

Public Outreach and Engagement Committee

October 4, 2018
Meeting Notes

Members Attending:

Larry Nordvig, Chair Powhatan County
Kristen Larsen, Vice Chair City of Richmond

Others Attending:

Martha Shickle, RRPDC Executive Director
Katherine Busser, RRPDC Consultant
John Taylor, West Cary Group
Dawn Werry, West Cary Group
Eric Gregory, RRPDC Legal Counsel
Julie Fry, RRPDC Staff/Recording Secretary

Chairman Nordvig called the meeting to order at approximately 3:10 p.m. and noted that as the committee is a Standing Committee of the RRPDC and has in attendance elected officials from local jurisdictions, the meeting is considered open and all discussion will be subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. He said Ms. Fry has been asked to document the discussions.

Chairman Nordvig reviewed that prior to convening the meeting, informal discussion had taken place regarding the process for this meeting. He said he would like to set action steps with clear due dates and identify those who will be responsible for meeting those dates.

There should be a clear idea of the desired outcome as determined by committee members which can in turn, be taken to the full RRPDC Board for review and consideration. Today's meeting will focus on rebranding efforts underway as led by West Cary Group (WCG) which include a marketing name, logo, and tagline. All of this work has been undertaken in order to make the agency and its work more accessible to the general public.

Chairman Nordvig also indicated that it will be important to determine what the agency needs to communicate to not only the public, but to its stakeholders and partners. In order to elevate the RRPDC within the region, the agency must look more like the region and become more forward thinking. He said the goal of the committee should be to work through all of the details in order to arrive at a final product to bring to the full Board.

Ms. Shickle noted that Mr. Frank Thornton (Henrico County) also indicated he would like to be part of the committee but has not yet arrived. She said she will review today's

discussions with Chairwoman Newbille during their agenda review meeting on Friday, October 5, and felt there should be a report provided to the full Board during its meeting on October 11.

Ms. Busser provided a recap of discussions that took place during the RRPDC Board meeting held on September 13. During that meeting, members provided the following feedback with regard to WCG's presentation to members on proposed marketing names, logos, and taglines for the agency:

- use of RVA and whether this truly reflected the entire region
- use of the word *regional* in the marketing name/tagline to indicate that the agency is a regional forum
- how marketing brands are used in other PDC regions, localities, and the Capital Region Collaborative
- need to meet restrictions for naming as set in Virginia Code

Mr. Taylor presented revised designs of the PlanRVA brand. He said the preferred design is the one standing on its own, with the arrow incorporated into the design. Mr. Taylor said that during the September RRPDC Board meeting, there had been discussion around whether to use the word *plan* or to change that to *planning*. Board members felt that *planning* provided the idea of action and more accurately described the work done by the agency. Mr. Taylor said in discussions within WCG and others, it was felt that the word *plan* had been viewed by RRPDC members as a noun, indicating a specific plan. WCG saw the word *plan* as a verb, indicating the action used to make plans. It's felt that PlanRVA has a smoother sound than PlanningRVA.

Mr. Taylor continued by addressing the requirement in State Code limiting the choices for naming PDCs. He said the tagline was changed to read *The Regional Commission*. This seems to meet Code requirement that PDC names can include *regional council* or *regional commission* instead of *planning district commission*.

Ms. Larsen said she thought the inclusion of *regional commission* was a good idea and noted that the agency's legal name already included Richmond.

Ms. Werry said WCG conducted internal research with its own staff to see how they felt about RVA and whether or not that term referred to the entire region. The use of RVA seems to have begun as a grassroots effort via social media.

Mr. Taylor said inclusion of the arrow in the name is meant to show forward movement and can also represent the James River, roads, and other symbols associated with the agency's work. The design is also easily scaled to be incorporated into any final work product.

Ms. Shickle said use of a monochromatic scheme will also allow easy reproduction and document accessibility with regard to regulations around audio reading.

Ms. Larsen asked if it was necessary to include the word *the* before *regional commission*.

Mr. Taylor said that should indicate that RRPDC is the only PDC in the region.

Mr. Gregory said he has some reservations about the branding name as the Code is very specific regarding how PDCs can be named. Ms. Shickle asked if a logo constitutes a name. Mr. Gregory indicated that the Code is specific because it needs to be clear to the public that the agency is a planning district commission. He said he has concerns as to whether PlanRVA meets those regulations. He said he felt that the tagline should read *The Richmond Regional Commission* in order to comply with the Code. The Code states:

Code reads as follows, §15.2-4203:

B. The charter agreement shall set forth:

1. The name of the planning district. An entity organized as a planning district commission under this act may employ the name "regional council" or "regional commission" as a substitute for the name "planning district commission."

Mr. Gregory said he's concerned that the name could be challenged as not complying with Code.

Ms. Busser asked if anyone complained about the name, if the person would submit a complaint to the Governor. The Governor would go to the Secretary of Commerce, who would in turn go to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). She said she didn't see that DHCD would be very concerned with a marketing brand.

Chairman Nordvig indicated that this is a Public Outreach and Engagement Committee and has been tasked with updating the RRPDC's image to be able to identify the agency to the public. It will be up to the committee to determine the agency's audience, what message to send, and the tone of that message.

Ms. Werry said the research conducted by WCG indicated that the RRPDC's audience is varied and encompasses technical staffs in the localities to members of the general public. She said there should be more emphasis on what the agency does in cooperation with the localities and partners.

Ms. Shickle noted that the agency wants to put out the message that the agency is a tool that can be used by those in the region to complete various projects and tasks. Chairman Nordvig agreed that the agency should cast a wide net.

Ms. Busser said it has been difficult to tell positive stories about how there is regional cooperation. Regional cooperation should be promoted via the RRPDC in order to elevate the entire region. Ms. Shickle added that the new website should create a visual for the entire region and transform the work of the RRPDC from an organizational identity to that of a regional identity.

Chairman Nordvig said it will be good to move away from a static government identity.

Ms. Werry said there should be an optimistic and forward looking identity.

Ms. Shickle said there is no guidance in the Code regarding websites. Chairman Nordvig said while the agency works to become more accessible to the public, care must be taken to do so within the guidelines set in the Code.

Mr. Gregory said while he understands the desire to upgrade the identity of RRPDC, everyone should remember that RRPDC is a government entity. The section of the Code relating to naming PDCs was added at a later date at the request of other PDCs to allow flexibility in naming. He said he will still suggest the inclusion of *Richmond* in the tagline to provide more legal cover.

Ms. Shickle said it will be important to continue to move forward with the effort in a positive way. She asked how this can be done.

Ms. Larsen indicated that RRPDC does not have a strong brand currently and no one has said the agency should not rebrand.

Chairman Nordvig reiterated that the Board had charged WCG to consider whether RVA denotes the region; the use of *plan* versus *planning* and whether the words are used as a verb or a noun; and consideration of the legal issues regarding a new marketing brand.

Mr. Gregory said he still has concerns about the PlanRVA and tagline brand as it has been presented this afternoon.

Chairman Nordvig said he'd like to move forward to present this brand to members of the RRPDC Board to ask for their input. Ms. Shickle pointed out that there is a requirement to provide a 10-day notice to members on any item that will require a vote. She said she'd like to be able to continue to move the marketing work forward while waiting for Board action. Chairwoman Newbille had asked for revisions from WCG to be brought back to the Executive Committee first for review.

Ms. Larsen suggested that Chairman Nordvig provide a report to members during the October 11 meeting and let them know that the full presentation will be brought to the Board in November.

Mr. Taylor said he'd like to point out that if the tagline is changed to read *The Richmond Regional Commission*, about 40 percent of the logo will contain the word *Richmond* and may be considered to show more sensitivity to the City of Richmond.

Ms. Larsen asked if WCG could be invited to attend the Executive Committee meeting on October 11. Ms. Shickle said the meeting is scheduled to last 45 minutes. She said she

would recommend that Chairman Nordvig provide an update to the Executive Committee that will include discussion on the legal concerns.

Chairman Nordvig said his report will include information on RVA being accepted as a regional reference; reasoning behind the use of *plan* versus *planning*; and the name of the tagline. He said he'd ask Mr. Gregory to provide information on the requirements of the code with regard to naming. He said he understands there is a risk in using the tagline being suggested.

Ms. Shickle said the intent of updating the agency's brand is to achieve goals within the Strategic Plan. She asked how the agency can mitigate some of the legal risks.

Ms. Larsen said she thought the risk was minimal.

Chairman Nordvig said he'd like to present a recommendation to move ahead with an outline of action that needs to be taken. This can be tempered with the legal caveat regarding the name.

Ms. Larsen said if the majority of the Executive Committee does not want to move ahead, there should be a Plan B available for consideration.

Ms. Busser asked what needs to be done next. Chairman Nordvig asked if it would be advisable to take the Code concerns to local General Assembly members.

Mr. Gregory said he did not think the General Assembly would be the best route. He recommended discussing the issue with DHCD and other PDCs which had recently been through a renaming process to find out why they chose the name they selected. He said as a government entity, PDCs have a higher responsibility to comply with the law.

Ms. Shickle said she will discuss all of this with Chairwoman Newbille when they meet on Friday morning. Ms. Larsen said she will also reach out to Chairwoman Newbille to discuss the issue.

Chairman Nordvig said he would like for WCG to attend the Executive Committee meeting and to have a Plan B option for review if needed.

Ms. Larsen pointed out that this is not a request to legally change the RRPDC's name. That would involve a lengthy Charter revision process. She said it's easier to change the logo. She said she does not want to pause the effort and would rather concentrate on working within the legal system.

Chairman Nordvig reviewed that Ms. Shickle will meet with Chairwoman Newbille; Ms. Larsen will reach out to Chairwoman Newbille; WCG will develop alternatives; he will recommend PlanRVA during his report to the Executive Committee and to the Board during the October 11 meetings.

Ms. Shickle said she would like for the committee to return to its primary charge of public engagement and using the new website as a tool for content on regional efforts. This will be important as the agency moves toward its 50th anniversary celebrations during 2019.

Chairman Nordvig thanked everyone for their input and time. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:35 p.m.