



November 29, 2011

Meeting Minutes

**The inaugural meeting of the Georgia Rural Development Council was held on November 29, 2011** at the State Offices South in Forsyth. The meeting began at 10 a.m. and concluded at 2 p.m.

**Members of the Council present** at the meeting are as follows: Jason Winters, Bill Kendall, Richard Harrell, Nancy Jones, Pat Graham, Tom Thompson, Billy Jackson, Buddy Leger, Charlton Rogers, Dewey Robinson, Gary Paulk, Matt Cardella, Ed Jordan, Dwayne Turner, and Bebe Heiskell. Ex-Officio members in attendance are as follows: Kevin Clark, Director of GEFA. Homer Bryson represented Commissioner Mark Williams, Jennifer Nelson represented Commissioner Chris Cumiskey, and Sidne Smith represented Commissioner Gary Black. Also present were Nancy Cobb, Executive Director of the OneGeorgia Authority and the Georgia Rural Development Council, Saralyn Stafford, Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs and Director of the Rural Policy Center, and Laura Meadows, Dennis Epps, Walt McBride, Matt Hauer, and Anna Boling, all of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, UGA.

Saralyn Stafford began the meeting with opening remarks. She welcomed all who were present at the meeting, reviewed the anticipated work of the Council, and announced the next meeting date of February 6, 2012. The meeting was then turned over to Walt McBride who led the group in a “get acquainted” activity. Each person present introduced themselves and stated why it was important to them to serve on or work with the Council. Walt then turned the meeting over to Nancy Cobb. Nancy distributed background material on the OneGeorgia Authority as well as a U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development paper, entitled “Seven Strategies for Economic Development.” Matt Hauer then gave a PowerPoint presentation which included demographic information relevant to rural Georgia. Information in the presentation included data relevant to income, education, jobs, population growth, and age, race, and ethnic group distribution.

Following Matt’s PowerPoint presentation, Walt began a facilitated discussion with the Council Members and the Ex-Officio members or their designees concerning three questions, as follows:

- What do you see as the single biggest challenge for rural Georgia?
- What do you see as the biggest opportunity for rural Georgia?
- What one issue about rural Georgia would you like to know more about?

Nancy Cobb disseminated these questions prior to the meeting and had collected preliminary feedback. The goal of the facilitated session was to expand upon the information collected by Nancy. A compilation of all the responses to these three questions are found below.



November 29, 2011

Meeting Minutes

## **What do you see as the single biggest challenge for rural Georgia?**

### **Infrastructure**

- Water, sewer, natural gas, transportation and better internet and cell phone service in rural areas.
- Is our infrastructure sufficient to the extent that we can create demand for our products and also deliver the finished goods?

### **Natural Resources**

- Protect and preserve our vital resources, including but not limited to water, land, and an educated work force.
- Create a proper balance between protecting and preserving North Georgia mountains, streams, lakes and tourism and rural economic development. Due to our natural resources, tourism is one of the largest industries for this section of our state.

### **Clean/High Tech Jobs**

- Bring clean, high tech jobs to North Georgia mountain counties without building four lane roads through them. This leads to congestion and pollution that is destructive to our precious natural resources and would be detrimental to our leading industry, tourism.

### **Sustainable Job Growth**

- Provide wages for our citizens that are above the current average wage levels in order to improve the socioeconomic conditions in rural Georgia.

### **Unemployment**

#### ***Jobs***

- Create new jobs and secure the ones we presently have.
- Create a better work environment.

#### ***Retool/Retrain***

- Redirect our efforts and change our mindset to focus on how to survive long term.
- “Retool” and recapture business which has been lost for years.

#### ***Immigration/Incentive to Work***

- Give our local citizens an incentive to work instead of trying to live off welfare and food stamps.
- Provide a way for migrant workers to come to and work in the United States legally and pay taxes.



**November 29, 2011**

**Meeting Minutes**

- Provide adequate living conditions and training for migrant workers.

### **Public Safety**

- Recruit adequate numbers of emergency response personnel.
- Provide adequate emergency response equipment.
- Provide a trauma center in the southern part of the state.

### **Education**

- Promote practical education (i.e., critical thinking, problem solving, basic communication, and other commonly applied skills). If we do not improve in this area, economic development, broadband, etc. will not matter.
- Combat the perception that rural Georgia does not have a trained workforce. There are areas that have trained workers ready for new opportunities now.

## **What do you see as the biggest opportunity for rural Georgia?**

### **Utilization of Natural Resources**

- Make our natural resources known. Develop and capitalize on them.
- Develop our natural resources into prosperous businesses that will provide jobs (i.e., develop timber and forest products into fuel and other uses beyond building lumber and paper).
- Coordinate and publish research being done by our universities so that one idea can build on another. Data needs to drive recommendations. (i.e., Wilkes County biofuel plant closed down due to federal regulations. Perhaps, biofuel is not currently a sustainable initiative. We need to see how policy recommendations might conflict with laws.)
- Use surface and sub-surface water to attract new businesses and new residents. (i.e., The Cordele Inland Port facilities located in Cordele along with the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project have the potential to create multiple opportunities for rural Georgia to export their locally produced goods.)
- Use the ports of Savannah and Brunswick to expand the export business in Georgia. Using vertical and horizontal diversification, there is no limit to the number of products that can be harvested, packaged and shipped from Georgia.
- Use natural resources to enhance quality of life opportunities.
- Use natural resources to produce locally grown food to be sold in Atlanta and other suburban markets.



**November 29, 2011**

**Meeting Minutes**

### **Rural Culture**

- Preserve rural culture, yet capitalize on quality development.

### **Rural Tourism**

- Advertise historical points of interest (i.e., the Sherman March Trail, the Jefferson Davis Retreat Trail, and many others) to generate more tourism.

### **Agri-tourism**

### **Marketing**

- Encourage effective marketing by local, regional, and state economic development agencies involved in business recruitment, retention, and expansion.

### **Marketing to Retirees**

- Develop the retirement population in Georgia. Retired people bring money to banks and other financial institutions, and they require a lot of services for which they are willing and able to pay. All these things create jobs. This would create a utilization of recreation facilities and a demand for better health care clinics in rural communities.

### **Jobs**

- Create opportunities for new industries and manufacturing.

### **Education**

- Develop a trained workforce.

## **What one issue about rural Georgia would you like to know more about?**

### **Harnessing Talent and Work Ethic**

- Take advantage of the talent and work ethic found in rural Georgia's workers and young people that has been instilled into the rural social fabric by previous generations.
- Work with schools and other local educational institutions to promote educational opportunities specifically in the area of high-tech, clean jobs.

### **Logistics Infrastructure**

- Improve logistics infrastructure in rural Georgia to allow easier access to ports, interstates, railroads, etc.
- Create access for goods and encourage economic growth in rural communities.
- Encourage a secondary north to south route to get traffic off I-75.



**November 29, 2011**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Create a Centralized One Stop Shop for Grant/Loans/Funding Sources**

- Develop a single repository where a citizen or a group of citizen could research grants, loans, and other funding sources that are available from both government and private funding agencies to support economic development.

**Cost of Government Services/ Taxation**

- Determine the per capita cost for the operation of a county or city government and how the Transportation Investment Act Regional One Cent Sales Tax would affect that cost.

**Industry Impact/Opportunities**

- Determine which industries have been least impacted by the current economy as well as which industries are able to grow in the current economy.

**Immigration**

- Determine how a business, industry, or farming operation can register migrants and utilize them as workers.

**Policy Positions of Local Leaders**

- Determine the position that local government leaders in rural Georgia take regarding economic development and/or capital improvements within their jurisdictions.
- Explain the impact of economic development to local government leaders in rural Georgia.

**Workforce**

- Determine the size and the qualifications of the workforce in rural Georgia. (This information could be helpful in determining how best to utilize the resources we have available.)
- Make money available to retool and retrain the workforce.

**Local Production**

- Determine how many communities have farmers' markets.
- Determine the rules for being a vendor in a farmers' market (i.e., quality of products, fees, etc.).

**Other issues**

- Is tort reform the reason for the success Texas has enjoyed in the area of job creation?
- What is behind South Carolina's success in job creation? Do incentives play a part in this success, and if so, how and to what extent?
- How does tax policy (income tax and tax abatements) affect economic development?
- How do we tap into the talent of military retirees?



**November 29, 2011**

**Meeting Minutes**

- 
- With the coming wave of retirees, how do we provide for health issues facing rural Georgia?

At the conclusion of the facilitated session, the meeting was turned over to Nancy and Saralyn. Both made concluding remarks. Saralyn reminded the group of the next meeting on February 6, 2012. The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 pm.