

The Mid-Shore Regional Council (MSRC) held a scheduled meeting on June 12, 2025. It was held at Choptank Electric, Denton Maryland.

MSRC members in attendance included: Carolyn Spicher, Kurt Fuchs, Frank Bartz, Dan Rider, Maria D'Arcy, Walter Chase, Bill Christopher, Delegate Tom Hutchinson, Delegate Chris Adams, Senator Johnny Mautz, Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Debi Sewell, Lajan Cephas, Rose Potter, Caroline County Administrator Kathleen Freeman, Dorchester County Manager Jerry Jones, and Talbot County Manager Clay Stamp.

Guests in attendance were: Salisbury University Dean and Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative (ESRGC) Director Michael Scott; ESRGC Project Manager Erin Silva; Dorchester County Economic Development Director Susan Banks; Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism Director Cassandra Vanhooser; Caroline County Economic Development and Tourism Director Bob Zimmeroff; Rural Maryland Council Program Administrator Megan D'Arcy; Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board (USWIB) Acting Executive Director Ellen LaFrankie; Choptank Electric Government Affairs Manager Matt Tefteau; Governor Wes Moore's Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison Madison Bryce; CareFirst Blue Cross Blue Shield External Affairs Manager Melissa Kelly Carels; Town of Trappe Commissioner Mike Sullivan; Maryland Department of Commerce Senior Business Development Representative Mindie Burgoyne; BEACON Director John Hickman; Advantis principal Sarah Guy; Chesapeake College President Clifford Coppersmith; U.S. Senator Angela Alsobrooks' Eastern Shore Regional Director Kim Kratovil; USDA Rural Development Deputy State Director for Delaware-Maryland State Office Letitia Nichols; Comptroller of Maryland Public Engagement Officer – Eastern Shore Mary Handley; Maryland Cooperative Extension representatives Shannon Dill (Extension Educator – Talbot County), Travis Ford (Extension Educator – Caroline County), and Analecia Byrd (Administrative Assistant II – Caroline County); Chesapeake College Board of Trustees Chair and e-Development International Chairman and CEO Reza Jafari; and Nationwide Police Services representative Joseppe Johnson. MSRC staff present were Scott Warner and Terry Deighan.

Chairman Chase called the meeting to order at 5:25 p.m. and introductions were made. Ms. Freeman was carrying a proxy for Larry Porter, Mr. Jones was carrying proxies for Ricky Travers and Lenny Pfeffer, and Mr. Stamp was carrying proxies for Chuck Callahan and Lynn Mielke.

Mr. Warner stated the following individuals sent their regrets for not being able to attend: U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen's Eastern Shore Regional Director Alyssa Hastings due to a staff meeting, Congressman Andy Harris' Operations and District Outreach Director Keith Graffius due to meetings in Washington, D.C., Congressman Andy Harris' Community Liaison Mike Detmer due to being out of state, and Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland Executive Director Greg Padgham.

Action Items

Approval of March 6, 2025, Minutes

Mr. Christopher made a motion to approve the March 6, 2025, minutes. Mr. Fuchs seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated that we have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All in favor signify by saying aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion approved unanimously.

Ratification of Executive Board November 26, 2024, Minutes

Mr. Fuchs made a motion to ratify the Executive Board November 26, 2024, minutes. Ms. Haddaway-Riccio seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated that we have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All in favor signify by saying aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion approved unanimously.

Ratification of Executive Board April 29, 2025, Minutes

Mr. Stamp made a motion to ratify the Executive Board April 29, 2025, minutes. Mr. Jones seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated that we have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All in favor signify by saying aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Kurt Fuchs presented the following financial reports.

MSRC Operating Budget

- Mr. Fuchs stated that all income and expenses are on track for the fiscal year end.

Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) Budget

- Mr. Fuchs stated the only change to the RMPIF budget report since the MSRC meeting on March 6, 2025, was for the "MSRC Capacity Building Coordinator" line item.

Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund (RMEDF) Budget

- Mr. Fuchs stated the only changes to the RMEDF budget report since the MSRC meeting on March 6, 2025, were to the "MSRC attorney" and the "Project Consultant" line items.

Mr. Christopher made a motion to approve all three reports as presented. Ms. Spicher seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All in favor signify by stating aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion approved unanimously.

Approval of FY26 Scope of Work

Mr. Warner stated that during the Executive Board's meetings on April 29 and May 27, 2025, the board reviewed and discussed the scope of work. During the May 27 meeting they approved for the full Council's consideration the FY26 Scope of Work. He noted the only change to the Scope of Work from FY25 to FY26 is on page 2 under "2. Diversify the local economy" under "Deliverables" the third bullet item. It did read "Support the resource-based industries in the Mid-Shore Region (Shore Gourmet, Inc.)." "(Shore Gourmet, Inc.)" has been eliminated. The MSRC reports more than just Shore Gourmet under this deliverable.

Mr. Fuchs made a motion to approve the FY26 Scope of Work. Ms. Spicher seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All in favor signify by saying aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of FY26 Budget

Mr. Warner stated that during the Executive Board's meetings on April 29 and May 27, 2025, the board reviewed and discussed the budget. During the May 27 meeting they approved for the full Council's consideration the MSRC's FY26 operating budget. He noted the only changes to the FY26 budget compared to the FY25 budget were in Fringe Benefits, Rent, and Telephone. The changes in Fringe Benefits were: 5% increase in health care, 3.1% increase in dental care, 3.8% increase in life insurance, and \$230.00 increase to the MSRC's IRA contribution to the staff because it was not adjusted in last year's budget when the staff was provided with a 4% increase in salaries. Rent increased because the landlord passed on increased Town of Easton and Talbot County taxes. Beginning August 1, 2024, the monthly rate went up \$157.77 (new total monthly rate = \$1,657.77). Telephone decreased by \$680.00 because Ms. Deighan called Verizon and negotiated a lower monthly fee.

Mr. Stamp made a motion to approve the FY26 budget. Mr. Jones seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All in favor signify by saying aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion carried unanimously.

Including Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Funds

Mr. Warner reminded everyone that the State of Maryland budget included \$6 million in the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) for FY26. This is a \$3 million reduction from full funding of \$9 million. Therefore, RMPIF will be providing the MSRC with a grant totaling \$385,000, a reduction of \$215,000 as compared to the most recent years.

Mr. Warner stated that during the Executive Board's meetings on April 29 and May 27, 2025, the board reviewed and discussed. During the May 27 meeting they approved for the full Council's consideration the MSRC's FY26 RMPIF budget.

Mr. Warner noted the proposed projects to be supported with MSRC's RMPIF grant are explained in detail in the document entitled Mid-Shore Regional Council's request for funding support in FY2026 from the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF). This document was included in the meeting packet. It is in the same form as the actual grant that is being prepared.

The RMPIF grant application is to be submitted to the Rural Maryland Council by August 1, 2025. Regional Planning and Development Councils have a rolling application process from 7/1/25 to 8/1/25.

Mr. Warner then briefly explained each project and its funding amount. As he went through the proposed FY26 budget he compared it to last year's budget demonstrating where the \$215,000 in reduced funding was affecting various programs.

1) MSRC Capacity Building Coordinator \$31,200 – provide additional capacity for MSRC in development, delivery, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of programs and activities. The Capacity Building Coordinator will serve as a liaison between program directors and other stakeholders to support program reporting to MSRC, the board of directors, and other stakeholders.

2) Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center (ESEC) \$12,050 – an investment to financially assist in the expenses for the F3 Tech Accelerator Program, to include the Pilot-Scale Biomanufacturing Facility and continued economic development investment in the Mid-Shore counties and the Eastern Shore region at-large. ESEC's efforts include delivery of technical assistance and business services to the agbiotech startup, entrepreneur, and innovation ecosystem and the expansion of programs and projects within the F³ Tech Accelerator Program.

3) Delmarva Index \$15,000 – Continue working with the TCCLES and the ESRGC to further develop an online repository and visualization tool that will function as a comprehensive data source for demographic, economic, geographic, environmental and social data, pertaining to the Delmarva Peninsula (or if datasets for the 3 states are not consistently available, the focus will be on the 9 counties of Maryland's Eastern Shore). Phase VIII will add additional value to the Index through continued maintenance and updates to Mid-Shore Hires, Mid-Shore CEDS, EDA Tools, Healthcare Facilities Map, Maryland Parks Dashboard, Public Safety Dashboard, Workforce Infographics, Economic Dashboard, Construction Economic Impact Dashboard, Manufacturing Economic Impact Dashboard, Tourism Economic Impact Dashboard, and the Economic Snapshots (Worcester and Caroline).

4) Circuit Rider \$30,000 – An ongoing issue in the Mid and Lower Shore of Maryland's Eastern Shore is Towns using GIS but only one person trained in how to utilize the technology, and it is rarely part of their daily workflow. Without regular use, GIS is like any other skill in that it must be practiced being maintained. There are many instances where jurisdictions have a need for assistance with data analyses that cannot be performed by the staff on hand. Responding to the need for on-site assistance with GIS-related tasks, the Circuit Rider position will be available to travel to jurisdictions throughout the Mid-Shore and provide specialized solutions to data analysis needs.

5) Annie's Project \$9,000 – supporting the University of Maryland Extension in providing Women in Agriculture and Annie's Project to the Mid-Shore region (Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties). Annie's Project is a farm management workshop for women interested in agriculture. Other activities also include a farm tour and recordkeeping/bookkeeping workshop that will be hands-on.

6) Summer Career Enrichment Program \$150,000 – The Summer Career Enrichment Program (SCEP) is a 4-week program aimed at providing middle school students with hands-on activities and training in Cyber, Media Arts, Chess, Presentation and Video Design, App Development, Drones, Animation, Robotics, and Careers in Health Care that lead to students becoming college and career ready. The program is in partnership with the Mid-Shore Regional Council, PFC Coalition, Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center, and Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot counties' public-school systems, and targets rising 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th graders. The program provides an opportunity for students to learn skills in requirements gathering, working on teams, delivering presentations, interviewing techniques, time management, project management, leadership development, and problem solving. The instructors also incorporate strategies to teach students how to become entrepreneurs and the requisite skills needed to start a business. In addition, students are exposed to career professionals and entrepreneurs, and gain unique experience to boost their confidence level, critical thinking, and interaction with peers.

7) Entrepreneurship Training Program \$75,000 – to assist small, minority, woman, and veteran entrepreneurs with education, mentorship, and access to capital through an 8-week training program with the goal of helping businesses increase revenue, create jobs, and grow the local and state economies.

8) Regional Marketing \$5,000 – supporting the regional marketing effort Taste of the Eastern Shore (TOTES). TOTES is a long-standing effort to promote Eastern Shore government and business entities to a statewide audience of elected and appointed officials. The economic development offices located in the Mid-Shore region (Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties) will be offered a prominent display area at the event.

Programs being affected by reduced funding are:

- Delmarva Index – there will be no new dashboards developed in FY26.
- ESEC – significantly cutting support to only include the F3 Tech Accelerator Program. The \$12,050 in funding this year will be the grant amount left over after funding all other programs.
- Shore Gourmet/Chesapeake Culinary Center partnership – no funding this year.
- SCEP – reduced funding by \$17,550 compared to last year and will continue to expand financial support from other partners.

Mr. Warner stated that the MSRC's investment in SCEP could be lowered since sponsorships for the program are still being secured. If the SCEP funding can be lowered, it is the recommendation of the MSRC Executive Board to move the additional funds to ESEC. If this situation should arise, the movement of

funds would need to be authorized by a vote of the MSRC Executive Board. This would be similar to the action taken last year.

Mr. Christopher made a motion to approve the RMPIF FY26 budget as presented, giving the MSRC Executive Board authority to move funds from SCEP to ESEC if applicable. Ms. Spicher seconded the motion. Chairman Chase stated we have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All in favor signify by saying aye; those opposed have the same rights. Ayes have it. Motion carried unanimously.

Updates/Notifications

Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund

Mr. Warner stated that individual MOUs between MSRC and each mid-shore county extending the original termination date to December 31, 2025, have been signed. All grant objectives and required work and deliverables to be completed and delivered by January 31, 2026.

MSRC Impact Infographic

Sarah Guy, Principal, Avantis, gave a presentation showing the return on the investment in the Mid-Shore Regional Council (MSRC). Dr. Guy is an expert in the field and she was able to analyze data from existing reports the MSRC produces. On one side the infographic shows the MSRC's return on investment in FY24 was 294%. Meaning every dollar invested in the MSRC in FY24, generated \$2.94 in funding for key regional development projects. The other side of the infographic demonstrates investments in projects supported by the Mid-Shore Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). In FY24 there were 29 active projects in the CEDS. The projects secured an estimated \$23.1 million in funding across financial sources and created/retained approximately 441 jobs. Additionally, the infographic notes that the impact of the work supported by the MSRC has continued to increase while state funding of the MSRC has remained at \$200,000, the same level of intended funding since FY02 when the MSRC was created via enabling legislation. To keep pace with inflation, state funding in FY25 would equal \$353,164.

Elimination of EDA in President's FY26 Budget Request

Mr. Warner briefed everyone that EDA has been slated for elimination in the President's Budget Request, known as the "Skinny Budget." This is a recommendation, ultimately, Congress has the power to make appropriation decisions. He reminded the board that this is not the first time this has happened. Mr. Warner stated he has been in contact with the NADO (National Association of Development Organizations) Executive Director Joe McKinney and NADO's Deputy Executive Director/Director of Government Relations.

Mr. Warner has also been in contact with the staffs of Congressman Harris, Senator Van Hollen and Senator Alsobrooks. He read excerpts from emails sent individually to the federal delegation on May 7, 2025, that highlighted some of the larger EDA grants that have been awarded to the Eastern Shore because of the MSRC and Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. This highlights mentioned the economic results that are being noticed from these projects. These emails resulted in Mr. Warner and Greg

Padgham having a meeting with Congressman Harris' staff (Legislative Correspondent Mark Brown and Operations & District Outreach Director Keith Graffius) and later the same day a meeting with Senator Van Hollen.

Mr. Warner shared excerpts from the EDA Stakeholder Coalition who is calling on Congressional Appropriators to protect EDA in FY26. The Coalition is a group of national organizations and leaders advocating for robust funding and support of EDA to promote economic growth and stability nationwide. They are asking Congress to support full funding of at least \$595 million, as authorized by the recently enacted Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024, which reauthorized EDA programs with strong bipartisan support. For every \$1 invested by EDA, \$15 is leveraged in additional capital. Investments are guided by regionally developed Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS), ensuring alignment with broader goals and strong local support. This Coalition is made up of several national organizations including the International Economic Development Association, National Association of Counties, NADO, and NARC (National Association of Regional Councils).

NADO-NARC video project – case study on the MSRC

On May 30 NADO Program Manager Joe D'Antonio reached out to Mr. Warner via email stating that NADO and NARC are working together on a project through the EDD (Economic Development District) Community of Practice (CoP) and would like make a 7-8 minute video case study about the MSRC. A few days later Mr. Warner met with Mr. D'Antonio and NARC Program Manager Matthew Leder via web conference. They further discussed the program explaining they would like to highlight one or two projects made possible by the MSRC. It was NADO's idea to highlight the MSRC. They recently made a short version video (2 ½ minutes) highlighting two EDDs. This will be their first long version video. The final product will be a video the MSRC and the network of EDDs will be able to use to educate stakeholders in the work of EDDs.

Highlights of MSRC programs

Entrepreneurship Training Program

Mr. Warner stated the training program is a partnership with the mid-shore counties economic development offices and Will Holmes Consulting. He thanked the mid-shore economic development directors for being such amazing partners.

The county economic development directors provided updates.

Bob Zimmeroff (Caroline County) stated Caroline County has recently completed their program and held graduation. It was a fantastic program and the entrepreneurs were very excited with the information they acquired. Now that the first year is finished, he has a better understanding of it and is even better prepared to promote the opportunity next year.

Susan Banks (Dorchester County) stated that they are still holding classes and their participants are gaining valuable knowledge. She also stated now that she has a better understanding of the program, she is better prepared to

promote it for next year. Her favorite part of the program to date was the participation of the business psychologist.

Cassandra Vanhooser (Talbot County) stated their classes ended March 25 and they had a great interest in the course. She shared a slide show where a student stated “this program changed my life.” She highlighted the long-term impact of the MSRC’s investment in small business providing these benefits: business confidence, business growth, job creation, and strong ecosystem. Ms. Vanhooser thanked the MSRC for making it possible. She also stated her office is fortunate to have an anonymous donor which afforded Talbot County the opportunity to give the participants who graduated a \$2,000 incentive upon completion.

Delmarva Index: Agricultural Census Dashboard

Erin Silva, ESRGC Project Manager, gave a presentation on the first ever Agricultural Census Dashboard. Ms. Silva stated that there was so much information they only chose topics that were specific to Delmarva. Even then the dashboard was 11 pages. The Council and guests were very impressed by the project. There were many questions posed especially in regards to farmers being approached to be paid to allow solar panels to be put on existing farmland and how that may affect the future of farming on the Eastern Shore. Ms. Silva and Dr. Scott both stated that all the information needed to answer most of the questions asked is already included in the dashboard, it just needs to be extrapolated.

Some new topics brought up by members that they would like to be tracked are:

- Information on seasonal workers
- Solar impacts on agriculture
- Agricultural land loss

Summer Career Enrichment Program (SCEP)

Mr. Warner reminded everyone that the 2025 SCEP will be held the month of July. Registration at the May cutoff date was 456 students. The target enrollment was 330, so even with dropouts the program should be full. This year’s SCEP will be held at Easton High School. Tour dates will be distributed via email within the next week or two. Please respond and come see this fabulous program.

Announcements/comments

Travis Ford was in attendance this evening so he could introduce himself as the new Agricultural Extension Agent for Caroline County. He replaced Jim Lewis who retired last year. He looks forward to working with everyone and said he is seeking sponsors and volunteers to help with an ag awareness day for 7th and 8th grade students. The event will be held at both middle schools in Caroline County.

Mayor Cephas praised the Agricultural Census Dashboard. She also had questions regarding land use and how such a tool could be helpful.

Adjourn

Chairman Chase adjourned the meeting at 7:08pm