

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Annual Retreat

July 20 - 22, 2012

Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay

Cambridge, Maryland

Summary Report

Background

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) held its thirteenth annual retreat on July 20 -22 at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay in Cambridge, Maryland.

COG initiated an annual, summer retreat process beginning in 1999. The first retreat featured a facilitated process that resulted in the landmark COG Strategic Plan that was formally adopted by the COG Board later that year. Subsequent retreats have been used to update the Strategic Plan, to determine COG's role in helping guide major regional assets and infrastructure, and to set the course for the Board's work on a regional planning program – *Region Forward*. The retreats also have served as an important networking opportunity among COG members and senior staff.

One Region Moving Forward

David Agnew, President Obama's Deputy Assistant and Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, addressed the participants at the opening dinner Friday evening. He noted the unique relationship between the federal government and the National Capital region and the significant impact changes in federal spending have on the region's economy. He also acknowledged the need for greater federal regional collaboration and committed to work with COG staff to open the lines of communication, offering to serve as the regional point of contact. Mr. Agnew also pledged to work with Fairfax County Supervisor Penny Gross on an event that would bring together a panel of top administration officials to meet with regional elected officials from across the country; similar to a recent presentation with the National Association of Counties.

The Saturday morning session focused on COG's ***Economic Growth and Competitiveness Proposed "Call to Action."*** A draft staff report was presented for feedback and consensus on the best way for COG to help drive action towards a more competitive metropolitan Washington. The report identified several regional challenges that the region must address to

remain economically competitive: inadequate investment in transportation, a disconnect between the skill sets of the region's workforce and available jobs, and need for a stronger relationship with the federal government. The initial recommendation was for the creation of a new public private partnership to lead an effort to address these challenges.

Participants were asked to prioritize the top regional challenges, and through a voting exercise, identified the following order of priorities for regional action: **transportation infrastructure, regional workforce, federal/ regional partnerships, regional branding strategy, and regional housing mix.** Participant groups were also asked to determine specific factors within each area that should be addressed and who should be at the table.

Through facilitated discussion, participants noted that much of the work that COG currently undertakes has a direct impact on the region's economy. The creation of a new public private partnership would complicate a process that already works. It was suggested that instead, COG refocus its work program on areas of strength (like transportation, land use and role of regional convener) and utilize its existing public private partnership the Region Forward Coalition to lead the effort.

The next Saturday morning session focused on **COG Governance.** Retreat participants discussed how they can best organize the work and roles of COG, the TPB and MWAQC. Executive Director Dave Robertson and General Counsel Sharon Pandak noted that *Region Forward* will remain an integrating force within COG. However, they said members should be ready for changes, such as possible shifts in federal or state funding of COG initiatives in the future. In addition, there is the need to identify opportunities for the COG Board and the new executive director who will be selected later this year. They led the participants in discussing several observations and then voting on several considerations. **In general, the participants favored a stronger role for the COG Board along with changes to COG's committee structure, funding rules, and public participation practices to strengthen the organization's effectiveness.**

Saturday's luncheon focused on entrepreneurship and innovation in the region. The speaker, **Maryland Lt. Governor Anthony Brown,** discussed his state's success in establishing an effective foundation for business, including the Maryland Investment Fund, a partnership that has raised millions of dollars for investment in early-stage companies and the new Maryland Innovation Center which works to facilitate the transfer of research and development work from laboratories to companies. He also discussed the need to focus on post-secondary education instead of four-year college degrees and the elimination of business regulations that are not working effectively.

The last retreat work session focused on how the proposed ***Region Forward Activity Center Maps*** will be used. Eric Olson, Vice Chair of the Prince George’s County Council, and Harriet Tregoning, Director of Planning for the District of Columbia, described the purpose and the utility of the updated maps. Tregoning described the maps tool as a kind of “bond rating” for a quality place to live. **The participants agreed that the updated maps will be useful in implementing *Region Forward* goals and welcomed their development.**

During his closing remarks, Chairman Principi reiterated that COG’s top priority is growing our economy. He said COG must do things differently regarding transportation, economic development, regional branding, and workforce development. He added that it will be important to expand COG’s circle of friends to include the White House, the governors, and the region’s delegations to the House and the Senate. COG’s Call to Action report will set the framework for needed action that ensures the region’s economic competitiveness.

Mr. Principi asked participants for additional feedback on the retreat, the location, content, length. Many noted that they liked the interactive feel of this retreat and they found the retreat sessions thought-provoking and well-organized. Several participants recommend an extension of the retreat to allow for additional discussion on implementation strategies and next steps. Adding a half or full day to the front or end of the retreat would also allow for more break times and the possibility of planned group activities.

Recommendations also included the need for a brief report out by department staff and/or committee chairs on other work ongoing at COG and potential best practices by jurisdictions related to the retreat focus.

Attachment A – 2012 COG Board Annual Retreat Program

Attachment B – 2012 Retreat Evaluation Summary

Attachment C – 2012 COG Board Retreat Participants