

Peninsula localities form regional authority for economic development



Mark Carter (left) of the York County EDA, was elected chairman of the Eastern Virginia Regional Industrial Facility Authority. He's talking with Williamsburg EDA member Bill Carr after the meeting on Friday at the Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce office in Hampton. (Tara Bozick / Staff / Daily Press)



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The board of the newly launched Eastern Virginia Regional Industrial Facility Authority met Friday to elect officers and discuss how the organization could help seven greater Peninsula localities collaborate on economic development projects.

The board elected Mark Carter, representing York County's Economic Development Authority, as chairman and Scott Seymour, representing Hampton's EDA, as vice chairman. Robin Bledsoe, representing James City County's EDA, was elected treasurer and David Meeker on the EDA in Gloucester was elected secretary.

The RIFA gives the seven member localities — Gloucester, Hampton, James City, Newport News, Poquoson, Williamsburg and York — a mechanism to collaborate, and share the cost and revenue of an economic development project, regardless of geographic location. Not all members have to participate in a particular project, and any project partnership would have its own agreement that governing bodies would still need to approve.

“Everyone agreed this would be a tremendous way to promulgate regional economic development,” York economic development director Jim Noel said.

The seven member localities initially came together in trying to find a collaborative project that could qualify for GO Virginia grant money, Noel said. GO Virginia provides incentives for localities who collaborate on economic development projects.

The localities supported establishing a drones testing site in York County, and that proposed project garnered a \$150,000 GO Virginia grant that’s being used to create the regional industrial facility authority.

The board also agreed to have the city managers and county administrators of the seven localities meet to discuss and recommend organizational structure and administration. For instance, asked James City county administrator Scott Stevens, would the board be open to South Hampton Roads localities joining?

Hampton City Manager Mary Bunting said it would make sense to have South Hampton Roads localities on board if the region wants to develop particular projects, like a mega site — or a large area of land that’s prepared as “shovel ready” for potential businesses or industry.

“I just want to say this is a huge step forward for the region,” Bunting said.

Newport News, Hampton, James City and York each contributed \$2,500, and Williamsburg and Poquoson each contributed \$1,250, to create the authority.

The 14-member EVRIFA board includes: Gloucester Board of Supervisors chairman Ashley Chriscoe; Hampton mayor Donnie Tuck; James City County Board of Supervisors chairwoman Sue Sadler; Newport News mayor McKinley Price; Newport News EDA chairman Alonzo Bell; Poquoson vice mayor Carey Freeman; Poquoson city councilman David Hux; Williamsburg city councilwoman Barbara Ramsey; Williamsburg EDA member Bill Carr; and York County supervisor Sheila Noll. Locality administrators or economic development directors serve as alternates.

The board is using the Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce as a fiscal agent and used the chamber office at 21 Enterprise Parkway in Hampton for its meeting venue.

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