



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

August 9, 2024

Location		Members Present	Guest Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		10	0	9:04 a.m.	10:13 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. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDE) • Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) • 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: 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 – Ityopia Rootz Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm • Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition 					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) • Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner • VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction • DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries • Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee • Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado 					

I. Welcome, Member Introductions, and Charge

Dr. Petersen called the Local Food and Farm Council meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. He welcomed all members and expressed gratitude for their presence. He acknowledged that the Council is in a transitional phase due to the appointment of the new president at UVI. He said more details on the transition would be shared as the meeting progressed.

II. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes (July 26, 2024)

- The minutes were reviewed, and no corrections or modifications were observed.
- Mr. Creque moved to approve the minutes as presented, and Dr. Olive seconded the motion.
- The minutes were unanimously approved with no objections or abstentions.

III. Budget Hearing Debriefing

- Dr. Petersen provided an overview of the budget hearing held on August 1st. He highlighted the Council's request for \$3 million for the PPI funding initiative and an additional \$27,000 to \$29,000 for organic farming inputs. The Council requested that unspent funds from various entities, including the Department of Education, Department of Agriculture, and UVI, be carried over into the next fiscal year to continue grant opportunities for farmers.
- Dr. Usman inquired about the specifics of these funding requests, particularly regarding the total carryover funds from each agency. He emphasized the need for a clear understanding to gauge the Council's financial standing.
- Dr. Petersen noted that exact carryover amounts were not immediately available and suggested that representatives from each entity provide those figures for review.
- Dr. Olive asked about the legislative process for approving funding increases. Dr. Petersen explained that the Budget Committee on Finance and Appropriations reviews all testimonies and funding availability before making

final decisions, which are recommended to the government. He emphasized that no funding is guaranteed until the entire process is completed.

New Topic I: Formation of a Budget Subcommittee

- Ms. Brown raised concerns about the Council's financial management, questioning whether a Budget Committee exists and how the Council oversees financial decisions, including the approval of certain purchases. She suggested that the Council might need a process for regular budget reconciliation and oversight, particularly if the legislature appropriates money to the Council.
- Director Biggs supported Ms. Brown's suggestion, recommending the formation of a Budget Committee. He proposed that the committee consist of a small group that could review budget matters and then present their recommendations to the full Council.
- Dr. Adamu emphasized the importance of the Budget Subcommittee, suggesting that more time be given for members to consider whether they would like to volunteer for this responsibility.
- Ms. Sellassie added that farmers should be represented on the Budget Subcommittee to ensure their interests are considered. She volunteered to be part of the committee, stressing the importance of tracking and managing the funds already distributed, particularly concerning the recent grant.
- Dr. Petersen stated that the Budget Subcommittee topic be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

IV. PPIF Grant Program Update

- Dr. Petersen explained that all applicants had been notified, and currently, Ms. Maynard and Ms. Brown were compiling and organizing the necessary files and agreements for the successful applicants.
- Dr. Olive followed up on a concern raised in a previous meeting by Mr. Creque regarding whether any feedback would be provided to applicants who were not selected. He inquired if the Council had plans to guide those applicants on strengthening their applications for future submissions.
 - Dr. Petersen responded, recalling the previous discussion where it was agreed that providing individualized feedback to each applicant would be ideal, but it was recognized as a time-consuming task. Instead, the Council considered organizing a workshop to address common issues and concerns identified during the review process. Dr. Petersen reiterated that while the Council couldn't provide detailed feedback to each applicant, they would consider responding to inquiries on a case-by-case basis.
- Ms. Brown added that the Council had discussed providing feedback upon inquiry but did not plan to offer blanket feedback to all applicants due to capacity constraints. She emphasized the need to build infrastructure to support applicants in the future better.
- Dr. Olive asked for clarification on the grant process and whether the applications were reviewed and ranked.
 - Dr. Petersen confirmed that some applications were excluded for incomplete answers, while others were ranked based on their responses.
 - Ms. Brown confirmed that the applications were first reviewed for completeness. Incomplete applications were set aside, and the complete ones were then reviewed and ranked. She also mentioned that the process was conducted anonymously, with applications assigned numbers to ensure impartiality.
 - Dr. Adamu emphasized that all applications were reviewed, and that no application was discarded without consideration. He suggested that this information should be communicated to applicants.
- Mr. Creque inquired whether the letters sent to applicants who did not receive funding indicated they could request feedback on why their application was denied.
 - Dr. Petersen and Ms. Maynard acknowledged that the communication did not expressly state this, and it was suggested that future correspondence include such language.
- Director Biggs proposed that the letter clarify that at least two people reviewed all applications and that the process was anonymous. He also pointed out that not all applications were denied due to quality; some were not funded due to budget constraints.
- Ms. Brown emphasized the importance of improving the process in the future. She also suggested organizing a workshop to help applicants understand the evaluation criteria and how to strengthen their applications.
- Dr. Adamu suggested that the evaluation criteria should be clearly outlined in the application materials to help applicants understand how their submissions would be assessed.
 - Ms. Brown agreed, noting that while criteria were provided online, more specific workshops and guidance would benefit future grant cycles.
 - Director Biggs echoed the importance of workshops and suggested leveraging the AgBC to assist in educating farmers on the application process.

- Ms. Brown confirmed the intention was to partner with the AgBC and other organizations to host workshops. She noted that scheduling conflicts prevented this during the last grant cycle.
- Ms. Sellassie raised a concern about the compliance requirements for fund recipients, asking whether there is paperwork to ensure recipients know what they need to comply with.
 - Dr. Petersen confirmed that agreements binding the recipients to comply with the funding requirements would be signed. The coordinator, Ms. Brown, and the office would oversee the project site.

New Topic II: PPIF Grant Program Future Actions

- Mr. Creque raised concerns about how applicants could know where they stood in ranking.
 - Dr. Petersen suggested that this information could be provided upon request, emphasizing that the Council could not proactively provide detailed feedback to all applicants.
 - Director Biggs reiterated the need for clear communication in the application process, suggesting that letters to applicants clarify the reasons for not being funded, whether due to incomplete applications or limited available funds.
- Dr. Petersen and other members agreed on the need for better communication and the potential for additional workshops to support future applicants.
- There was a consensus among all members to incorporate these lessons into the next PPIF Grant initiative.

V. Open Discussion

a. Bordeaux Irrigation and Watershed Plan Workshop

- Dr. Petersen provided an overview of the challenges related to water resources in the Bordeaux area. Two meetings were scheduled for August 15th: one at UVI's Cooperative Extension Service Conference Room at 1 PM and another in Bordeaux with the farmers who are the project's direct beneficiaries.
 - Dr. Angeli added that there are ten watershed management plans within DPNR and provided a link in the chat. She mentioned that invitations had been extended to other agencies, including the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which sends leadership from the Southeast to the meetings.
 - Ms. Sellassie mentioned that We Grow Food, Inc., collaborating with NRCS, has worked on this project for five years. She offered to connect Dr. Angeli with the necessary contacts.
- Mr. Wickrema asked Dr. Angeli about plans to help farmers with soil nutrition and composting.
 - Dr. Angeli responded that this function falls under the Waste Management division rather than DPNR.
- Dr. Petersen emphasized the importance of interagency collaboration to ensure that related issues are addressed efficiently and mentioned the need for follow-up communications to ensure all necessary parties are involved.

b. Council Budget and Travel Consideration

- Ms. Brown raised a point about establishing a travel budget for the Council, especially when members must travel for meetings. She questioned whether the Council's funds could cover travel expenses for members attending meetings on different islands.
 - Dr. Petersen agreed that this is an important consideration and mentioned that the Budget Subcommittee should address these issues to create internal policies for the entire board's approval.
- Dr. Adamu expressed concern about attending the Bordeaux meeting, given the lack of a formal travel reimbursement structure. He suggested that without such a structure, Dr. Petersen could represent the Council.
 - Dr. Petersen responded by confirming that the department would likely absorb travel expenses for Council members as a contribution to the Council's work.

c. Transition and Future Meetings

- Dr. Petersen discussed the upcoming transition with the new UVI President, who is expected to co-chair the Council meetings.
- Dr. Petersen proposed postponing the next meeting to September 6th to allow Dr. George time to transition into her role and receive an overview of the Council.

d. Recognizing Dr. Hall

- Dr. Olive proposed recognizing Dr. Hall's contributions to the Council by sending a thank-you gift.
 - Director Biggs suggested sending a local fruit and vegetable basket as a gesture of appreciation.

VI. Adjournment

Dr. Petersen called for a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was moved by Director Biggs and seconded by Dr. Adamu. The meeting was adjourned with a reminder that the next meeting is scheduled for September 6th at 9 AM.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:13 a.m.