Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission



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*“Improving the Quality of Life for the Citizens of*

*Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, Henry and Houston Counties”*

**MINUTES**

**SEARP&DC BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

**MARCH 9, 2023**

**3:00 PM**

The **SECOND** regularly scheduled meeting of the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission Board of Directors for **FISCAL YEAR 2023** convened on **March 9, 2023** at **3:00 PM.** The meeting was held on the sixth floor of the Houston County Administration Building.

**Board Officers:** Second Vice Chairman Mark Blankenship (Dale County).

**Executive Committee Members**: Earl Gilmore (Barbour County), Thomas Crossley (Barbour County), Rob Hinson (Geneva County), Toby Seay (Geneva County), David Money (Henry County), and Matt Parker (Houston County).

**Board of Directors**: Rachel Smith (Barbour County), Jack Tibbs (Barbour County), Joe Richburg (Covington County), Terry Holley (Covington County), Charlotte Hunt (Covington County), Steve McKinnon (Dale County), Frankie Wilson (Dale County), Leah Harlow (Dale County), Derek Dickens (Dale County), Henry Grimsley (Henry County), Greg Reynolds (Henry County), Jimmy Money (Henry County), Brandon Shoupe (Houston County), Kimberly Trotter, (Houston County) and Michael Smith (Houston County).

### ITEM 1: Call to Order / Invocation / Establishment of Quorum – Acting Chairperson Blankenship

Acting Chairperson Blankenship called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM and asked David Money to begin the meeting with prayer. He welcomed everyone and introduced the new board member, Michael Smith (Houston County).

**ITEM 2: Review and Approval of Minutes from the form December 15, 2022 – Acting Chairperson Blankenship**

Matt Parker made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Thomas Crossley seconded the motion. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

**ITEM 3: Report of Officers, Committees, and Departments**

1. **Executive Committee Report**
2. RLF Board Member Re-Appointment – Rachel Armstrong

Ms. Armstrong stated that Mr. Ronnie Tucker is a member of the Loan Administration Board and his term has expired. She stated that Mr. Tucker is still willing to serve. Ms. Armstrong recommended the Board reappoint Mr. Tucker. Board members were involved in the discussion and participated in the development and approval of RLF Board Member. David Money made the motion to reappoint Mr. Ronnie Tucker to the Loan Administration Board. Matt Parker seconded the motion. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

1. Resolution #459 Head Start and Early Childhood Development Program (HSECD)

Evidence-Based COVID-19 Mitigation Policy – Scott Farmer

Mr. Farmer in formed the Board that in January 2023, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) published its Final Rule “Mitigating the Spread of COVID-19 in Head Start Programs”; andas part of the Final Rule, the Head Start Performance Standard 1302.47(b) (9) requires the program to have an evidence-based COVID-19 mitigation policy developed in consultation with the Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC). He stated the evidence-based COVID-19 mitigation policy should be scaled up or down based on the impact of COVID-19 in the community to protect staff, children, and families from COVID-19 infection; and an evidence-based COVID-19 mitigation policy has been drafted utilizing guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), reviewed by the HSAC, and adopted by the Policy Council. Therefore, he is requesting that the Board approve the Evidence-Based

COVID 19-Mitigation Policy. Board members were involved in the discussion and participated in the development and approval of Resolution #459. Terry Holley made a motion to approve the Resolution. Frankie Wilson seconded the motion. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

1. Resolution #460 Head Start and Early Childhood Development Program (HSECD) Change of Scope: Home-Based Option for Headland – Scott Farmer

Mr. Farmer informed the Board that the Headland Head Start / Early Head Start Center was indefinitely closed due to extensive health and safety needs in August 2022; and**,** the Office of Head Start has allowed temporary use of the HSECD Program’s COVID-19 learning protocols for Headland enrollees. He stated after extensive investigation, there are no existing facilities in the Headland community available to operate a center-based Head Start and Early Head Start program without extensive renovations; and it is the desire of the Agency to provide more extensive services to the enrolled children and families in Headland; and Head Start Program Performance Standards provide a home-based option for delivering services. The Agency desires to apply for a Change of Scope to develop a home-based option to more comprehensively serve the Headland community until a center is reestablished. Therefore, he is requesting that the Board approve applying for a Change of Scope: Home-Based option for Headland. Board members were involved in the discussion and participated in the development and approval of Resolution #460. Matt Parker made a motion to approve the Resolution. Frankie Wilson seconded the motion. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

1. Resolution #461 Head Start and Early Childhood Development Program (HSECD) FY 2023 One-Time Supplemental Funding Request - Headland Facility – Scott Farmer

Mr. Farmer informed the Board that the Headland Head Start / Early Head Start Center was indefinitely closed due to extensive health and safety needs in August 2022; and after extensive investigation, there are no existing facilities in the Headland community available to operate a center-based Head Start and Early Head Start program without extensive renovations. The Office of Head Start has occasional availability of one-time supplemental funds available to Head Start grantees for the purpose of program improvements; and if awarded, these supplemental funds will be applied toward a much-needed facility to serve the Headland community. He stated the Board of Directors is required by HHS/ACF to participate in the development of and approval of funding applications for facility improvements. Therefore, he is requesting that the Board of Directors of the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission approve the application for one-time supplemental funds that will be applied for a facility serving Headland Head Start / Early Head Start Center, and that the Executive Director be authorized to sign documents related to these one-time supplemental funds. Board members were involved in the discussion and participated in the development and approval of Resolution #461. Jack Tibbs made a motion to approve the Resolution. Terry Holley seconded the motion. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

1. Resolution #462 Head Start and Early Childhood Development Program (HSECD) Change of Scope: Enrollment Reduction – Scott Farmer

Mr. Farmer informed the Board that the Head Start and Early Childhood Development Program has a low cost per child for both Head Start and Early Head Start programs in comparison with other Head Start grantees. Recent implementation of a new Wage Plan, providing needed increases in compensation and fringe benefits to Head Start and Early Head Start personnel, and the impacts of inflation on non-personnel costs, including supplies, insurance, and maintenance needs, are greatly constraining program operations, which is causing challenges in maintaining a high-quality program. Long-term impacts of COVID-19 in rural communities and the continued expansion of the State of Alabama’s First Class Pre-K Program is impacting current and future enrollment; and Section 640(g)(3) of the Head Start Act allows programs to propose a reduction to funded enrollment to maintain quality of program services. He stated the Office of Head Start issued Information Memorandum ACF-IM-HS-22-09 (November 7, 2022) regarding Enrollment Reductions and Conversion of Head Start Slots to Early Head Start Slots providing guidance to development and submission of these type of requests. After careful consideration of several factors, including the Community Assessment, Annual Self-Assessment, Staffing and Training Needs, Wage Comparability Study, Service Delivery Model, Equity, Staff Structure, and Ongoing Budgetary Concerns, the Agency desires to request a Change of Scope for Enrollment Reduction of no more than 52 enrollment slots (three Head Start classrooms) while maintaining current funding levels in order to increase the quality of the program. Mr. Farmer stated the cost savings will be achieved through salary and fringe benefits reduction for six employees (three classroom teachers and three classroom teacher assistants), classroom supply savings, food service contractual savings for adult meals, mental health observation savings for three classrooms, nutrition service savings for three classrooms, child liability insurance savings for a reduction of 52 children, software and curriculum savings, and professional development savings for six employees, and the cost savings will be redistributed for use for an Education Coach position (including fringe benefits), additional child service supplies for remaining classrooms, needed facility upgrades (including recreational), and additional resources for staff professional development in attaining needed credentials. He noted the Agency desires to request the Change of Scope for Enrollment Reduction to occur between academic years in order to lessen programmatic and community impacts. Therefore, he is requesting that the Board of Directors of the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission approve applying for a Change of Scope: Enrollment Reduction. Board members were involved in the discussion and participated in the development and approval of Resolution #462. Earl Gilmore made a motion to approve the Resolution. David Money seconded the motion. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

1. Resolution #463 – Key Hire (Chief Financial Officer) – Wendy Cook

Ms. Cook informed the Board that the position for the Chief Financial Officer of the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission (SEARP&DC) became vacant due to the resignation of Lakisha Davis effective February 17, 2023.The Chief Financial Officer position was advertised and posted in several locations and platforms and multiple qualified applicants indicated their interest in and applied for the position. She stated after interviewing the top three candidates for the position, Judith Tate was determined the most qualified for the position, including having earned a Bachelor of Science in Accounting and having working experience and knowledge of the fiscal complexity required for SEARP&DC’s programs and services. The six-member interview panel comprising of two SEARP&DC Board Members with a finance background, a Policy Council Member with a budgeting and contracts background, the Executive Director, the Deputy Director, and the Human Resources Director unanimously selected Judith Tate for the position.She is requesting that the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission hereby approves and supports the employment of Judith Tate in the position of Chief Financial Officer. Board members were involved in the discussion and participated in the development and approval of Resolution #463. Jack Tibbs made a motion to approve the Resolution. Earl Gilmore seconded the motion. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

1. Resolution #464 – Key Hire (HSECD Director) – Wendy Cook

Ms. Cook informed the Board that the position for the Head Start and Early Childhood Development Director of the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission (SEARP&DC) became vacant due to the resignation of Celeste Jones effective February 10, 2023. The Head Start and Early Childhood Development Director position was advertised and posted in several locations and platforms and multiple qualified applicants indicated their interest in and applied for the position. She stated after scheduling interviews for the top three candidates for the position, Erin Norsworthy was determined the most qualified for the position, including having earned a Master of Arts in Human Services and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, and having working experience and knowledge of the fiscal complexity required for SEARP&DC’s programs and services. The six-member interview panel comprising of a SEARP&DC Board Member with a public service and educational leadership background, a Policy Council Member with a public service background, the Executive Director, the Deputy Director, the Assistant Head Start / Early Head Start Program Director, and the Human Resources Director unanimously selected Erin Norsworthy for the position.Therefore, she is requesting that the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission hereby approves and supports the employment of Erin Norsworthy in the position of Head Start and Early Childhood Development Director. Board members were involved in the discussion and participated in the development and approval of Resolution #464. Thomas Crossley made a motion to approve the Resolution. Terry Holley seconded the motion. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

1. New Job to Classification Plan – GIS Technician – Wendy Cook

Ms. Cook informed the Board that she was requesting there approval of the New Job to Classification Plan – GIS Technician. She stated in looking at our Organizational needs following the resignation of our IT Assistant, we propose a change in this position to that of a GIS Technician. This combined position would allow for both assistance to the IT department as well as the Community and Economic Development department. Under the supervision of the Community and Economic Development Director, the GIS Technician performs routine and technical work on mapping projects related to departmental and interdepartmental activities in the SEARPDC region. The employee maintains the regional database with updated demographic and planning related data; prepares reports and maps as required; and assists in the preparation of applications and planning assessments. The employee operates the agency's GIS and department network; provides technical planning assistance to member governments and performs general duties as required in the operation of the department. She noted we are seeking a candidate with knowledge of both IT and GIS Mapping. If mapping experience can’t be found, our plan is to find a candidate that will be knowledgeable, eager and trainable that can be taught the mapping system. Board members were involved in the discussion and participated in the development and approval of New Job to Classification Plan – GIS Technician. Steve McKinnon made a motion to approve the GIS Technician Job Classification Plan. Frankie Wilson seconded the motion. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

### Agency Administration

* 1. **FY 2023 Reports**
	2. **Finance Department – Scott Farmer**

He informed the Board that the Agency Wide Budget report runs from October 2022-January 2023. The year-to-date percentage of the budget is 35% and the budget average for four months is 33%. Mr. Farmer stated that the Finance Department continues to assist our programs through a variety of tasks such as payrolls, accounts payable, billing, reporting to our funding sources, daily deposits and many other tasks. He also presented a detailed budget report and credit card expenditure for the agency.

* 1. **Community/Economic Development – Emily VanScyoc**

Ms. VanScyoc informed the Board that the Small Business Loan Programs closed a Revolving Loan Fund to: *Ryno Resell, LLC, Dothan* (10 new jobs) Intermediary Relending Program to: *Complete Signs, LLC,* D*othan* (27 jobs). She stated The Economic Development Administration grant to the ***Eufaula Water Works*** and the City of ***Eufaula*** to provide improvements to the Eufaula Wastewater Treatment facility is expected to be let for bids within the next 90 days. The proposed project will benefit the Medical Industries of Americas Latex Plant and other businesses located in the Eufaula Industrial Park. The Eufaula Water Works is still in the process of obtaining easements in the project area. SEARP&DC staff prepared and submitted a CDBG/Economic Development application to the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs on behalf of the ***Coffee County Commission***. The grant requested $350,000 to provide water system improvements to serve Command Sergeant Major Bennie G. Adkins Veterans Home in Coffee County. The project is expected to create 224 new jobs. The Water Works of the City of Enterprise will contribute $532,517 in local matching funds. The VA Home will spend approximately $105,211,186 to bring the project to fruition. This grant application has been approved and construction is expected to begin in March. The CED staff is continuing to work on Comprehensive Plans for the following: *City of* ***Daleville***, *City of* ***Taylor*** and *Town of* ***Ariton***. The plans are in various development stages. SEARP&DC staff and Delaney Consultant Services, Inc. are continuing to assist with the Fort Rucker Compatible Use Study to mitigate encroachment and incompatible land uses near Fort Rucker. The public involvement phase is expected to begin within the next 90 days. She also stated on January 18, 2023, a SR-167/SR-52 Feasibility Study Stakeholder Meeting was held. Sain Associates, Inc. provided an overview of the completed, in progress and upcoming tasks within the scope of the study. The study is now in the public input phase. Sain presented a recommended public meeting format and a comment form, mapping, and stakeholder one-pager. Public meetings will be held on March 7, 2023 at the Enterprise Civic Center and March 14, 2023 at Wiregrass Electric Cooperative. Both meetings will be held from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

She noted CED staff participated in CDBG Public Hearing for upcoming grant cycle conducted by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs and the Compliance Workshop for PY2022 funded projects. Rachel Armstrong provided continuing administrative support services for Grow Southeast.

Emily VanScyoc participated in MPO/RPO monthly virtual meetings.

CED staff participated in the Mayor’s Round Table held at the Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce.

Rachel Armstrong attend the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) annual training conference held in Memphis, TN.

CED staff have been participating in broadband technical assistance meetings. Local jurisdictions and counties will receive technical assistance to understand broadband gaps and opportunities in their respective communities. The technical assistance is being provided by representatives from the Alabama Digital Expansion Division of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs.

* 1. **Senior Employment – Gail Clark**

Ms. Clark informed the Board that current enrollment as of March 9, 2023:

33 – Center for Workforce Inclusion (formally SSAI) – Authorized - 37

11 - Alabama Department of Senior Services (ADSS) – Authorized - 16

This is the third quarter of PY2022-2023. We are in line for spending on the Federal Grant. We are still in the learning phase for the new Department of Labor reporting database. The reports are still not available at this time. They hope to have them available for next quarter. She stated we are also in the second quarter of the 2022-2023 project year on the State grant. We are in line for spending on the State Grant also. As of March 9, 2023, we are in line with spending on the Federal grant. We are also in line for spending on the State grant. Our Federal Grant as of March 9, 2023, we have enrolled four (4) new participants and had seven (7) exit the program this project year. We have had two (2) seniors enter employment this project year. State Grant – As of December 15, 2022, we have enrolled four (4) new participants and had six (6) exit the program this project year. Two (2) seniors enter employment. The present time there are no host agencies closed due to Covid-19. Since remote work has been approve for both the Federal and State grants, we have one Federal participant working from home. We do not have any State participants working from home at this time. The guidelines to get agencies approved for remote work are very stringent. We are working toward getting more agencies approved for remote work. We continue to request that our host agencies help us get the word out about our program and help us recruit in their local area. We also continue to request that the members of the Board of Directors help by spreading the word in their local communities and thank them in advance for their assistance.

* 1. **Head Start – Jackie Daniels**

Ms. Daniels informed the Board those of us at, SEARP&DC Head Start and Early Childhood Development Program met with Jason Flowers, our TTA rep. from the Regional Office, February 14 & 15 to assess the facilities. We are await the final report. He states, that we are headed in right direction with the Headland center and the other centers were in good shape (no major concerns). We had a Health Advisory Committee Meeting to discuss & share their input our Mitigation Plan. There were health officials and other community representatives who served on this committee. She stated. Our Mental Health consultants have made monthly observation to the classrooms. Our staff made CLASS observations on several classroom and discussed the results with the center staff. Head Start supports staff in numerous ways, one being the educational opportunities. She noted currently, there are ten staff who are attending college, to further their education in Child Development.

**Enrollment:**

One of Office of Head Start’s focus is FULL enrollment. We are in the process of recruiting for our upcoming 2023-24 school year. Therefore, spread the word, Head Start serves children from birth to five years old. They can apply for Early Head Start, Head Start and PreK by using the QR codes.

**Early Head Start**

 **Head Start**  **Pre K**

 

We are working with Alabama Quality STARS staff to improve our DHR STAR rating. The representatives are working with the Center Directors to accomplish this task. So, in the near future will have earned two or more stars.

PreK funds were used to update the six PreK classrooms. She noted the Center Directors would begin the Annual Self-Assessment process. Therefore, we will be calling on some of you to assist us with this task.

Staff has participated in the following trainings:

 - Regional In-Service (Feb. 17)

 - Region IV Head Start Conference

 - Various webinars

* 1. **Human Resources – Wendy Cook**

Ms. Cook informed the Board that within the past month that she has enjoyed meeting most of the staff, learning about the organization, current policies and procedures, and some of the DHR/ Head start regulations. She is currently in the process of “studying” all the different standards for compliance and the reorganization of personnel records. Her plan is to pilot more efficiency, structure and impartialness to the Human Resources Department. She stated as the new Human Resource Director, the immediate goal is to meet with all program staff to better assess the needs of each program and where change and/or improvements that might be needed. She stated in looking at our Organizational needs following the resignation of our IT Assistant, we propose a change in this position to that of a GIS Technician. This combined position would allow for both assistance to the IT department as well as the Community and Economic Development department.

We are seeking a candidate with knowledge of both IT and GIS Mapping. If mapping experience can’t be found, our plan is to find a candidate that will be knowledgeable, eager and trainable that can be taught the mapping system.

* 1. **Wiregrass Transit Authority – Mike Crittenden**

Mr. Crittenden informed that Board that Wiregrass Transit Authority (WTA) personnel currently consists of 2 dispatchers, 9 full- time bus drivers and 3 part-time bus drivers. We are currently recruiting for two part-time drivers and one full-time dispatcher. The current fleet consists 6 twenty-passenger buses, 1 fourteen-passenger bus, 2-twelve passenger buses and 5 ten-passenger buses and 4 twenty-four passenger buses (total of 18). Our Capital consist of Accepted delivery of the four twenty-for passenger buses on February 15, 2023 and Awaiting delivery of 14 twelve-passenger High Roof vans. He stated WTA hosted ALDOT/ALTRANS Customer Assistance Readiness & Essential Sensitivity Training (C.A.R.E.S.) February 6-7, 2023. He noted we are awaiting approval of FY 2023 Section 5307 ARPA grant application for $394,272. This funding will not be available going forward. We are preparing grant applications for FY 18 5307 funds in the amount of $901,132 and FY 20 5339 funds for $109,085. We must be under contract prior to the lapsing deadline of 09/30/23.

* 1. **Executive Director – Scott Farmer**

Mr. Farmer informed the Board the following information:

**Facility Update:**

Working on a Professional Services agreement with Goodwyn, Mills & Cawood (with ALDOT guidance) for design work.

**Redistricting:**

Provided guidance:

City of Abbeville (for 2025 Municipal Election)

City of Eufaula (for 2025 Municipal Election)

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA):**

City of Elba HMGP

Assisted the City in closing out its acquisition/demolition project pertaining to floodprone structures.

City of Hartford HMGP

Working with the City on two generator grants.

**Other:**

Working with CED Department on BUILD Grant implementation.

Attending monthly meetings with Office of Head Start Point of Contact (and HSECD management).

Assisting HSECD management with Headland facility situation and other programmatic needs.

Working with Finance and Wiregrass Transit departments on additional implementation for FTA Direct Recipient process.

**Conferences, Workshops, Events, or Webinars attended:**

AARC Executive Committee Meetings (Multiple)

Grow Southeast Alabama Elected Officials Luncheon (Troy – January 12)

Mayor’s Roundtable (Dothan – January 25)

Main Street Alabama Board of Directors Meeting (Foley – February 8)

SE Alabama Workforce Council WOW East – Luncheon/Tour (Dothan – February 16)

**Federal Funding Update**

**FY 2023**

FY 2023 Omnibus bill will provide funding for additional compensation in Head Start / Early Head Start grant for applicable staff.

Do not foresee major changes to other Agency programs.

**FY 2024**

President’s Budget should be released soon, beginning the appropriations process.

* 1. **Executive Director’s Evaluation**

The Executive Committee recommended approval of a new Evaluation Survey Form for the Executive Director’s evaluation. It was discussed for Chairperson Lori Wilcoxon to administer the Evaluation during the next quarter.

**ITEM 4: New Business**

None Noted

**ITEM 5: Announcements and/or Other Business**

None Noted

**ITEM 6: Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.

Chairperson Executive Assistant