

MARLBORO COUNTY COUNCIL

MARLBORO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERHSIP BUILDING

COUNCIL CHAMBERS

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORK SESSION
UPDATE OF 2017 PLAN

MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2019

4:30 PM

Present at the meeting: Mr. Jason Steen, Mr. Willie Gladden, Dr. Carolyn Prince, Ms. Corrie Plato, Mr. Charles P. Midgley, Jr., Mr. Verd Odom, Mr. Steve Blackmon, and Mr. Anthony Woods; Mr. Ron Munnerlyn, County Administrator; Mr. Andrew McLeod, County Attorney, Ms. Ainsley Moore, Finance Director; Ms. Doris Sumpter, Administrative Services Director; Mr. Doug Carabo, Public Services Director; Ms. Jackie Hough, Herald-Advocate; and Ms. Patricia Bundy, Clerk to Council.

Invocation: Mr. Anthony Woods

Ms. Carolyn Prince, Chair, opened the meeting and stated Mr. Ron Munnerlyn, County Administrator, would provide an update on the status of the strategic plan which was adopted back in 2017 and recommend next steps in order to move forward.

Mr. Munnerlyn stated he would talk about tasks that have been completed and suggestions on what next steps might include. He asked members of Council to feel free to interrupt and ask questions.

Why Strategic Planning?

Mr. Munnerlyn stated strategic planning allows Council and staff to:

- Forces all to discuss the “big picture”;
- Identifies and prioritizes areas of focus; and
- Creates a “game plan” for staff and for allocation of scarce resources.

County Council’s Strategic Planning process

Mr. Munnerlyn stated that the planning process would allow staff and council to:

1. Understand where we are now and changes that have been made since 2017;
2. Discuss “in-progress” or “unfinished” initiatives;
3. Determine path forward; and
4. Outline NEW initiatives for next two years and beyond.

Establishing a baseline – Where are we now?

Mr. Munnerlyn stated when he came on board, he and Council worked on establishing a baseline and where we are now depended on the baseline which included:

- Facts, not emotion
- Measurements or “metrics” relative to areas of concern
- Population data is an excellent example

Mr. Munnerlyn stated that population from 1990 to 2018 decreased by 21% or 5,982 people from 29,704 to 23,722 (this number does not include prison population).

Mr. Verd Odom stated he felt that about 60% of the population that reside in McColl were senior citizens. He stated when he served as Mayor of McColl back in 1990, many were on fixed incomes and could not work and he knew the number had grown since that time.

Chair Prince stated that many residents in Bennettsville and throughout the County were receiving the Homestead exemption credit which meant they do not pay but a portion of property taxes if any. She stated the population could not be controlled and the county and city were at a disadvantage due to the age and disability of folks.

Mr. Steve Blackmon asked if folks that received the homestead exemption were included in the census numbers. Mr. Munnerlyn confirmed that all folks were included in the census and that the 2020 census was coming up.

Sheriff Charles Lemon stated that some of the 2020 Census folks visited his office recently and asked his staff to pass out packets of information which were provided to Mexicans, children, homeless folks and everyone they could think of. He stated the folks told him that federal money was not available to Marlboro County because folks that are here were not following up with getting included on the census numbers. He stated he needed to be educated on this.

Mr. Munnerlyn stated the number of folks under 18 had gone down by 35%. He stated he felt that some folks were afraid of the census authorities.

Chair Prince stated she felt that some folks did not want to be included in the Census count.

What Should Our Response Be?

Mr. Munnerlyn asked what our response should be with the strategic planning. He stated he felt staff and council should focus on:

- Be REAL about our situation – facts, not emotion
- Identify problems AND resources
- Choose realistic goals & “role models”
- Participate in, but be cautious of, Regionalism
- Lobby, persuade, FIGHT for assistance

Success Since 2017

Mr. Munnerlyn mentioned Success since 2017 and stated he felt the following were successes:

- “Clean-up” events
- Emergency preparedness and response
- MARTi bus system
- New EMS system
- New solid waste trash collection system and contractor
- County organizational efficiency

Mr. Anthony Woods stated folks in Clio had asked him why some of the ambulances were red, white and blue and had the name of Marlboro County Rescue Squad on them. Mr. Munnerlyn stated those ambulances were not responding to E-911 calls, but ambulances with gold and black striping with “Marlboro County EMS” markings were the county’s ambulances.

Mr. Willie Gladden stated he felt that citizens were pleased with the new EMS services now.

Mr. Munnerlyn stated the Task Force found several problems with the EMS services before the county made the decision to take it over and the service was much better. He stated EMS still struggles with hiring folks but staff has worked hard to make sure wages are in line with what other EMS folks in other counties are paying. He stated a request has been submitted to the Marlboro County General Hospital Charities Trust to get help with educating paramedics, etc. and staff was awaiting to see if the Trust would assist with the cost in providing the same.

Mr. Munnerlyn stated a new solid waste collection system and contractor would be in place soon. He stated the tax notices had not gone out yet with the fees added on them. He stated the law requires that we have a legal way to dispose of trash so we had to make changes to have a new system in place.

Mr. Jason Steen stated the existing trash service company seemed to be skipping many trash pickups and stated that when folks call to complain the company picks up their container from the residences.

Mr. Verd Odom stated he felt that the folks that would complain about the fee for trash service were the ones not paying the \$240 per year service with the current contractor.

Ms. Corrie Plato stated that a citizen called her last week and explained that she was on a fixed income and it would be tough to pay the full amount by the deadline date.

Mr. Steve Blackmon stated that he felt that folks were going to be happy with the new service once it was implemented. He stated that he had an uncle that did not like the idea of adding the fees to the tax bills and requiring all folks to have a container but that he had finally gotten through to him and now he was a big supporter of the new service coming soon.

Mr. Munnerlyn mentioned the county’s organizational efficiency. He stated that this year it appeared that the county would only spend approximately \$380,000-\$400,000 from reserve funds which was a huge improvement in the past of needing more than \$1,000,000 from

reserve funds. He stated staff was doing a much better job in keeping up with money being spent and the amount of money needed for upcoming department budgets. He stated the county had hired some folks for positions where folks had retired and mentioned Ms. Doris Sumpter, Mr. Doug Carabo, Mr. Donald Hamilton and the new Recreation Director. He stated some positions required folks with experience and some positions could be filled by folks that could be trained.

Mr. Munnerlyn provided pictures of staff in action during hurricane preparation meetings; public works in action working on dirt roads; staff and folks feeding the hungry during the storms; clean-up of properties in Marlboro County; pictures of grand openings of the Brightsville, Blenheim and McColl Fire Stations; and folks making repairs to county buildings which included the large courtroom in the Courthouse.

Mr. Willie Gladden stated the clean-up of county buildings was really important.

Mr. Munnerlyn stated that Chair Prince wanted to discuss the county buildings that are owned by the county during this next strategic planning process.

Key Initiatives of County Council - Discussion

Mr. Munnerlyn mentioned the Key Initiatives of County Council. He stated some of the key initiatives identified during the last strategic planning in 2017 included:

1. Amend state law and regulations to remove barriers to free standing emergency rooms and/or EMS transports to Urgent Care facilities
2. 4-lane SC-38 from Bennettsville to US-74 in Hamlet
3. Community "clean-up" programs, including Solid Waste collection
4. Improve Recreation programs, adapted to population change
5. Destination Marlboro – Tourism and new residents
6. Develop marketable economic development sites

Amend state law and regulations to remove barriers to free standing emergency rooms

Mr. Munnerlyn stated Senator Gerald Malloy was very helpful in getting meetings set up with key folks to discuss the process needed to follow up in order to get the state law and regulations amended. He stated Resolutions were adopted by Marlboro County Council, as well as the Town of Blenheim, Town of Clio, and City of Bennettsville.

Chair Prince asked if it would be appropriate to consider approaching large hospitals in the North Carolina area to see if they would consider establishing a free-standing emergency room in our county and the costs that would be associated with doing so. Mr. Munnerlyn confirmed he thought that was a good next step and asked members of Council if they would agree to this next step. All agreed.

Mr. Verd Odom asked if there was a hospital within 30 miles of the county that had an existing free standing emergency room that staff could check on to obtain information on how it operates, etc.

Mr. Munnerlyn stated that Mount Pleasant, Simpsonville and Jasper County were the only ones that have free standing emergency rooms. He stated what Council has requested is that laws be amended to allow any border counties with population of less than 40,000 to have free-standing emergency rooms and the only counties that would be affected would be Jasper and Marlboro counties. Mr. Munnerlyn stated it would be helpful to meet with counties that have these free-standing emergency rooms if members of Council would agree. He stated council did get some resistance locally and there must be a unified effort in order to get the laws amended.

4-lane SC-38 from Bennettsville to US-74 in Hamlet

Mr. Munnerlyn stated that Council did not pass a Resolution supporting I-73 which did not go over well with Congressman Tom Rice. He stated SC-38 has become more and more of a safety issue. He stated that he had been approached by the Richmond County Administrator/Manager who stated that their Commissioners were in favor of working with County Council in order to get SC-38 established as a four-lane road to the state line. He stated Richmond County had funds that could help with this project and stated that maybe the county should focus on working to get portions of Highway 38 constructed into a four-lane as a part of I-73. He stated that Richmond County did this and signs were erected stating "Future I-73". He stated he thought maybe state funds could be available if that type effort was made.

Chair Prince stated she had traveled Highway 38 North a good bit lately and suggested that council and staff look at the area of Highway 79 behind Highway 38 as an alternate route for the possible 4-lane road. She stated she felt that might be a better choice.

Mr. Munnerlyn agreed that might be a better route due to so many residences being impacted by the current road. He stated taking more of a westerly route might be the best suggestion and it would also get away from the existing round-a-bouts. He asked if everyone agreed with this idea. All agreed.

Mr. Jason Steen stated he had spoken with a resident that was building a house on Highway 38 who inquired about I-73. He stated he told the resident that he did not see I-73 anywhere in the near future. He stated the more westerly route would be a great idea and stated from April through September, Highway 38 was one of the most dangerous roads in Marlboro County. He mentioned the intersections of Old Wire Road and Highway 79 and stated that the traffic on Highway 38 really slowed down emergency response staff. He stated there should be some statistics available that suggest the maximum number of cars that should travel a two lane road. He stated the two lane road will certainly be a danger for the new trash service trucks that will be stopping at every residence, as well as school busses.

Mr. Willie Gladden stated there were many houses right on the roads as well and suggested that the alternate route may be best idea.

Community "clean-up" programs, including Solid Waste collection

Mr. Munnerlyn stated that the clean-up events have gone very well in the past but would encourage other municipalities to join in with the county. He stated he would like to have a first class convenience center closer to the city limits for folks equipped with paved parking,

staffed with extra employees for roofing contractors and others to take shingles. He stated the county could charge an up charge to cover the costs of collection and there could be a drop-down area for folks to drop and empty the debris. He stated the Boro location would be a great location for this convenience center since it is already fenced in and they could have scales installed. He stated staff would bring back to council a proposal for consideration on this.

Chair Prince asked if the convenience centers were still accepting tires. Mr. Munnerlyn confirmed they were accepting tires from commercial folks for a fee. Mr. Munnerlyn noted the possible need for a tire shredder, as well a recycling program. Chair Prince stated that many folks would recycle if a program could be made available.

Mr. Munnerlyn stated there is now a local company back in business in the county that will accept metal.

Improve Recreation programs, adapted to population change

Mr. Munnerlyn stated activities were needed for older folks, ladies and girls other than stick and ball sports. He stated a new Recreation Director has been hired, as well as a Recreation Coordinator and good things were getting ready to happen here. He stated the CW Love Park in McColl looked really bad and staff would be working to get that park back in shape. He mentioned Ms. Lynn McQueen and the great work she was doing at the Museum and Murchison building. He mentioned the Wade H. Prince Recreation Center and stated that was a great location for activities other than stick and ball sports. He suggested a meeting be held with folks from the City to see what they would be willing to offer and not offer.

Mr. Willie Gladden agreed that activities for the middle aged ladies and senior citizens needed to be made available. He stated that the Community Center was at one time just that – a community center. He stated that the Prince center could be the county's Community Center.

Mr. Anthony Woods agreed that programs should be made available in the afternoons and on the weekends for children who want something to do. He suggested card games, bridge games and suggested that one room be set up with TVs and video games for children. He stated that the Prince Center was a safe place for these activities.

Mr. Munnerlyn suggested that college kids could be paid to man the center while activities were going on and to keep the center open after normal business hours and the weekends for folks. He stated by keeping youth busy, it would help law enforcement and everybody involved.

Chair Prince stated that she had a conversation with Sam Bass about the space next door to the Prince Recreation Center and she would talk with him again. She stated that if they did not plan to use the building that maybe it should be torn down because it was not being kept up. She stated caterers in the county have really made the Prince center look great for events and have gotten many folks interested in the facility.

Destination Marlboro – Tourism and new residents

Mr. Munnerlyn stated that some other folks took this idea. He stated some folks that google Marlboro County see things that are not good. He stated that Marlboro County has many older homes which should be marketed to folks who want to retire in this area. He stated retired folks do not need schools and things of that sort so the fact that our school system is not great would not be an issue for them. He mentioned electronic marketing and stated that the costs would not be much to accomplish. He stated Marlboro County was in a good place and we should push that fact in order to move forward.

Develop marketable economic development sites

Mr. Munnerlyn mentioned the Delta site and stated it was going at a snail's pace. He stated that there is a lot of excitement about this area. He mentioned the old industrial park and stated that the entrance to the park needed to be freshened up which could be used for smaller industries. He stated the Delta site could be used for other larger industries.

Mr. Munnerlyn mentioned work force skills in our area. He stated even if we had four spec buildings, work force keeps industries from coming to our area. He stated this was a real problem for us and it needed to be addressed. He stated that the Partnership recently sent out membership due notices and one local industry leader called and stated he was unsure why he would want to renew the membership because he was afraid that we would get new industries in the county which could possibly take employees from his company.

Chair Prince stated it was her hope that Northeastern Technical College would be providing work-force training for industries but this had not happened yet. She stated she felt that Northeastern needed to be pushed to do more, to have more training programs to prepare folks for the workforce of our local industries.

Mr. Munnerlyn agreed that the goal should be to have Northeastern Technical College provide more vocational/industrial training. He stated the old Winn-Dixie building was transferred to them for that purpose but so far the training has not happened. He stated at the next strategic planning session, this may be reviewed as an initiative. He stated he understood that it takes money to provide these types of training.

Mr. Woods mentioned to recruit businesses, the county needed to have more things to offer after hours. He stated the educational system was certainly a negative point for us and suggested that recreational activities be offered after hours and on the weekends. He stated that folks come here to work but then return to their homes in Florence and other places. He also mentioned the internet problems in the county. He stated this was a real problem for businesses and residents.

Mr. Munnerlyn stated when he became Administrator in 2017, he mentioned the education system and the Superintendent called him out on making the comments. He stated that the School District, Northeastern Technical College and all governmental entities needed to pull together. He stated that Industry Appreciation Day events were scheduled at Arris Manufacturing for this week and it was a real struggle to get folks to attend these type of events.

Next Meeting – New Initiatives

Mr. Munnerlyn mentioned that the following be discussed at the next meeting:

- Public Buildings and Facilities (old library)
- County employees – succession planning, difficulty recruiting new/experienced/skilled employees

Mr. Munnerlyn mentioned that the average age of workers in the United States was 42.4. He stated the average age of elected officials was 63, the average age of those in management/supervisory positions was 53, the average of key/certified personnel was 53 and the average age of regular workers was 44. He stated currently, the county was having to hire folks and train them. He suggested compensation needed to be considered. He stated his vision for jobs in the county was that we have fewer folks but pay those folks more money.

Mr. Munnerlyn stated the personnel manual was being revised and the section on benefits may need to be discussed in executive session.


Chair Prince suggested that staff look at employees and what type of skill sets they may need in the future and then start meeting with career developers at the high school. She stated that it may be possible to identify jobs that may be available in the county so that the high school may prepare and offer the marketable skills needed for the jobs.

Chair Prince stated that she felt Council and staff had done well. She stated that council would continue to brew on the information provided tonight to see how Marlboro County can be made to be a better place to work and live.

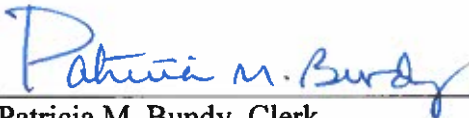
The Strategic Planning Session ended at 5:58 pm.

(SEAL)

ATTEST:



Dr. Carolyn A. Prince, Chair
Marlboro County Council



Patricia M. Bundy, Clerk
Marlboro County Council

Adopted: December 10, 2019