

**ALACHUA COUNTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON RURAL CONCERNS
MINUTES – June 20, 2023**

*Community Support Services @ Alachua County Health Department
218 SE 24th St., Conference Rm. A, Gainesville, FL*

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dr. Rodney Clouser (Chair), Dewayne Baines, Jordan Callaham, Janet Hearn, George Mells, Dr. Cindy Sanders, Amy Van Scoik, Richard Wilhelm

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jennie Ford, Larry Hall (Vice Chair), Juan Salva

STAFF PRESENT:

Ken McMurry, Planner, Growth Management
Regina Williams, Planning Assistant, Growth Management
Ben Chumley, Principal Planner, Growth Management
Sean Mclendon, Economic Development & Food Systems Manager, Office of Sustainability, Equity & Economic Development Strategies Office (SEEDS)

PUBLIC:

Karen Arrington
Tamara Robbins

Chair Clouser started the meeting at 4:03 pm. Seven members were physically present, which was confirmed to satisfy the requirement for at least a quorum physically present under County Advisory Board Guidelines. Chair Clouser welcomed the two members of the public present and said that public comment would be taken at the appropriate points on the agenda.

Committee member George Mells joined the meeting at 4:43.

I. Approval of the Agenda

Chair Clouser asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Motion was made by Ms. Callaham to approve the agenda; seconded by Dr. Sanders.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

II. Introduction of new members

Chair Clouser welcomed the two new RCAC members, Amy Van Scoik and Richard Wilhelm.

III. New Business:

a) Updates on the draft Request for Proposals contract and process for the proposed Meat Processing and Training Facility, and Small-Producer Agriculture Capital Support Grant Program – by Sean Mclendon, Economic and Food Systems Manager, Office of Sustainability, Equity, and Economic Development Strategies

Mr. Mclendon gave an update on the Small-Producer Agriculture Capital Support (SMACA) Grant Program including origins and purpose of the program, previous awards,

supply chain and increased costs issues for recipients, and plans for additional awards using ARPA funds.

There were questions and discussion by Committee members regarding working with recipients on their purchasing issues and follow up on funding of remaining applicants. There were questions from the public regarding farmers' needs, publicity for the program, delays in funding the program, and supply chain issues. Mr. Mclendon said the applications were for a range of capital expenditures for equipment, there would be additional outreach going forward, and applications for ARPA funding are rigorous and time intensive. Dr. Sanders said the program was advertised on the County website and through the Extension Office email list. Chair Clouser said he would like to see the program move towards a dedicated source of funding.

Mr. Mclendon gave an update on the draft Request for Proposals contract and process for the proposed Meat Processing and Training Facility including qualities sought in an operator, timing of process, and long-term operational aspects. He said he plans to present the draft work scope to the County Commission on July 11, followed by advertising the RFP, with responses potentially in the fall. He said members of RCAC would likely be asked to serve on the evaluation committee and, once in operation, an oversight committee.

There were questions and discussion by Committee members regarding details of the scope of work, phasing and enforcement of operator evaluations, allowance for the operator to process their own beef for sale, and responsibility for taxes and finding USDA inspectors. There were additional questions and discussion regarding project impacts due to the veto of state funding and whether any other federal funding is now available. There were questions from the public regarding the County's proposed investment, examples of similar public-private partnerships, the capacity of RCAC to evaluate the financial feasibility of the proposed facility, and the feasibility of flexible facility development based on available funding.

Mr. Mclendon said operator evaluations would be phased in with consideration to startup aspects and overall scope of work, and facility development would be phased based on available funding. He said the County would provide capital investment only, with the operator responsible for all operating expenses including any applicable taxes, and the financial structure would ensure all expenses are covered before any profits to the operator. He said the primary goal is to provide USDA services to small ranchers, but operator sales could be considered, e.g., if limited to local beef and critical to operations. Dr. Sanders said that once the facility is USDA-certified then USDA would be responsible for finding an inspector, and that USDA funds for local foods and small farms are still available. Chair Clouser said he wanted to clarify that he has stated that any financial feasibility study for the facility would involve funded expertise beyond the scope of RCAC. Mr. Mclendon said that flexibility would not compromise USDA standards but was an approach to meeting the Board's objectives with the available funding.

IV. Approval of minutes for 5-16-23 meeting

Motion was made by Dr. Sanders to approve the minutes for the 5-16-2023 meeting; seconded by Ms. Hearn.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

V. Attendance Report

Mr. McMurry said the current Attendance Report showed all members in compliance with the attendance policy at this time. He said the Attendance Report is always sent out with the meeting materials and that if members have any questions, they should ask staff. He said there are 5 member terms ending this year on Sept 30th and that staff will be advertising those soon. He said that one of those terms is now vacant due to Ms. Werner's resignation earlier this month; Chair Clouser said he would like to send a thankyou letter when staff can prepare one.

VI. Chair Comments

Chair Clouser said there will be no RCAC meetings in July, November, and December unless something comes up that needs attention. He said that per previous Committee direction there will be a meeting on the east side of town each quarter, and that can be discussed at the August meeting. He said that at their 2nd meeting in May, the County Commission asked for an update on RCAC, and he is scheduled to follow up with them at their regular meeting on June 27th.

VII. Committee Members Comments

Mr. Baines asked if the Committee could talk about affordable housing in rural areas. Chair Clouser asked staff to keep the topic of rural housing issues related to affordability in mind for a future meeting. Mr. McMurry said that the RCAC Workplan needs to be approved in September and Chair Clouser said discussion of it can start at the August meeting.

VIII. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

IX. Next meeting: August 15, 2023, at Alachua County UF/IFAS Extension Office

X. Adjourn: Motion was made by Ms. Hearn to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Mr. Baines.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Clouser called the meeting to a close at 5:11 pm.

Approved 8-15-2023