



# Meeting Minutes

## January 12, 2024

Location		No. of Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		6	9:04 a.m.	10:51 a.m.	Jacquette Maynard
<b>This Council is composed of the following agencies, farmers, and restauranteurs:</b>	University of the Virgin Islands (UVI)	Department of Agriculture (VIDA)	Department of Education (VIDE)	Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR)	Economic Development Authority (USVI EDA)
	Farmer (TBA)	Farmer (TBA)	Farmer (TBA)	Restauranteur (TBA)	Restauranteur (TBA)
<b>Voting Members/Designees Present:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-chair: Dr. David Hall – President (UVI)</li> <li>Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner Nominee (VIDE)</li> <li>Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI)</li> <li>VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction</li> <li>VIDE Designee: Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living</li> <li>DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Director of Fish and Wildlife</li> </ul>				
<b>Voting Members Absent:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA)</li> <li>Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR)</li> <li>Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner (VIDE)</li> </ul>				
<b>Presenters:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dr. Kendra Harris, Dean of the School of Business (SBDC/Agriculture Business Center)</li> <li>Mr. John Morosco, V.I. SBDC State Director (SBDC/Agriculture Business Center)</li> <li>Dr. Rick Nader, Vice Provost for Res. &amp; Grad Stud (UVI – Office of Sponsored Program)</li> <li>Dr. Lawanda Cummings, Director, Eastern Caribbean Center (UVI – Eastern Caribbean Center)</li> <li>Ms. Trevesia Queeley-Richardson, Research Analyst II (UVI – Eastern Caribbean Center)</li> <li>Attorney Marie Thomas-Griffith (Elevate Law, PLLC)</li> </ul>				

### I. **Welcome, Introduction of Members and Charge**

- The meeting was called to order at 9:04 a.m. by Dr. Hall, Co-Chair of the Local Food and Farm Council.
- Dr. Hall extended New Year's wishes and thanked the members and presenters for their attendance and participation.
- In his opening remarks, Dr. Hall highlighted the role of the Ag Plan Task Force and approved funding and emphasized the accomplishments of the Local Food and Farm Council, partnerships, and plans for community outreach to the farming and fishing communities.
- Dr. Hall noted that each presenter had a 10-minute timeframe to present on their respective tasks.

### II. **Presentation: Dr. Kendra Harris and Mr. John Morosco [Agriculture Business Center]**

Dr. Harris and Mr. Morosco reported on the accomplishments and future goals of the Agriculture Business Center (ABC). Dr. Harris mentioned that they had launched the St. Croix ABC in December and were planning the launch of a center on St. Thomas. She highlighted the ongoing process of appointing a director for the center and the focus on identifying consultants with expertise in the agriculture business. She also mentioned the reserved domain names for the center. Dr. Harris discussed an upcoming meet and greet event in St. John. She also mentioned that training activities focusing on tax preparation, recordkeeping, and USDA services will be scheduled in February. She noted that one farmer on St. John had already been licensed due to the Center, and additional Farmers were in the pipeline.

Mr. Morosco added that the website for the ABC was operational, and Karen Jones, the Associate State Director for the SBDC, was leading the office until a director was appointed. He encouraged attendance at the St. Thomas opening event, where 19

dignitaries were confirmed to attend. Mr. Morosco emphasized building trust and working one-on-one with the farming community. He mentioned that the SBDC staff had contacted farmers to spread the word about the center's services.

**Discussion:**

- Mr. Wickrema shared that some members may have a conflict with the grand opening of the ABC on St. Thomas due to Westin's grand opening in St. John.
- Dr. Adamu asked why two domain names (.org and .com) were needed. **Mr. Morosco explained it was done to protect the domain names.**
- Dr. Adamu inquired about the specific farm of the licensed farmer under the center. **Mr. Morosco mentioned that it was Chance Tall Tree Farm.**
- Dr. Nader offered a resource for agriculture-related topics: Jack Elliot from Texas A&M Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture, who would visit the island on January 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>.

**III. Presentation: Dr. Rick Nader [Office of Sponsored Program]**

Dr. Rick Nader presented on behalf of Director Mindy Solivan. He mentioned their efforts in identifying a senior agriculture specialist, Dr. Muhammad Ali, who recently retired from the USDA. who will strategically coordinate training and capacity-building activities for grant acquisition. They have also implemented a fund finder to identify funding opportunities. Dr. Nader outlined their planned training, including the fund finder, administering funding, and workshops on compliance and sustainability. He emphasized the need to compile a list of agency personnel to be trained, as well as UVI faculty and staff. Dr. Nader proposed a kickoff orientation with Dr. Ali and said they aim to have him on board by mid-February. He then shared Dr. Ali's background, highlighting his extensive experience in agriculture and life sciences and his role as a senior Executive Service officer at USDA. Dr. Nader encouraged the council to provide guidance and advice on the timing of Dr. Ali's visit and training sessions to move forward with their efforts.

**Discussion:**

- Dr. Hall inquired about identifying specific grants related to agriculture, particularly in the water area, as part of the efforts of the Ag Plan. **Dr. Nader explained that they have an inventory of grants at UVI and mentioned the need to collaborate with other departments and agencies in the Virgin Islands to identify relevant grants.**
- Dr. Hall emphasized the urgency of identifying grants and requested a meeting be convened with Commissioner Petersen, Dean Adamu, Director Greg Guannel, and himself to narrow the list of priorities and focus their efforts on pursuing those grants.

**IV. Presentation: Dr. Lawanda Cummings and Ms. Trevesia Queeley-Richardson [Eastern Caribbean Center]**

Dr. Cummings emphasized the collaborative nature of gathering information for the data collection. She discussed the administrative groundwork, study design, structure, and the efforts to recruit farm liaisons and interviewers. Dr. Cummings also highlighted the importance of the GIS data collection and the proposed assessment plan, which included the annual farm survey, agricultural business trends, project progression, and community awareness. Dr. Cummings announced that Mr. Dale Morton and Mr. Stafford Crossman are the farm liaisons hired by the ECC for St. Thomas and St. Croix, respectively. Dr. Cummings also shared an image of the project's brochure and mentioned plans for the liaisons to attend the Ag Fairs on both islands.

**Discussion:**

- Dr. Harris commended Dr. Cummings on the comprehensive plan and asked if fishing liaisons were included.
  - **Dr. Cummings responded that they hadn't included fishing liaisons but were open to the idea.**
  - **Dr. Habtes mentioned that DPNR has two fishing liaisons in the territory who could be a great resource. He offered to connect Dr. Cummings with them to facilitate the distribution of information.**
- Dr. Hall acknowledged the importance of not duplicating efforts and encouraged collaboration between all liaisons.
- Dr. Hall emphasized that the ECC would assess the efforts of various programs and encouraged members and presenters to consider how they measure success.

**V. Presentation: Dr. Renee Charleswell [VI Department of Education]**

Dr. Charleswell provided an update on the progress of selecting a candidate for the position of Director of Sustainability. She stated that interviews for the position were scheduled for the upcoming week. If a candidate is selected, she hopes they will be ready for approval by the Governor and in the position by early February. Dr. Charleswell also mentioned that the funding for the Seed of Security Program, which had previously been removed, has been reinstated. She expressed the importance of having the new director in place to ensure the success of the program's various components.

**Discussion:**

- Dr. Hall inquired about the next steps once the Director of Sustainability is in place and what individuals can expect to see in the next 2 to 3 months.

- ***Dr. Charleswell responded by stating that the first steps would involve meeting the individual schools selected for the pilot program, identifying the program's locations within the schools, and making necessary purchases for materials and resources to start the program.***
- Dr. Hall inquired whether the pilot schools had already been identified. He suggested that sharing the list of pilot schools would be beneficial for public outreach efforts, especially when presenting at the Agriculture Fair. ***Dr. Charleswell confirmed that this information would be shared.***

#### **VI. Presentation: Dr. Louis Petersen [VI Department of Agriculture]**

Dr. Petersen stated that all personnel requisitions for vacant positions have been approved. However, the department has been developing comprehensive job descriptions for these positions, aiming to complete them by the end of the month. He highlighted the challenge of not having an executive assistant in his office, the difficulty in filling that role despite efforts, and the recent resignation of a support staff. Dr. Petersen emphasized the need to promote from within and to advertise vacancies at the upcoming Ag Fair.

Regarding the farmers slated to join the Council, Dr. Petersen explained that the two farmers had not received the questionnaires required for their submissions. He said he would work with them next week to ensure their questionnaires and resumes were completed. A similar process would follow for the St. John farmer. He also said his goal is to send the letter to the St. John farmers.

#### **Discussion:**

- Dr. Hall announced that at the end of the formal presentation, he would like to revisit the topics regarding the Farmers. He asked Dr. Harris and Mr. Wickrema, who were part of the Ag Plan Task Force, to stay for this discussion.

#### **VII. Presentation: Attorney Marie Thomas-Griffith [Elevate Law, PLLC]**

Attorney Thomas-Griffith provided an overview of the framework for the Public-Private Partnership Agreement that would serve as a contract between the Council and the farming community. She highlighted the need for a formal document outlining eligibility requirements, post-award commitments, and the application process for the matching program and loan funds provided by the Council. Attorney Thomas-Griffith committed to presenting drafts of these documents in the next 7 to 10 days.

Regarding the eligibility checklist, Attorney Thomas-Griffith emphasized the need for flexibility in criteria, considering factors such as term commitments to the Council, projects funded, and the amount of support received from other local programs. She discussed post-award commitments, including governance, monitoring, and evaluation components. She stressed the importance of engaging with farmers to guide their leadership and management for efficiency and productivity.

Attorney Thomas-Griffith outlined her approach to monitoring, which involves tracking metrics related to farm product improvement and expansion. She explained that the monitoring process would be tailored to each farmer's needs and circumstances. Finally, she discussed the evaluation process for award-recipient farmers and mentioned the possibility of profit-sharing or equity partnerships. However, she expressed reservations about the latter, particularly for small-scale farmers applying for federal funding.

#### **Discussion:**

- Dr. Hall suggested that questions for Attorney Thomas-Griffith be held until the documents are reviewed. He inquired about possibly having draft documents available to share with farmers in February, especially in preparation for the Agriculture Fair on St. Croix.
  - ***Attorney Thomas-Griffith responded that the 7 to 10 days to provide the three draft documents was realistic. However, she emphasized the importance of communicating with farmers well before the Ag Fair to ensure they can review the documents and understand the resources and growth potential.***
- Dr. Harris expressed the need for balanced messaging to assure smaller-scale farmers resources are available for them and that the program is designed to help them grow to access greater support in the future.
- Dr. Hall acknowledged the importance of outreach efforts, including town halls with farmers, and mentioned plans for more engagement with the farming community.

#### **VIII. Addressing Farmer Representation on the Council**

Dr. Hall thanked Dr. Petersen for his update on the appointment process of farmers on the Council. He addressed the prolonged absence of farmers, emphasizing the criticism during the Ag Plan Task Force period when farmers were absent despite the significant work being undertaken. Dr. Hall acknowledged that the appointment process might take several, and he put forward the following recommendations:

1. **Inviting Ag Plan Task Force Farmers:** inviting farmer members from the Task Force to participate informally in Council activities. These farmers could attend meetings, engage in discussions, and access materials developed by the Council.

2. **Non-Official Status:** The Task Force farmers would not be official members, given that the Council will decide. Official members have to be appointed by the Governor. However, their presence could provide valuable insights.
3. **Involving the Fishing Community:** possibly extending an invitation to individuals from the fishing community to serve on the council in an informal capacity.
4. **Compensation for Informal Members:** to compensate informal members with the honorarium as specified in the legislation for appointed farmers as an acknowledgment of their voluntary contribution.

**Discussion:**

The members debated the idea of inviting both the Ag. Plan Task Force farmers and the governor-appointed farmers as informal members, totaling five recommended members as an addition to the Council. Concerns were raised about the potential unwieldiness of having too many representatives. A main concern was voting authority for the informal farmer members in the Councils' actions. It was also emphasized that any compensation provided should be framed as an honorarium for their participation, with a clear funding source. Additionally, there was a discussion about inviting restaurant representatives in an informal capacity. The council members collectively agreed on the following:

1. **Invitation to Farmers:** the decision was made to invite both groups of farmers, comprising the three from the Ag Plan Task Force and the two farmers appointed by the Governor, to join the Council. Formal invitation letters will be sent to all five farmers, and they will serve as informal council members in the interim. This decision aimed to ensure representation from farmers of various sizes to maintain fairness and parity.
2. **Honorarium for Informal Members:** the five informal farmer members would be eligible to receive the required honorarium for every meeting they attend.
3. **No Voting Authority:** the five informal farmer members would not possess voting authority but would be encouraged to participate and provide input in meetings, discussions, events, and activities.

The consensus among the council members was that inviting these five farmers would address the issue of inadequate farmer representation, allowing farmers to have a seat at the table, thus addressing past criticism of exclusions. These informal farmer positions would serve as a short-term solution until the nomination process is complete to ensure farmer participation in the Council's activities. A joint correspondence will be sent to these farmers, inviting them to participate in the next meeting.

**IX. Official Letterhead Options and Event Logistics**

1. **Letterhead:** Two letterhead options were presented, and the members selected option one, which lists the names and agencies of the council members.
2. **Reception and Roundtable Event hosted by Delegate Plaskett:** Dr. Hall mentioned the upcoming invitation from Delegate Plaskett for members to participate in the reception and roundtable event.
3. **25<sup>th</sup> Annual Bordeaux Vegan Fair:** Dr. Petersen will organize to set up the tent and table; some of the flyer content will be revised; volunteers are lacking, and the members decided that they will manage the table.

**X. Next Meeting:** The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, January 26, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

**XI. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 10:51 a.m.