

**MINUTES OF THE BLACK BELT COMMISSION
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
Lowndes County Board of Education Office – Hayneville, AL
December 10, 2013**

The Black Belt Commission Executive Committee met Tuesday, December 10, 2013 at The Lowndes County Board of Education Office in Hayneville, Alabama with Dr. Daniel Boyd hosting the meeting. The following were in attendance:

Ron Sparks, Director, Alabama Rural Development Office
Sheldon Day, Co-Chair
Dr. Daniel Boyd, Chair, Education Committee
David Hooks, Chair, Manufacturing Committee
John Zippert, Chair, Agriculture Committee
Donald Mills, Chair, Small Business Committee
Mary Catherine Gaston, Co-Chair, Marketing and Tourism
Wimberly Comer, Co-Chair, Marketing and Tourism
Ed Castile, Chair, Skills Training and Workforce Development
Bobby Jon Drinkard, Assistant to Ed Castile
Melinda Williams, Congresswoman Sewell’s Office
Dave Dagostino, Chair, Families Committee
John Clyde Riggs, Alabama Tombigbee Regional Planning Commission
Bob Lake, West Alabama Regional Development Council
Ginger Stewart, Project Manager
Candy Capel, Project Manager
Thomas Moore, Project Manager
Emily Law, BBC Executive Director

Ron Sparks welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. He then recognized and thanked Dr. Daniel Boyd for hosting the meeting. He asked everyone to introduce themselves. He then turned the meeting over to Sheldon Day who chaired the meeting.

Sheldon said he had been traveling a lot lately selling “Rural Alabama.” His motto is “It’s cool to be rural.” He also related the news about Chad’s grandfather dying during the night and his wife’s brother-in-law dying within the last week. Asked that everyone remember Chad and his family in prayer. In addition, he asked that George Alford be remembered in prayer as he is in the midst of treatments for cancer. He then asked for committee reports.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE – John Zippert, Chair, Candy Capel, Program Manager, reported –

- Tuskegee has let the bids for the Black Belt Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Center.

- Costs came in considerably higher than anticipated.
- A requirement placed on them by ALDOT would help get cost in line.
- Committee is attempting to attract new members.

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

Project Manager,–

- **No report sent.**

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - Felecia Jones, Chair, Thomas

Moore, Program Manager-

- Committee continues to work on the leadership development project for elected officials.
- The goal is to empower them with ongoing leadership information.

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

Manager, reported –

- No report given.

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

Manager, reported on three projects;

- Project Camp - Dr. Boyd reported that Ron Sparks brought a Project Camp Representative to meet with him.
 - They offer ACT preparation and score improvement is their goal.
 - They reported as much as a seven-point gain in scores from this program.
 - December 17, Dr. Boyd will have representatives from the program address the Black Belt Superintendents’ Coalition meeting.
 - Lowndes will begin the program in January and Boyd hopes other Black belt counties will follow suit. They are currently seeking funding.
- Last Spring, Nisa Miranda of the University of Alabama once again collected funds and books for Black Belt schools.
 - Superintendents agreed it was better to divide the books and funds among a few Black Belt schools.
 - Wilcox and Perry counties and Demopolis city were drawn this year to receive the books and funds.
- The annual summit will be held again this year in June and open to all Black Belt schools. Funding has been cut in half so meals will not be provided this year. Attendees will be on their own for lunch.

FAMILIES COMMITTEE – Dave Dagostino, Chair – Ginger Stewart, Project

Manager reported:

- Reported that Judge Pettway of Wilcox County wants to add a Family Resource Center like the one in Selma.
- The committee will appoint a chairman and create a mission statement, then define the needs of Wilcox County and find a workforce, volunteer or paid, depending on what the structure is.

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

- No report given. No one present from committee due to death in family.

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

- He's been working on organizing the Black Belt Caucus with the assistance of Senator Beasley. They met December 5th.
- Legislative session will meet January 14th.
- Purpose of caucus is to have more political involvement in order to make things happen.

Sheldon commented that business and industry will gravitate to the easiest place to locate and we want that to be in the Black Belt and rural Alabama. We need to pay close attention to the impact we have.

John Clyde stated that rural Alabama is under attack. Senators and Representatives from urban areas want to use a skewed formula of need to allocate funding. Having the legislative caucus will help. Same thing will happen on state appropriation. Freezing funding is one thing, but taking people's meals is another story.

Ron introduced **Melinda Williams**, representing Congresswoman Sewell's Office in Selma. She specializes in health matters and talked about the working relationship she wanted to create with our organization and felt that a legislative caucus would be a good move.

Melinda related that **Senator Dial** spoke to her regarding space ports. He stated he was trying to get a grant to do the feasibility study. In speaking with him, he was told to consider the Black Belt for locations for space ports as the Black Belt has lots of vacant land.

Noopie reported the dredging of the river is a Homeland Security issue.

John Clyde stated one thing that's been wrong as a result of skewed information is the way in which CDBG funds have been distributed. He reported that every recaptured grant has had a major impact on the area.

MANUFACTURING COMMITTEE – David Hooks, Chair, Candy Capel, Project Manager, reported-

- David Hooks introduced himself and explained his vision regarding reconstruction of the Committee.
- His focus is on assisting industries in the black belt. There are 244 industries that have ten employees or less.
- This refers to some catfish and farming industries. He will attempt to get membership from these industries.

- David stated there is a uniqueness in the 7th Congressional District. UAB is in the 7th Congressional District also. In this district you have poorest to richest.

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

- Mary Catherine Gaston reported on the Widest Yard Sale being a part of the **Historic U.S. 80 Hiway Sale** April 18 and 19. This sale begins in Longview, Tx and comes through Louisiana, Mississippi and on through Alabama along U.S. 80 and
- The Marketing and Tourism Committee met November 5th to discuss the roll-out of the Yard Sale
- Working on developing promotional material that will be sent to vendors, chambers, antique shops and flea markets, as well as mayors and county commissioners located throughout the Black Belt region. Place cards will be placed in all eight welcome centers throughout the state.
- American Pickers is coming to Alabama. We need to get them interested in this sale.

Plans are to:

- Continue to move toward national designation.
- Develop a regional marketing initiative is taking place to better understand who are current and potential visitors and what the region can do to better market to potential visitors.
- Kickoff for the Black Belt Birding Trail will be in December, 2013.
- Support the development and promotion of Alabama River tours.
- Enhance arts education and tourism in the Black Belt in partnership with Black Belt Treasures.
- Develop downtown walking tours.
- Hold Main Street Workshop January 23, 2014 in Monroeville, Alabama

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

- Chairman Donald Mills presented a strategic action plan for 2014 along with a tentative calendar of events.
- Events will include a small business tax workshop in January,
- A small business resource summit in March,
- The homegrown business conference and youth entrepreneurial seminar in April,
- Two conferences in May
- Technology workshop in November, among other plans.
- Committee’s first meeting will be January 23rd at 10 a.m. in Livingston.

Proposed Activities and Initiatives for 2014 are:

- Build upon current partnerships and relations to strengthen the Black Belt Region small Business resources.
- Foster a better relationship with financial institutions in the Black Belt.
- Provide workshops, seminars and training in the area of business startup, expansion and growth.

- Work closely with other committees to promote small business and economic development.

SKILLS TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – Ed Castile Chair, Dr. Ken Tucker, Co-Chair, Candy Cappel, Project Manager, reported-

- Ed Castile reported on the organizational meeting held three weeks ago at ADECA to discuss reorganization of committee.
- He distributed copies of the **Workforce Strategic Plan** and talked about the Mission and goals of the Committee.
- The **mission** is to evaluate workforce issues in the Black Belt and develop strategies that will enhance the economic opportunities for its citizens.
- **Goals** include encouraging workforce development through job specific training programs for unemployed and underemployed citizens in the Black Belt.
- **Strategies** include ensuring all existing programs are in place and operating to their maximum potential and ensure new and innovative job specific training programs for the unemployed potential workforce in the Black Belt counties.
- **Initiatives** are outlined in the attached Strategic Plan.

John Clyde reported on Ed’s part in the Golden Dragon saga. Stated that **Ed** made a commitment to find enough people to work. There were 20 to 30% hired from Wilcox County. There are 600 people unemployed in Wilcox County. If 100 people become employed, that’s good. One delay in Golden Dragon hire was visas pending.

- He reported the Chinese are coming to the U.S. looking for locations for companies. We have to be ready to meet their needs.
- There is a minimum training period. Pre-employment is two weeks; pre, pre employment is two hours. College is also doing a program.
- Try to get a pool of eligible employees so that you match person with job. Began two years ago with the Board of Education. Says there are 4 or 5 ways you can get GED.

Ron stated when you meet with **Ed**, good things are going to happen.

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

- **Absent**

REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORTS:

John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission:

- Of the committees that have worked in the Black Belt, nearly every one has done something to help those who need help. In the beginning, we wondered if it would be successful and we know that it has been. He stated he appreciated all that the Commission has done.

- Working on ID program for seniors through the Department of Senior Services and the senior centers in 10 counties.
- Bob Lake will handle Greene County.
- Got to see how much funds we will have to work with.
- Doing RFP to have someone to do these things.
- Alabama New South Coalition is identifying people who need work.

Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Development Commission:

- Absent.

Bob Lake, West Alabama Regional Council:

- Absent

Ron and Sheldon gave closing remarks and the meeting adjourned for a delicious lunch provided by **Dr. Boyd**.