



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

July 26, 2024

Location		Members Present	Guest Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		9	0	9:04 a.m.	10:32 a.m.	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 (TBA)	Farmer (TBA)		Farmer (TBA)	Restaurateur (TBA)	Restaurateur (TBA)
Present:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chair: Dr. David Hall – President (UVI) • Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDE) • Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) • VIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living • Honorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – The B-Hive Farm Collective • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm • Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee 					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) • Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner • Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI) • DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife • VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction • DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries • Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado • Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition 					

I. Welcome, Member Introductions, and Charge

Dr. Hall called the Local Food and Farm Council meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. He welcomed all members, expressed gratitude for their presence. He noted that the introduction of the new President, Dr. Safiya George, was initially planned for this session; however, due to a miscommunication, she did not receive an invitation. Dr. Hall informed the Council that his last day as President will be the 31st of this month, after which Dr. George will assume leadership. He emphasized that while it may take her some time to fully understand the role, the Council is fortunate to have a co-chair who will ensure continuity with Dr. Petersen and Dr. George. Dr. Hall encouraged the Council to welcome Dr. George with the same warmth they extended to him, and to also provide support to Dr. Petersen.

II. Meeting Minutes: June 12, 2024

- The minutes were reviewed, and no corrections or modifications were observed.
- Mr. Wickrema moved to approve the meeting minutes as presented, with Dr. Petersen seconding the motion.
- The minutes were unanimously approved with no objections or abstentions.

III. Status and Strategy for Upcoming Budget Hearing and Testimony

Dr. Hall informed the Council that the hearing date, originally scheduled for the previous day on St. Croix, was postponed to Thursday morning and relocated to St. Thomas. Dr. Hall stated that he informed Senator Fret Gregory's office, that given the revised date of the hearing, he will provide the testimony on behalf of the Council, despite his official role ending on July 31st. Dr. Hall emphasized the importance of the testimony in demonstrating the Council's progress over the past year and outlined the key areas covered, including updates on the funds received by various departments, such as the Departments of Agriculture and Education, respectively. He stated that the testimony was circulated among Council members, and he solicited active feedback from the members.

Key Testimony Points Identified

Progress and Funding Requests

- Testimony highlighted the Council's progress in its first year despite challenges.
- A significant focus was on the need for continued funding into FY 2025.
- The Council received \$4.6M in funding requests for the Grant Program which far exceeds the available \$500,000.
- Emphasized the need for increased Legislative support to meet growing demands.

New Initiatives

- Requested additional funding for organic farming initiatives, led by Dr. Nate Olive, with a proposed budget of \$27,000.
- A recommendation discussed was to identify areas in which the fishing community could sell products; however, this was not included in the testimony and the suggestion was to address this matter directly with the Governor.

Dr. Hall requested that the members identify anticipated questions and concerns from the Testimony

- *Farmers' Representation:* Dr. Hall and Dr. Petersen discussed the issue of the Council operating without officially vetted farmer members as required by Legislation.
- *Coordination and Silos:* Concerns were raised about the coordination of agricultural projects within the Territory. Also, the testimony acknowledged the need for improved communication and collaboration to avoid working in silos.
- *Recruitment Challenges:* Discussed challenges in recruiting local talent for specialized positions like plant pathologists and agricultural engineers. Accordingly, consideration of expanding the search beyond the Territory, including potential candidates from Puerto Rico. Dr. Hall suggested partnerships with UVI to make these positions more attractive.
- *Mentorship and Training:* Mr. Creque proposed developing local talent through mentorship programs, similar to successful models in other Regions. Dr. Petersen shared that there are ongoing training programs in collaboration with UVI and other organizations to build local capacity.

IV. PPIIF Grant Program – Review and Selection Subcommittee Update

Dr. Hall reported that the Selection Committee had planned to present their funding recommendations for various applicants but has not yet completed the process. He explained the reviewing process, and process, in which two Reviewers are required to score and comment on each application; however, one Reviewer had not finished their work by the last meeting. Accordingly, special meetings regarding the finalization and ratification of the winners.

Special Meeting Scheduled for Subcommittee and Council

- The subcommittee will meet initially on July 31, 2024, to finalize the winners
- A subsequent meeting will be held with the members to approve the Selection Subcommittee's recommendations for the Public-Private Investment Fund process.
- Attendees were asked to confirm their availability for the meeting.
- Farmers and fishers who submitted applications can attend the meeting; however, at the point of discussing the PPIIF final selection, they must recuse themselves from the discussion during the meeting.

Administrative Issues and Next Steps

Several administrative issues need to be addressed, including:

- Signing agreements by selected recipients.
- Sending notices to both selected and non-selected applicants.
- Coordinating the distribution of checks with EDA.
- Planning a public announcement after recipients are informed.
- Determining whether grant funds are taxable; Legal Counsel will be consulted.

V. Passing of the Gavel

- Dr. Hall discussed the leadership transition to Dr. Petersen, effective after the meeting on July 31st.
- Dr. Petersen will organize meetings and continue to co-chair the meetings.
- Dr. Hall emphasized the importance of holding funding recipients accountable and continuing to collect relevant data from farmers and fishers.
- Attorney Thomas Griffith, who has been providing pro bono legal services, may require a formal billing arrangement if her services continue.

VI. 501(C)(3) Filing Update

- Dr. Hall reported that Legal Counsel is working on filing the 501(c)(3) application to allow the Council to raise additional funds for farmers and fishers. He stated that Dr. Adamu and Dr. Petersen were named as organizing members for the application.

VII. Final Remarks

- Dr. Hall thanked all Council members and the Administrative team for their dedication and support.
- Council members shared reflections on their time working with Dr. Hall and expressed gratitude and admiration for his leadership.

VIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

IX. Upcoming Meetings

1. *Special Meeting:* The Review and Selection Subcommittee will meet on Wednesday, July 31, 2024, at 8:00 a.m.
2. *Special Meeting:* The LFFC Council Members will meet on Wednesday, July 31, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.
3. *Regular Meeting:* The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held **on Friday, August 9, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.**