



MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #V.D.3

DATE: MARCH 3, 2014
TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS
FROM: STAFF
SUBJECT: FRCA REPORT ON STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

Five SFRPC Council Members (Stacy Ritter, Patricia Asseff, Sandra Walters, Frank Caplan and Mario Bailey) attended the Florida Regional Councils Association (FRCA) Strategic Assessment held in Tallahassee on January 9-10, 2014. The purpose of the Strategic Assessment was to consider the current status of the Association and create an implementable plan to enhance FRCA's role and the role of Florida's Regional Planning Councils (RPCs) in addressing the challenges and opportunities facing Florida's communities, regions and State in general. The facilitator's report is attached for your information. Council Members attending the Strategic Assessment will provide their perspectives during the Council discussion.

In addition, on February 13, 2013 FRCA's Executive Directors met in Tallahassee and outlined some recommendations that can be addressed in the short term. A summary of that discussion and recommendations are also attached.

Recommendation

For discussion.



Florida Regional Councils Association Strategic Assessment November 2013 – January 2014

About the Florida Planning Councils Association

The Florida Regional Councils Association (FRCA) is the statewide organization of the 11 regional planning councils (RPCs). FRCA strengthens Florida's RPCs, partners with government and the business community to enhance regional economic prosperity, and improves the consistency and quality of RPC programs to ensure they add value to state, regional, and local initiatives.

About the SouthEast Regional Directors Institute

The SouthEast Regional Directors Institute (SERDI) is a professional development association for regional council executive directors and when appropriate, their councils and state associations in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. One of the many services SERDI provides its membership upon request is the design and facilitation of council or association strategic assessments.

OVERVIEW

The Florida Regional Councils Association (FRCA) contracted with the SouthEast Regional Directors Institute (SERDI) to design and facilitate a strategic assessment that would consider the current status of the association and create an implementable plan to enhance FRCA's role and the role of Florida's Regional Planning Councils (RPCs) in addressing the challenges and opportunities facing Florida's communities, regions, and the state in general.

The strategic assessment included three major components: (1) an online survey that was distributed by FRCA and the RPCs to selected community, regional, and statewide leaders, (2) in-person interviews of 31 state government, state association, state non-profits, and consultant leaders all conducted in Tallahassee, and, (3) a strategic retreat of the FRCA Policy Board and other RPC Board members. Participants in the strategic retreat included RPC board members from 10 of the 11 RPCs. Ten of the 11 RPC executive directors and FRCA staff were in attendance at the retreat, participating as staff resources. The complete record of the three major components can be found in the appendices.

STRATEGIES MOVING FORWARD

The RPC board members participating in the retreat identified six areas that they felt would enable RPCs to play a more significant and helpful role in assisting their owners (Florida's local governments) address challenges, opportunities, and issues to enhance regional economic

prosperity, and improve the consistency and quality of RPC programs to ensure they add value to state, regional, and local initiatives. The six areas are: (1) RPC/Local Government/Legislative/Governor's Relations (state/federal), (2) Communication – Best Practices – Updates – Media, etc., (3) Revenue Alternatives/Options, (4) Statewide focus...economic development, transportation, emergency management, environment – energy, water, sewer, beaches, (5) Regional Vision (opportunities/challenges), and, (6) The Data Center/Analysis: Regional Focus. The retreat proceedings and SERDI staff recommended strategies follow:

RPC/Local Government/Legislative/Governor's Relations (state/federal)

For the RPCs to elevate their role and significance as a player in local, regional, and statewide economic development, the RPCs must be clearly understood by their owners (local government), the Florida Legislature, and the Governor.

While the RPCs' entire scope may vary from region to region to account for each unique area of the state, their primary statewide mission and focus must be identified. Only then will it be time for the RPCs to be proactive.

The RPCs must proactively engage; listen and learn; read between the lines; look for hot spots; and, be willing to mediate solutions. The RPCs must proactively ask their local governments and the state legislature, "What can we do to assist you in addressing the challenges and opportunities that you face?" Equally important, will be the issues or opportunities that the RPCs identify from being in the field, which local governments, the Legislature, and the Governor's office need to know about. State, and to a lesser extent, Federal agencies will confidently engage with the RPCs if they know that local governments are totally committed to their RPCs.

RETREAT STRATEGY: FRCA should form an advisory council from among the RPCs' gubernatorial appointees who will request one or more meetings with the Governor to advocate for the RPCs by demonstrating the value of financially supporting RPCs at the state level and how RPCs can further the Governor's priorities.

SERDI STAFF COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATION: Florida is the only state in the southeast and for that matter, may be the only state in the country that has Gubernatorial appointees on the Board of Directors of RPCs. This has been viewed from outside the state as a great thing and makes other states desirous of the same structure. The RPCs have never formally, taken advantage of the appointees through FRCA as a statewide advisory voice to a Governor.

It was recommended by a former member of the Florida Legislature at the retreat that FRCA should formalize a "Gubernatorial Advisory Council (GAC)." The SERDI staff concurs with this recommendation.

The Gubernatorial Appointees, with the help of the FRCA staff and RPC Executive Directors, should put together a platform of ideas emphasizing the value of local government's RPCs and how they are of great value financially and assistance wise to the Governor and the State of Florida. On an on-going basis, the GAC should provide a formal communication line with the Governor and his/her office.

Communication – Best Practices – Updates – Media, etc.

To assist the RPCs in their efforts to clearly lay out their focus in 2014 and beyond, it will be necessary to develop a very well defined, comprehensive, and cohesive communication plan and program. Coordination and delivering the “same message” statewide will be important. The development of press releases on activities, projects, and meetings in each of the 11 regions and at the statewide/FRCA level will be crucial to this effort.

Regularly scheduled communication between RPCs, individual locals governments, media, government officials, and the general public through social media, e.g., facebook and linkedin; and local media, e.g., personal meetings with editorial boards and Public Service Announcements (PSAs) will be crucial. Regularly released communication of best practices or significant events among councils and statewide through FRCA will be a constant reminder of the significant role RPCs can and are playing to enhance community economic development across Florida.

Additionally, it is absolutely critical that FRCA work with the Florida League of Cities (FLC) and the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) to have RPCs included in their outreach efforts to municipalities and counties; after all, they have the same owners and the RPCs are their regional vehicle to address the needs, challenges, and opportunities of local government throughout the state. This can be done through presentations at FLC and FAC meetings and by having a FRCA booth at their conferences as a way of emphasizing the seamless relationship. Similar relationships should be built, as feasible, with the state chamber, Enterprise Florida, local chambers, and other applicable entities.

In total, FRCA should be the central nexus or resource for RPC actions/communications by establishing templates, social media, and a foundation for sharing state concerns and best practices as well as an exchange of ideas and services.

RETREAT STRATEGY: FRCA should develop a communication plan/program that includes at a minimum encouraging each RPC to develop and issue press releases and/or PSAs on activities, projects, and significant accomplishments, and regularly share best practices among the RPCs.

RETREAT STRATEGY: FRCA should work more closely with FLC and FAC to promote RPCs within their networks. FRCA should also have a presence in the exhibit hall during FLC's and FAC's annual conferences.

SERDI STAFF COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION: Concurrence with the Retreat Strategies.

Revenue Alternatives/Options

One of the biggest challenges that the RPCs face moving forward is a revenue stream that enables them to conduct the work that should be expected of them to serve the state and meet the needs of local governments. The decision not to provide the RPCs state funding and to weaken Florida's growth management system has lessened their financial stability.

The RPCs individually and through FRCA should create a business development plan to identify and seek funding sources from state agencies that would value an enhanced RPC network to help them deliver or implement a program statewide. The business development plan could also

include other public and private sector community economic development groups, thus expanding the RPCs' customer base.

It was noted that building an understanding among each RPC and its revenue streams would vary depending on programs and the emphasis that each region's local governments desired from their RPC. However, it was also noted that local governments need to consider how they could use their RPC to pool financial resources to address programs or initiatives that they might not otherwise be able to do.

RETREAT STRATEGY: FRCA should create a business development plan to identify and seek a variety of funding sources to support the priorities and programs of the RPCs.

*SERDI STAFF COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION: The state's local governments need to focus on how they can use **their** RPC as their regional funding pool to address needs that they individually cannot afford, and that would enhance their community.*

Statewide Focus...Economic Development, Transportation, Emergency Management, Environment – Energy, Water, Sewer, Beaches, and, Regional Vision (Opportunities/Challenges)

While during the strategic assessment process it was noted that RPCs universally played a significant role in emergency management efforts, whether it was hurricane evacuation or HAZMAT initiatives or other areas, the FRCA retreat participants felt that even those contributions varied from region to region. Additionally, various programs were identified through survey results and interviews as being offered by RPCs that were helpful but not universally provided statewide.

It was recognized that the RPCs must develop a statewide focus/offering of expertise or services as their base of existence with allowance for additional services that are warranted by region. Immediately, the RPCs should develop a focus and strategies to contribute support for economic development statewide with and on behalf of public and private partners such as chambers of commerce, Enterprise Florida, local economic development organizations, utilities, and others. An area where RPCs can be invaluable to this effort is through the research and provision of databases and information to support the creation of quality jobs and quality growth.

The RPCs, through FRCA, should advocate for FLC and FAC to explore ways that the three associations can ban together and develop a list of priorities, and, an agenda that advocates for local governments, both for municipal and/or county interests and common interests.

RETREAT STRATEGY: RPCs should develop a statewide focus, core programs, and expertise as their base of existence, allowing for additional services as warranted by region.

RETREAT STRATEGY: The RPCs, FAC, and FLC should develop a common agenda and priorities.

SERDI STAFF COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION: It has been duly noted that there are many differences from RPC to RPC throughout Florida. Holmes County and Broward County have nothing in common other than they constitutionally belong to Florida and so forth and so on. However there can be common ground and services that all RPCs must provide as a "core offering" that state agencies, the Legislature, and Governor's office must know they can receive from RPCs regardless of the location. This does not necessarily mean that all expertise will be found in each RPC staff, but it does mean that those services could be provided statewide for all

67 counties. An example of this would be Treasure Coast offering community design services outside their region to other RPCs at another RPC's request.

During the personal interviews, it appeared that hurricane preparedness and other emergency management planning and services was something for which the RPCs received high marks, however, there was less consensus on that at the FRCA retreat. Therefore, as soon as it is feasible, it is recommended that the RPC Executive Directors develop a proposed structure of common expertise's/offerings that they want to market or promote as their core mission/focus. Once these have been agreed to, then the common expertise's/offerings/mission/focus should be recommended to the FRCA policy board for consideration and adoption.

Convener – Organization of Partners

When a relevant, successful regional council is identified, almost always, that regional council is seen as the public convener of its region. When a RPC is a convener, it provides the place where the local governments come together to address multijurisdictional challenges, opportunities, and issues; and, in some cases, helps decide how they will move forward to address them.

In addition to playing the convening role for its owners (local governments), the RPCs should work to be the host convener for partners and other regional interests, public and private, whose goals are to enhance community economic development opportunities for their region.

At the current time, not all of Florida's RPCs are seen as the convener of their region. This is something that must happen. The RPCs, through FRCA, should develop a strategy for how best to campaign for this role and should take the guidance from those RPCs performing this role.

RETREAT STRATEGY: RPCs should either continue to carry out their function as conveners of the region or take steps to become the convener, developing a strategy for how to best communicate and perform this role.

SERDI STAFF COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION: Concurrence with the Retreat Strategy

The Data Center/Analysis: Regional Focus

There is currently no statewide regional data network that is seen as "the data source" in Florida. It is logical that the RPCs should endeavor to fulfill this role. Serving as "the data source" can establish the RPCs to help public and private leaders in their decision making processes to address challenges and opportunities that enhance community economic development in a local community, region, or on a statewide effort.

It is recommended that each RPC would be responsible for maintaining current databases. It will be up to the RPCs, through FRCA, to determine a format for distribution of or access to the data, taking into consideration the various uses of data (e.g., research development).

It would be up to the RPCs, through FRCA, to develop a common statewide database with the ability to expand for regional differences.

RETREAT STRATEGY: RPCs should enhance their role as data centers and determine how to best collect that data and make it accessible throughout the state.

SERDI STAFF COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION: Concurrence with the Retreat Strategy

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY SERDI STAFF

It must be clearly understood by local governments that they are the owners of the RPCs and the local governments must embrace their RPCs

Before the RPCs can become more relevant and enhance their role in supporting their local governments and region, and, gain the confidence of state agencies as reliable partners representing the interest of local governments in all 67 counties, the RPC Executive Directors and their Board of Directors officers must clearly get the commitment of the city and counties in their region to acknowledge and accept ownership of the RPC.

It should be up to each RPC to determine how to go about gaining that commitment and buy-in. It is acknowledged that there are different levels of buy-in currently from RPC to RPC, and perhaps even different levels within an RPC. With that said, a list of considerations is offered:

- Hold an orientation session for each RPC Board of Directors. Provide a historical perspective of how Florida's RPCs were founded and their original stated purpose. Provide an overview of programmatic and funding sources of the RPC currently being undertaken. Clearly present the role of the Board of Directors and their obligation to be in constant communication and engagement with the RPC's owners, the region's local governments. An overview of FRCA should also be included.
- Hold an initial orientation/feedback meeting within each region that logistically works best and then on an annual basis in each county. The orientation/feedback meeting would be held for the city council and county commissioners. It would be the decision of the city and county elected officials as to whether appointed officials such as city or county managers, etc. would attend. The purpose of the orientation/feedback meeting will be to provide an overview of the RPC similar to the one for the Board of Directors. The orientation should provide an overview of what the RPC has done in those jurisdictions over the years as well as what they might currently be working on. Enough time should be given for the elected officials to ask questions as well as to provide feedback as to what concerns they have, opportunities and challenges they are facing in their jurisdictions, and provide time for them to ask for assistance if applicable. The RPC executive director, the RPC Chair, and the RPC Board members representing the jurisdictions in attendance should facilitate the meeting.
- Through this process, a quarterly meeting of the mayors and county chairs should be held with the RPC executive committee and executive director, to update everyone on activities and accomplishments as well provide a forum for the mayors and county chairs to bring to the attention of the RPC challenges, opportunities, etc. that may be occurring and which might best be addressed on a regional/RPC basis.
- Each RPC executive director should host a periodic meeting of his/her region's city and county managers to provide the managers with an update on regional activity as well as to provide a forum for the managers to exchange ideas and request support and assistance from the RPC.

Engagement with Legislators

It was very helpful having three former members of the Florida Legislature participate in the FRCA policy board retreat. The message was very clear. FRCA/RPCs must reach out and educate the Legislature on who the RPCs are and their importance to Florida's local governments, their regions, and how they can be helpful to them. Some angles to consider in engaging Legislators follow:

- The 11 RPC executive directors should work with the FRCA staff to develop a common overview on the RPCs and their worth to local governments, their citizens and, thus their constituents.
- It is important that executive directors set up visits with each member of their legislative delegation, and if at all possible, take key elected officials/board members with them to visit and promote the RPC's value.
- An annual, preferably, late Fall, RPC Board Meeting should be held in each region with the focus being on the Legislative delegation and the upcoming session of the Legislature. The meeting should be the time to make the delegation aware of what is going on at the RPC and in the region, but the majority of the focus should be on the delegation, giving each of them the opportunity to talk about their committees, the upcoming session, their concerns, etc.; hopefully, asking for feedback from the RPC Board members and others present.
- Some consideration might be given to having a Saturday morning breakfast with the delegation several times during the session for the delegation to share thoughts and ask for input and reaction to what is happening in Tallahassee.

As a side note, serious consideration should be given to adopting the portion of the Kentucky regional councils governing structure (Area Development Districts) that would allow a member of the Florida House and a member of the Florida Senate to become voting members of each RPC Board.

State Agency Representatives

State agencies representatives that participated in the personal interviews support the concept of RPCs and in fact, a number of state agencies noted that they had beneficial relationships with individual if not multiple RPCs. The concern they have about RPCs is consistency and quality among all 11 regions, and that for most state agencies, their district boundaries, where applicable, do not align with the 11 RPC regions. Additionally, the state agencies would feel more confident in using the RPCs as a statewide network if they felt confident that all 67 counties and the significant municipalities across the state were confident and committed to the RPCs.

It is recommended that FRCA set up meetings with the appropriate state agency representatives as soon as it is feasible to begin exploring how this partnership can be strengthened and how concerns that state agency representatives may have can be addressed.

Enterprise Florida

The assessment process made it clear that a major emphasis is NOT THE emphasis with the RPCs should be broad-based economic development. What can RPCs do to support the creation of jobs? What can RPCs do to support and assist their communities be more attractive and thus more competitive for job creation, expansion, and retention? It would appear that the Department of Economic Opportunity stands ready to create a stronger partnership with RPCs and that the leadership of Enterprise Florida is open to local government/RPC participation in state economic development efforts. It is recommended that when it becomes feasible, a representative group of FRCA board, staff, and RPC executive directors should meet to contemplate how RPCs could be an asset to DEO and Enterprise Florida's effort in job creation, expansion, and retention throughout the state.

BOUNDARIES

The boundaries of Florida's RPCs were a discussion point in a number of online surveys, the interviews with state level officials, and at the strategic retreat. As part of the discussion on boundaries at the retreat, it was noted that 10 of the 11 RPCs were represented. Executive Director Ron Book explained that the Withlacoochee RPC, headquartered in Ocala, chose not to participate in the retreat. He noted that while there were a lot of different challenges facing the Withlacoochee RPC that had an impact on the statewide network of RPCs, the biggest challenges they were currently facing were financial.

It was the consensus of the retreat participants that while boundaries were a key component and had to be considered/addressed moving forward, the strategic retreat was not the time and place for that consideration. It was recommended that Ron Book, Patty Asseff, President of FRCA, and Brian Teeple, Chair of the RPC Executive Directors Advisory Committee visit with the Withlacoochee RPC Board.

Following the meeting with the Withlacoochee RPC Board, it was recommended that a working group of staff and Policy Board members would work with President Asseff, Mr. Book, and Mr. Teeple to determine the criteria that would enable FRCA to take an educated look at the boundaries, (i.e., commuting patterns, economic centers, metropolitan/micropolitan areas, state agency districts, etc.)



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EXCERPT FROM FEBRUARY 13, 2014 FRCA BUSINESS MEETING SUMMARY

FRCA Strategic Planning Retreat

The members discussed their overall observations regarding the FRCA Strategic Planning Retreat. The conversation then focused on the retreat recommendations and action steps for moving forward. It was noted that some of the recommendations would take time and could not be acted on immediately. Therefore, the members agreed to make the August Policy Board meeting a business meeting that focuses on those issues and to decide whether future fall Policy Board meetings should continue to be held in conjunction with the Florida Association of Counties' or Florida League of Cities' annual conferences due to attendance and other issues.

The two recommendations that the members felt could be addressed in the short term were the creation of a Gubernatorial Advisory Committee and actions to improve communications. There were varying views on whether there should only be one Gubernatorial Advisory Committee made up of all Council gubernatorial appointees or just those who are members of the Policy Board, and whether each council should form its own Gubernatorial Advisory Committee, which several were already in the process of doing. In all cases, it was agreed that the Gubernatorial Advisory Committee(s) needed to be provided with talking points focused on the role of regional planning councils in economic development. However, it was understood that there were issues pertinent to each region, which could also be addressed, such as the unique role that the ECFRPC could play in helping to convene sector plan related activities in the East Central Florida region and the potential importance of those activities to the Governor.

The members agreed to let the Gubernatorial Advisory Committees form on their own from council to council and let them each try to access the Governor. They felt that at this time, there was no pressing need for the committees to coordinate, but did not close the door on future coordinated activities. It was suggested that the committees be encouraged to reach out to the Governor's regional liaisons, as well. The members also agreed that a FRCA Gubernatorial Advisory Committee should be formed from among the appropriate Policy Board members.

With regard to the development of a communications plan, the members identified several ways to improve communications among the councils; for the benefit of the councils' and FRCA's partners; and, for education of elected official at all levels, including the following:

- Create an orientation package explaining the purpose and value of regional planning councils to be given to all newly elected officials;
- Move forward with a press release on the Energy Resiliency Study and for all councils to become more proactive in issuing press releases;
- Create a quarterly FRCA electronic newsletter that is succinct and links to the soon to be developed scorecard website; and,

- Consider issuing regional electronic newsletters, similar to what the NEFRC and WFRPC are currently doing.

Discussion followed regarding the need to coalesce and communicate regional planning council core programs. The members generally agreed that the core council programs were economic development, emergency management, technical assistance, and transportation. However, the recognized challenge was how to capture that under the umbrella of the councils' role as conveners; the councils being key to cost efficiencies; and, the councils' role in strengthening regions by bringing communities together. The members agreed to continue this discussion in February.

