

Public Outreach and Engagement Committee

November 28, 2018
Meeting Notes

Members Attending:

Larry Nordvig, Chair, Powhatan County
Frank Thornton, Henrico County
Chris Winslow, Chesterfield County
Kristen Larson, City of Richmond

Others Attending:

Martha Shickle, RRPDC Executive Director
Katherine Busser, RRPDC Consultant
Julie Fry, RRPDC Staff/Recording Secretary

Chairman Nordvig called the meeting to order at approximately 2:35 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reminded those in attendance that the meeting is considered open and subject to FOIA requests. Chairman Nordvig asked Ms. Shickle to review today's agenda.

Ms. Shickle said she'd like to begin by reminding members that earlier this year, the RRPDC Board adopted a new Strategic Plan. A review was made of the Standing Committee structure and it was determined that new Standing Committees should be established that could work to assist in the implementation of the Strategic Plan and to more fully engage members of the Board in that implementation. There are now four Standing Committees:

- Executive Committee
- Audit/Finance/Facilities
- Public Outreach and Engagement
- Operations

Ms. Shickle said she envisioned the purpose of the Public Outreach and Engagement Committee to review how the agency currently engages the public and how public engagement efforts can be improved. The committee should work to develop a plan for effective public outreach.

There has been an ongoing effort to keep the community aware of the RRPDC and its role in the region. Ms. Shickle said she sees the role of the RRPDC as promoting regional cooperation and assisting when there is a requirement to engage the public.

The agency has been working to identify the tools needed to more effectively reach out to and build a relationship with the public. The two most important tools are the website and the agency's brand identity. By working with West Cary Group, these two tools are being developed.

Now that the tools are being developed, Ms. Shickle said a strategy to use those tools for public engagement is needed. She said staff has been meeting with a group of the region's public information officers over the past several months to learn how the localities handle public engagement.

Chairman Nordvig asked, now that the brand identity has been endorsed by the Executive Committee, how involved staff remains with West Cary Group (WCG) as they work to develop the website. Ms. Busser said she interacts with WCG at least twice a week. The agency contracted with WCG for five deliverables with a set pricing structure. She is currently working with WCG to lay out each section for the website.

Ms. Shickle added that RRPDC is the first PDC that WCG has worked with so extensively. She said it's been a good learning experience for her as WCG has shown her how the website can be used to better communicate with the public.

Ms. Busser said WCG has been asked to make the RRPDC's website easier to understand by the general public. The website needs to be more accessible and engaging. The new brand name – PlanRVA-The Regional Commission – will help identify what the RRPDC does. The agency's legal name – Richmond Regional Planning District Commission – will still be used on all legal documents.

WCG was asked to develop a way to show the partner organizations of the RRPDC and how these all interact. Ms. Busser provided a concept sheet of proposed partner logos/brands for the RRTPO and for CVEMA as these two partners have the most complicated content – plans, studies, public engagement requirements through Title VI, etc. Ms. Busser said WCG looked at other agency websites to see how they handled similar partnerships. One of the first issues to be resolved was to bring the reading level down to an 8th grade level, which is the accepted standard for websites.

Ms. Shickle added that the governance of each partner was also considered. RRTPO is governed by its own Board, and CVEMA is governed by an executive committee. Ms. Busser pointed out that the logos show the partnership with RRPDC by adding *Managed & Staffed by PlanRVA*. This will also be applicable to other partners such as coastal management and the Collaborative. In conversations with Kim Scheeler, consideration is being given to eventually merging the Collaborative website with the RRPDC website and linking to the ChamberRVA website. She said the Collaborative links the public and private sectors for work on regional concerns.

Ms. Larsen said she likes the idea of the partner logos but suggested that there was no need to include the word *staffed*. She said being managed by another group indicates

there is staff involved. She said she liked the top image for the RRTPO and the middle image for CVEMA.

Ms. Larsen asked if the current website lists Commission Board members and the committees they sit on. Ms. Busser said it does; however, there are quite a few steps to go through to get to the information. Ms. Shickle said the website is being designed to emphasize the region and the localities, not RRPDC as an entity.

Ms. Busser reported that on the website's homepage, there will be visuals to show all of the good things about the region.

Ms. Larsen said she hoped there will be more accessible information that the media can use to contact members and/or staff. Ms. Busser said there will be a section for staff contact information. Information for members can also be included and will show only the contact information that is included on the locality websites.

Chairman Nordvig asked if there will be a way for the public to know who to contact for specific issues. Ms. Shickle said all members will be linked to their localities. Ms. Busser added that there will also be information on local events that will link back to either the locality or the event website.

Chairman Nordvig asked if the agency has the staff capacity to keep the website information updated. Ms. Busser said WCG will build the framework for the website and it will be up to the localities to supply content. Ms. Shickle said the regional public information staffs created a hashtag (#oneregionrva) to share local events and announcements. Ms. Busser indicated that CVEMA's announcements are handled on Facebook and Twitter through the Homeland Security website. She said the goal of the RRPDC website will be to connect the public to other resources and to the localities.

Ms. Shickle said that the agency does not have the staff capacity to maintain the website. She said the Strategic Plan focuses on RRPDC as a regional resource center.

Chairman Nordvig pointed out that issues typically generate public participation.

Mr. Thornton said he felt that public participation should also include keeping a high level of congeniality and collegiality between Board members. He said empathy between all of the jurisdictions should be maintained as issues can sometimes cross boundaries. Mr. Thornton said he believes the region is becoming more progressive and forward thinking, and the public needs to know this so they'll continue to come to the region.

Mr. Winslow said staff can help identify topics that have interest to all of the localities. There are times when a regional effort is needed to make things happen. He said he feels that the website should also celebrate regional success stories.

Ms. Larson said she agrees that the jurisdictions want the general public to know how much the jurisdictions cooperate with one another on a routine basis.

Ms. Shickle said RRPDC is the only place where regional leaders can meet and build relationships. She said there should be an effort to determine how to use these relationships to their best advantage.

Ms. Busser said she'd like to move on with another discussion topic before time runs out. She provided information to members on how to build a framework for public engagement as well as ideas about what makes up community engagement. Most all organizations have a vision, mission, and core principles. These should be considered when building a framework for public engagement. She also provided information on levels of community engagement.

Chairman Nordvig said the public should be included in conversations and be offered an opportunity for comment. Ms. Busser noted that community conversations imply they are two-way. Ms. Shickle said several months ago, there was data information included on how many people accessed the RRPDC Facebook and Twitter accounts. She asked if this information should be reintroduced to members.

Ms. Larson asked if staff would be willing to attend local district meetings or provide articles for district newsletters. Ms. Shickle said staff would be happy to assist the elected officials in any capacity to get out information regarding regional projects.

Ms. Busser said she'd like to suggest that the information she provided on building a framework for public engagement be used to develop future committee agendas. Ms. Shickle said work will continue on development of the RRPDC website with a focus on the RRTPO and CVEMA. The next big event within the RRPDC will be an update of the RRTPO Long Range Plan. This update will require public input. She said the agency's upcoming 50th anniversary will also provide an opportunity to map out activities for public engagement.

Mr. Thornton said he's been involved with RRPDC since 1996, and he's excited about the efforts underway to provide more information to the public. He said he feels this work should be used as a template for new members as they come onto the Board.

Chairman Nordvig thanked everyone for their time and said at the next meeting, the information provided by Ms. Busser will be discussed.

Ms. Shickle asked if the January 29 date sent out previously was still good for members. She noted that in the Doodle poll sent out a few weeks ago, there was no clear indication as to whether morning or afternoon meetings worked best. Ms. Larson said she has a standing meeting on Tuesdays at 12:00, so she may be late for a 2:30 meeting. Chairman Nordvig suggested that the January 29, 2:30 p.m. time be kept and the committee will discuss other dates at the next meeting.

There was no additional business or discussion, and Chairman Nordvig adjourned the meeting at approximately 3:55 p.m.

