

LOCAL FOOD AND FARM COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Date:		Start Time	Location		Recorder
8/18/2023		1:04 p.m.	via Zoom Video Conferencing		Jacquette Maynard
This Council is composed of the following agencies, farmers, and restaurateurs:	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	Farmer	Farmer	Restaurateur	Restaurateur
Voting Members/Designees Present:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-chair: Dr. David Hall – President (UVI) Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner Nominee (VIDE) Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife VIDE Designee: Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living 				
Voting Members Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI) Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner (VIDE) Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) 				
Guest(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Torhera Durand – Sustainable Development Associate (UVI Research & Technology Park, Corp) Mindy Solivan – Director (UVI Office of Sponsored Programs) 				

I. Welcome, Introduction of Members and Charge

- Dr. Petersen, co-chair, presided over the meeting and welcomed all attendees, including guests Torhera Durand and Mindy Solivan.
- Dr. Hall explained that he would be participating in the meeting from the airport, as he was traveling to attend a funeral.
- Director Biggs said that he would present the EDA’s proposed guidelines regarding multiple funding programs at the next meeting.
- Mr. Wickrema indicated that would be standing in for Dr. Wells-Hedrington and will be the Designee for VIDE and will present on their agenda item, “Budget for Seeds of Sustainability Pilot Program.”
- Dr. Angeli was identified as the Designee for DPNR.

II. Meeting Minutes: August 4, 2023

- There were no corrections or changes observed to the Minutes.
- Dr. Angeli motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes as presented; seconded by Dr. Hall.

III. Inclusion of the Fishing Community as part of the LFFC’s Activities and outreach initiative

Attachment: [Ag Plan Fishing Industry Reference](#)

- Dr. Angeli briefly recaps the discussion from the previous meeting, in which the Council discussed ways to enhance inclusivity and develop strategies for engaging the fishing community. This initiative aimed to address concerns related to capacity, limitations, capital funds, and technical guidance within the fishing industry. Dr. Angeli emphasized that this proposal is not intended to impose additional work. Instead, it aimed to ensure that the fishing community is well-informed about the opportunities outlined in the Local Food and Farm Council plans. In support of this proposal, Dr. Angeli referenced the 2011 updated version of the Farmers, Fisherman, and

Consumer Assistance Act under the Virgin Islands Code (V.I.C.) Title 7, Chapter 13, subsection 1. Definition 92 within this section specifically defines fishing, which includes that agricultural activities involve catching fish.

- **Discussion:**

- Dr. Petersen discussed his understanding of the referenced V.I.C statute, mentioning that it previously included Aquaculture. He inquired if the proposed expansion of the fishing sector would include fishers in the open sea. **Dr. Angeli confirmed that the intention is to include both farmers of fish and fishers of wild fish.**
- Dr. Petersen raised concerns about the potential impact of the proposed expansion on the existing definitions and provisions. **Director Biggs suggested seeking legal counsel's interpretation to ensure consistency with existing statutes.**
- Director Biggs shared that lending programs related to farmers and fishers are coupled together, indicating similarities in the requirements for the USVIEDA lending program requirements.
- Dr. Hall provided input from the perspective of the Ag Plan Task Force that developed the plan, emphasizing the importance of reaching out to the fishing community directly. He mentioned that the initial decision not to include the fishing community was due to a lack of direct contact and engagement with them. Dr. Hall proposed that before expanding, the Council should be responsible for directly contacting the fishing community, conducting surveys, and town hall meetings to hear their concerns. **Mr. Wickrema agreed. He shared that from his previous experiences and the importance of engaging with the fishing community.**

Action(s):

1. **To consult with legal counsel on interpreting existing statutes relating to expanding the Plan to the fishing sector based on the Virgin Islands Code (V.I.C.) Title 7, Chapter 13, subsection 1. Definition 92.**
2. **There was a consensus by the Council members to move forward with including the fishing community as part of LLFC outreach initiatives to address their needs.**

IV. Presentation by the UVI Office of Sponsored Program

Attachment: [Agriculture Plan Briefing](#)

- Director Solivan presented information on the sponsored program funding initiatives at UVI, emphasizing its diverse components. She explained that the initiatives encompass various areas, including pre-and post-award activities, grants management, and training. The initiative involves collaborations with the School of Agriculture, the Caribbean Green Technology Center, and the School of Business to identify funding opportunities, water security assessments, educational outreach, and curriculum development. Dr. Solivan elaborated on a grant-finding system called Grant Forward, which aids in identifying suitable funding opportunities.

Additionally, Dr. Solivan described a multi-pronged training approach involving internal and external expertise and electronic training options. Dr. Solivan outlined a budget allocation for training services, grant specialists, travel, and technological tools. She emphasized flexibility in budget allocation to adapt to evolving needs based on collaboration with the Council and relevant agencies. Her presentation briefly highlighted plans by the ECC, in which she expressed her limitations in addressing detailed inquiries about the ECC's specific plans and suggested that the Council contact Dr. Cummings, Director of the ECC regarding any matters related to surveys. Further, Director Solivan stated that the Caribbean Green Technology Center will also be a valuable resource to the Council.

- **Discussion:**

The discussion centered on the budget submission for the educational outreach programs, mainly focusing on curriculum integration, aquaponics, grant opportunities, the role of the Education Curriculum Specialists, and the importance of K-12 education.

- Mr. Wickrema raised a question about the Education Curriculum Specialist and the term FTE, particularly what 0.5 FTE represents. He also mentioned the need for a competitive salary for the Grant Specialist position to ensure dedicated work and passion for those involved in educational programs. **Director Solivan responded that the FTE represents Full-Time Equivalent, and the 0.5 represents an employee who performs about 50% of a full-time employee's workload.**

- Mr. Wickrema discussed the importance and integration of aquaponics and agriculture-based curriculum into the educational system, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between plants and marine life. He noted the importance of incorporating aquaponics, fish farming, and land-based agriculture into the pilot project. Mr. Wickrema emphasized the impact and learning abilities of about 2,000 students across 6 schools that would be involved in the program in agriculture and other subjects like math, biology, and chemistry. Mr. Wickrema also mentioned the collaborative involvement of VIDA with the project and suggested seeking grant support from VIDE and other agencies. He also discussed hiring a Director of Sustainability and their potential involvement in training.
- Dr. Hall raised concerns about networking and collaboration between different entities to ensure seamless coordination and mentioned the need for effective communication and routine networking meetings to align efforts. Dr. Hall acknowledged that the K-12 grade education segment might require more attention and funding for successful implementation, and he stressed the need to find funding to implement the K-12 curriculum fully.
- Director Solivan addressed concerns about the Grant Specialist's salary, explained that it's competitive within industry standards, and salary setting considerations at UVI. She discussed the different levels of Grant Specialist positions and their collaboration with different departments. She discussed the focus on K-12 curriculum development and the challenges of securing funding for it.
- Dr. Angeli inquired about the effectiveness and usage of the "Fund Finder" tool for finding funding opportunities. She asked about the possibility of using "Fund Finder" for grants administration and finding opportunities. ***Director Solivan discussed the Fund Finder tool and its role in identifying funding opportunities across different agencies. She further clarified that the Fund Finder is primarily used for grant prospecting and for grant administration. She mentioned the importance of targeting key areas and subject matter when searching for grant opportunities and discussed the potential for specialized training sessions to educate participants on grant writing and the submission process.***

Action(s):

1. **The Council accepted the recommendation for the Educational Curriculum Specialist to collaborate with the School of Agriculture and Business to develop K -12 curriculum materials.**
2. **Director Solivan will explore grant opportunities and organize training sessions to enhance grant application skills.**
3. **For positions within the Council's authority, consideration will be made for equity and competitive salary levels.**
4. **There was a consensus to invite Dr. Cummings, Director of the ECC, to the next meeting.**
5. **The Council members voted unanimously to accept the proposal for funding.**

V. Local Farm and Food Coordinator Position (Revisited)

Attachment: [List of Recommended VIDA Positions and Budget](#)

- Dr. Petersen first reported on the progress in securing farmer membership into the Council He stated that among the three recommended farmers, one was not approved. However, the efforts and focus are being made on the two approved farmers. He informed the Council that there is another potential farmer being considered and is expecting a response shortly. Dr. Petersen shared that some individuals expressed reluctance to assume the added responsibilities of joining the Council.
- Secondly, Dr. Petersen discussed the importance of reinstating vital roles as outlined by the Agricultural Act. He noted the Department's reduction in headcount and diversity over time, highlighting positions like civil engineer, pathologist, soil and water conservationist, soil scientist, entomologist, and farm and food coordinator. He shared that the budget allocation of \$350,000 was designated for these positions; however, this funding might not fully cover all roles. Dr. Petersen presented the proposed budget breakdown for identified priority positions: civil engineer, pathologist, farm and food coordinator. The proposed budget of \$302,000 fell short of the initial \$350,000, and he suggested exploring additional funding sources, potentially utilizing differences between the amounts. This surplus could address transportation needs and potentially fund an executive assistant for the food and farm coordinator.

- **Discussion:**

- Dr. Hall commended the thoughtfulness put into promoting the presented recommendations. He expressed no objections to proceeding with the recommended positions. He emphasized the need to support the Farm and Food Coordinator, even if the remaining budget couldn't cover a full-time person. He suggested exploring part-time support to help with the coordinator's responsibilities. **Dr. Petersen agreed to probe the part-time assistant role.**
- Dr. Petersen addressed Dr. Hall's concern and clarified the modification to the organizational structure. He confirmed that the Farm and Food Coordinator would report directly to him. He mentioned adjustments made to the descriptions and plans for seeking funding for the economist position and explained the rationale for selecting the pathologist position over an economist.
- Director Biggs supported the presented recommendations and emphasized the availability of lending programs at the EDA. He mentioned the consulting firm's involvement and explained plans to present a comprehensive proposal for the next meeting. He discussed plans for a kitchen incubator and collaboration with programs like the Junior Chef Challenge.
- Mr. Wickrema inquired about assistance for schools participating in the Seeds of Sustainability or Planet Green Force Project, particularly in starting clubs and programs to support entrepreneurship and food sales. **Director Biggs responded that while no specific grants were available, they were open to discussing potential collaboration on this initiative and providing guidance to students interested in business.**

Action(s):

1. **The Council voted unanimously to approve VIDA's recommended positions and budget.**

VI. Presentation of the "Seeds of Sustainability" budget.

- Mr. Harith Wickrema presented the Seeds of Sustainability budget proposal on behalf of VIDE. The budget included plans for implementing an aquaponic systems in six schools. These systems would require ongoing maintenance, with support for maintenance staff and providing each student with four grow bags. A new position, Director of Sustainability, had been approved and posted, with potential candidates being interviewed by Dr. Renee Charleswell, Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction at VIDE. The budget also covered employee benefits and resources like soil, seeds, and fertilizer, where input was taken from experts at VIDA. The budget showed a commitment to the program's success, including support from Planet Green Force for additional funding. Mr. Wickrema emphasized the importance of involving families and communities, aiming to engage 2,000 students across the territory through after-school clubs, awards, field trips, and a monthly newsletter, all aimed at promoting agricultural and scientific pursuits among students and parents,
- **Discussion:**
 - Dr. Angeli sought clarification on the projected budget's flexibility and benchmarking. She inquired about the ability to adjust costs substantially higher or lower than projections and questioned how costs had been benchmarked, citing the expensive nature of soil and propagation programs for native and endangered plants. **Mr. Wickrema responded, explaining that the numbers were formulated for soil, seed, and fertilizer through discussions with Assistant Commissioner Collingwood of VIDA. He stated that the numbers were considered reasonable and mentioned plans with major vendors and manufacturers, emphasizing scientific accuracy in determining factors like the grow bag size that would explain allocations in the budget.**
 - Dr. Angeli further inquired about the potential for cost change, whether funds could be moved between categories, and whether the Council's approval would be required for changes. **Mr. Wickrema responded that while micromanagement wouldn't be ideal, he was committed to privately fund increases up to a certain point to ensure results and reduce bureaucracy.**
 - Director Biggs proposed a motion that once a budget is approved a budget, it should function as a lump sum budget, allowing movement within categories unless changes exceed a 25% threshold, in which case, the Council approval would be necessary. **Dr. Petersen and Mr. Wickrema supported this motion.**

- Dr. Petersen raised the point of program sustainability, suggesting that efforts should be made to secure external funding, potentially from USDA, and to develop programs capable of generating their own funding.

Action(s):

- 1. Director Biggs made a motion for the Council to adopt a lump sum budget method, wherein approved budget can change within categories up to a 25% limit that once a budget is approved, it becomes a lump sum budget with allowances for movement within categories, subject to a 25% threshold for significant changes. Mr. Wickrema seconded this. Dr. Petersen called for a show of hands, and the members voted unanimously. The motion was approved.**
- 2. Dr. Petersen moved for the Council to approve the Seeds of Sustainability budget as presented. Members voted unanimously to approve this budget.**

VII. Next Meeting

- It was agreed that the next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, September 1, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

VIII. Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 2:34 p.m.