked about Camden and **Mark Curl**, former Chairman of the County Commission in Wilcox County, who died this past year. Stated we were glad to have **Bob Lake** back with us and talked about the beauty of Wilcox County. He remembered coming down while running for Governor and crossing Gee's Bend on the ferry. He then introduced **Norm Davis and Pernell Jenkins** with **TruFund Financial Services**.

Norm gave a little of his background as Director of ADECA during the Seigleman Administration. He is now **Vice president and Managing Director of TruFund**. He spoke about TruFund and its new identity.

- Formerly Seedco Financial, the company changed name.
- Mission is to provide underserved organizations with fair and accessible capital remains constant.
- Tru Fund – Not for profit Community Development Financial institution with more than \$55 million in assets.

- Provides fair and accessible capital, tailored financial solutions and connections to a network of business consultants to not for profit organizations and small businesses that are underserved by traditional banking and lending institutions.
- TruFund has three principal areas of geographic focus: New York, Louisiana and Alabama.
 - In Alabama, its initial work was to develop affordable housing projects in partnership with historically black colleges and universities.
 - It has expanded to develop growth opportunities for Alabama's underserved small businesses, including those in the agricultural and construction sectors.
 - A notable area of recent investment and future growth for TruFund Financial Services is expanded operations and support for the businesses and communities of Alabama's Black Belt region.

Co-chair Bea Forniss asked that everyone introduce themselves, which they did.

Bea recognized **Ginger Stewart** who informed the board about a project her class at the U of A is undertaking. The class is made up of Press Release writing students who will be assigned to work for/about the individual committees. They will be preparing a SWOT Analysis, press release, audio news release, a direct mail piece, a public service announcement, a brochure, a newsletter story, a video news release and a media kit over the course of the semester. The goal is NOT to give the Chairs or Program Managers any additional work but they might have a question once in a while that could be easily answered by email or quick phone call.

This was put in the form of a motion by **Shirley Worthington** and seconded by **William Scott**.

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 local farmers.
- Funding is available through the three land grant colleges with Tuskegee as leader of the group.
- Had conference call meeting July 8th in which Dr. Hill and Hargrove indicated project is proceeding.
- Recognizing cooperative of farmers who have grown watermelons, peas, greens for sale through Walmart . Some go to farmers' market.
- Talked with Bell's Foods about marketing products for farmers.

Ron asked for update on **Pickford case**. **John Zippert** reported that the money was supposed to be received by farmers in the Black Belt by the end of October. There were 39,000 claims filed by the May 2012 deadline, with 6,000 eliminated and 33,000 claims left to be paid. 5,000 of the 39,000 are in Alabama and a decision should be made by the end of August.

**COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE – Dr. David Hale, Chair, Ginger Stewart.
Project Manager, Deana Watkins with the University of Alabama reported –**

- Working on ConnectingALABAMA, which is designed to show connectivity or lack thereof throughout the state.
- Verizon and AT & T are the top two carriers in the state. Verizon reports having more coverage in the Black Belt than AT&T.
- This project will collect independent data to show actual coverage. An app shows upload and download speeds so that we can find out what is happening in actual use, regardless of what the carriers report. The app sends large numbers of “Crowd sourced” data from 3G and 4G phones (anonymously) to get information.
- **Deana Watkins, Project Coordinator** at the IT Innovation Center at the University of Alabama requests everyone’s help to crowd source the app.
- Go to www.connectingalabama.gov in the app store and download the free app.
- Once a week, the app will test your data speed wherever you are. Performance maps will be made available for state policy makers, carriers and consumers.
- **Dr. Hale** is available to answer other questions via ALMobile@ua.edu

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

- Continue to work on beyond leadership program.

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 awarded grants to 47 community organizations.
- \$102,400 was awarded for the community arts projects.
- Awards program was held in Selma, June 22, 2013, 11:00 a.m. at Concordia College in the Julius & Mary Jenkins Building.

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

- The committee was able to provide one scholarship to the University of Alabama’s Student Introduction to Engineering program. The scholarship this year went to a student from Perry County hosted by Dr. Charles Nash.
- Education summit on June 3 and 4 received positive feedback. Over 275 Black Belt educators attended. Detailed report is in newsletter distributed.
- Plans are to have a 2014 summit based on the continued success of each year’s summit.
- The next committee meeting date has not yet been announced.

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

- Dr. Stinnett contacted Ginger and has resigned as chair of the committee.
- We’ll be looking for a new chair for this committee.

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

- No report given.

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

- The committee met to discuss several projects the committee might be able to accomplish.
- **John Clyde Riggs** said a big “Thank you” to Bea for seeing that the Commission gets the recaptured funds in the Black Belt. To date over \$15 million has been funneled to the Black Belt region for infrastructure projects.

MANUFACTURING COMMITTEE – Candy Capel, Project Manager, reported-

- Candy reported there was an individual who was interested in becoming the chair and she would be contacting that person to pursue fulfilling the position.

MARKETING & TOURISM –Mary Catherine Bargainier/Wimberly Comer, Co-Chairs – Thomas Moore, Project Manager, reported –

- The M and T Committee met June 27 to critique the 2013 WWYS. A number of suggestions were made to make future sales more successful.
- One suggestion is to enlarge the footprint of the sale to adjacent states. A meeting was scheduled for July 29 in Jackson, Ms. Pam Swanner, Emily Law, Jenn Tate and Gena Robbins attended the meeting.
- The new chair and co-chair of the committee is **Wimberly Comer and Mary Catherine Bargainier**.
- Wimberly Comer introduced herself and gave some background on what she’s been doing.
- She’s been working on the National Heritage Area designation for the Black Belt. If approved, it would be a formal recognition from the National Park Service that the west Alabama is culturally and historically significant and worthy of preservation and protection.
- Wimberly also works with Accenture and talked about an exciting opportunity for Alabama’s Black Belt from National Geographic to submit sites, events, trails, and community points of interest to be featured on their GeoTourism site.
- As a result of the BP oil spill and damage to tourism in the 4 Gulf States of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida, grants have been obtained for geo-mapping and other outcomes. National Geographic will produce a Geotourism website, mobile app and print MapGuide to promote travel to the region that celebrates and sustains what is most distinctive.

Mary Catherine Bargainier introduced herself. She currently serves as the Communication Director and ENHANCE Coordinator for the Town of Pike Road.

- Mary Catherine will assist in coordinating the U.S, 80 Hi-way Sale formerly the World’s Widest Yard Sale.

Ron talked about the Historic U.S. 80 Hi-way Sale. He reported that it was discovered that a Highway 80 sale already exists beginning in Longview, TX and stretching into Louisiana and Mississippi. We plan to partner with this sale and bring it across the state into Alabama. Communication has already been established into Georgia also with Columbus, GA being the end of the route at this time. Pam Swanner, Emily Law, Gena Robbins, Jenn Tate and Emily Law all traveled to Jackson, MS to attend a meeting of representatives from TX, LA, MS and AL to discuss joining forces for the 2014 U. S. 80 Hi-way Sale which will be held April 18 and 19, Easter weekend. This is going to be quite a transition, but if we can make it work, the sale will continue long after we are gone.

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

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

- The committee met August 20th in Livingston (see attached report).
- The Interagency rural Economic Development and Small Business Forum was held August 21 also in Livingston,
- Looking forward: The committee plans another **Home Grown Small Business Conference** with emphasis on Farming and Agri-Business.

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

- Has done survey and there are people interested in serving as Chair for this committee. She will be reaching out to these people.

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

- **Introduced Major Kenneth L. Phillips, Founder and CEO of Priority Soldier, Inc. a non profit that helps veterans with places to live.**

REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORTS:

John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission:

- Reported it is still a time of frustration but he said he would refrain from any philosophizing at this time.
- Stated everything's about relationships and we've built some great relationships.

Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Development Commission reported:

- Basically same report as last time. He had planned to ditto what John Clyde had to say.
- He reported they are working with ADA as far as the metropolitan areas trying to take meals on wheels.
- Congresswoman Terri Sewell is now involved.
- Senator Orr of Decatur is taking funds and applying formula as he wants.

Bob Lake, West Alabama Regional Council:

- Conveyed his displeasure with what's taken place regarding funding levels for the Department of Senior Services meals program.
- Discussed how wrong it is for this to happen to deprive citizens in the Black Belt of meals when the rural areas are more deserving.
- Stated we needed to be more aware of funding formulaes.

Bea reported that CDBG applications are due Monday and she is working on opportunities for the Black Belt region.

Bea and **Ron** gave closing remarks and the meeting adjourned for lunch provided by John Clyde Riggs and The Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission.