



**REDI Board of Directors Meeting
Offsite Retreat
MINUTES
April 29, 2023, 8:00 am.**

Shulman Rogers, 12505 Park Potomac Avenue, Potomac, MD 10854

Board attendees: LaVonne Torrence Berner, Nikhil Bijlani, Angela Chaney, Rob DiSpirito, Bei Ma, Carla Merritt, Bridget Donnell Newton, Nancy Regelin, Morgan Sullivan, Bill Tompkins, Cliff Viers, Justin Yang

Absent Board Members: Richard Alvarez, Ben Anstrom, Marji Graf, Alton Henley, Dan Mallon, Suzanne Osborn, Michael Scott

Other attendees:

Staff: Cindy Rivarde, Richelle Wilson, Danette Nguyen, Amanda Bosland

Visitors: Monique Ashton (City Councilperson), Mark Pierzchala (City Councilperson), Barak Matite (Deputy City Manager), Dave Gottesman (Assistant City Manager), Jenny Snapp (Deputy Director Community Planning and Development Services), Kathy Kirk-Dantzler (Public Information Officer Rockville), Steve Pennington (Vice President Technology and Innovation, Maryland Tech Council), Kelly Groff (CEO, Visit Montgomery), Stephany Yu (Founder and General Partner, Sunwater Capital), Rhonda Devan, Owner D and D CPA.

Presenter: Secretary of State Susan C. Lee

- 1. Welcome and Goals** – Susan Prince
Ms. Prince welcomed everyone and introduced everyone to the Secretary of State. Ms. Prince noted that in developing this year's retreat content, the **theme of keeping Rockville top of mind and leveraging partnerships** came to the forefront. The Board should consider these themes in their discussions.
- 2. Presentation** – Secretary of State Susan C. Lee
Secretary Lee spoke about the goals for the new Wes/Moore Administration noting that Maryland is a global world class leader in several key industries including

Cyber/Tech, Life Sciences, Emergent Technologies, and Higher Education. The State is moving support of international affairs from the Department of Commerce back to the Department of State. Secretary Lee will be working with a subcabinet for International Affairs to develop impactful relationships with other nations with an eye towards bringing more business to Maryland. She noted that she will be looking at the Sister State Program to see how new relationships can be developed and to make sure connections are beneficial to Maryland. She noted that they are working across departments on strategic planning, and she welcomes input from the private sector and other jurisdictions in Maryland. She suggested that the State, County and cities coordinate for targeted international missions, and that she is looking at a mission to Japan.

It was noted that there is a need for more lab space to attract life sciences and additional tax incentives. The Secretary also noted a need to target capital investors so that they are aware of the opportunities in Maryland. She also asked the economic development professionals to help in messaging the ROI on incentive programs. Councilmember Ashton pointed out that the recent legislation requiring amortization of R & D is affecting life science businesses. There was an acknowledgment that we need to work with the federal government. The Secretary further suggested that Montgomery County send a delegation to key Maryland legislators in advance of the next session.

The Secretary was supportive of Montgomery County and REDI putting together a working group to provide input on the life science sector and other key industry areas to assist in creating a strategic plan. She also indicated that it would be helpful to have materials on what our area has to offer businesses that can be used at the State level. It is an ideal time for us to not work in silos and be stronger by working together. The connection between businesses and higher education was emphasized – and the statement “Local is Global” was made as an approach to how we are looking at the ecosystem.

3. Review of FY23 Strategic Plan and Goals – Cindy Rivarde

Ms. Rivarde reviewed the Power Point in the Board packet that outlined what progress had been made in FY23 towards the strategic plan and goals adopted by the Board. She reminded the Board that their charge is to look at the key topic areas to identify what problem REDI should be focusing on for FY24, using the Richard Rumelt approach to strategic planning.

4. Breakout Sessions:

Due to timing, there were two breakout sessions on the topics of Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction as well as Marketing with the attendees noted below. There was not a separate session on Creative Industries, Placemaking and City Projects. Also, there was no discussion of small business support/MWBC as the strategy and goals from last year are still viable.

Notes from the breakout sessions are attached.

TOPIC	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3	GROUP 4
Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction	Angela Chaney Bridget Newton Rhonda Devan Bill Tompkins Nikhil Bijlani Richelle Wilson Kelly Groff Stephany Yu	Todd Pearson Cliff Viers Dave Gottesman Mark Pierzchala LaVonne Torrence Jenny Snapp Amanda Bosland	Bei Ma Susan Prince Kathy Kirk- Danzler Steve Pennington Monique Ashton Morgan Sullivan Danette Nguyen	Carla Merritt Nancy Regelin Justin Yang Barak Matite Rob DiSpirito Cindy Rivarde
Marketing	Richelle Wilson Dave Gottesman Cindy Rivarde Nikhil Bijlani LaVonne Torrence Steve Pennington Stephany Yu	Cliff Viers Bridget Newton Morgan Sullivan Carla Merritt Rob DiSpirito	Justin Yang David Myles Rhonda Devan Amanda Bosland Todd Pearson Jenny Snapp Bill Tompkins	Nancy Regelin Mark Pierzchala Susan Prince Angela Chaney Bei Ma Kathy Kirk- Danzler Barak Matite Danette Nguyen Kelly Groff

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Break Out Notes

Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction

Group 1

Notetaker: Angela Chaney

It is important that we communicate our resources in a concise, consistent, and ongoing manner highlighting resources from the State, County and City. We need to be clear about the point person for businesses and help direct to financial resources. We are supporting all businesses, not just life sciences.

Tell the story of Rockville. It is important to emphasize quality of life - affordability, biking, festivals, restaurants (Global Bites), and districts. We should emphasize arts and culture – and fund lab startups. Sell Rockville's lifestyle.

We should look at obtaining testimonials from businesses and residents and amplify them on social media. Use existing businesses as our brand ambassadors and advertise the resources of REDI and the City. Our branding is key.

We should look at what Boston is doing. The State needs an overall economic development strategic plan – and we need focused leadership. We should figure out what international outreach we should target.

Key may be to attract the workforce which then attracts the businesses. Question if we have enough accommodations in housing/schools.

Group 2

Notetaker: Todd Pearson

We should target sectors of the city - like Pike District vs. Town Center vs. Research Boulevard. There is benefit in marketing an area larger than just Rockville when we are approaching outside markets. We need to understand who the diverse audiences are - Site selectors/brokers versus businesses.

Look at the benefit of creating more champion districts – which is a designation unique for Rockville. What certainty can be given in zoning to assist businesses in making development decisions and obtaining funding. The zoning ordinance rewrite should focus on making public approvals easier, more transparent, and less confusing.

Small businesses do not have the same expertise in navigating, and there should be an easier process and ombudsman. We need more education on city processes – especially with the Fast Track and Invest in Rockville programs.

It would be helpful to have consistency in inspections so that different inspectors do not look at situations differently. The permitting and inspection systems are much better – but still need to be improving upon the process.

Market the assets of Rockville – schools, quality of life. Retail has its own identity. Branding areas should be bigger to get national attention.

Concern with the County increase in taxes and rent control and how it will affect lending.

We need to understand the need for space and let the market know what space is available.

Group 3

Notetaker: Bei Ma

We need to tell the story of Rockville. Testimonials are seen as effective. We should look at a mix of old school and new school (social media) techniques for marketing.

We want to collaborate with the new state administration and have “REDI take the lead on bio” and be the model, as we did with the Life Science Report that was so helpful to the Secretary of State. We should help provide the high-level view. Montgomery County is the bedrock. If we take care of our backyard, our neighbors will follow.

We should look at the opportunity for international collaboration and see a greater area of Rockville, not just the city boundaries. We should build strategic and collaborative partnerships like the Virginia Alliance which has cohesive messaging.

The Global Bites program is important in highlighting our international character.

It was noted that we should continue efforts to track businesses – and look for more comprehensive data sources to know when businesses are coming and going. Also workforce/talent, is key. It was suggested that we obtain psychographic information – example Pasadena.

It would be helpful to have a more coordinated life science incubator path – or centralized one stop shop.

Group 4

Notetaker: Carla Merritt

It is important to focus on the life sciences as a key industry, especially as we are making an investment in branding. It was noted that Maryland has a better environment and support for life science companies as they grow, and we may want to offer opportunities to businesses as they are incubated in Virginia-and then need to grow.

We need to have better coordination in messaging for business retention and attraction. We should develop industry partners and champions.

We have an opportunity to work with the state on international business development by leveraging partnerships and getting our voice heard at the state level.

We need to identify obstacles to businesses in coming to Rockville or operating here. (Which can be done in part through the zoning update). Can zoning/inspections be outsourced to a third party to make the process faster – especially for life science?

It is acknowledged that more jobs and growth come from existing businesses than attraction efforts, so we should invest in our existing businesses. It will be important to educate the council members, partners, site selectors, and the public about the importance of economic development – especially from an ROI perspective. We should consider a business summit when we roll out our branding – perhaps coordinating with USG as well as providing opportunities for business sectors to network. The networking would need goals/focus different from the support and opportunities provided by the Chambers. The business survey showed that businesses want more networking opportunities and marketing support.

It would be helpful if the County also had a grant for Expansion projects.

Consider going to Northern VA bio events like Beer and Bio. Start reaching out to businesses in the Prince William County Incubator.

Marketing

Group 1

Notetaker: Richelle Wilson

We need to create brand ambassadors/develop private sector champions – this should include restaurant owners, etc. – stories of what Rockville has done to help them succeed. “What did Rockville do for me”. It can be more impactful when peers say benefits of a location rather than government.

Use social media – influencers, especially for restaurants. A theme noted was that many businesses are successful when they engage with the community. Community makes us stronger. We should co-market and cross market.

We have large, medium, and small businesses. We should have testimonials. The tours of life science businesses are amazing – what people are innovating here. Could we have a Rockville Hall of Fame? Maybe a business hall of fame?

Rockville seen as a fly over city between Bethesda and Gaithersburg? Why aren't brokers bringing clients? We are the County Seat – the Center of Everything/Eye of the County.

Promote great lifestyle – Global Bites, Cost of Living, Schools. We should promote how you can get everything you need in Rockville.

Compare with our competitive markets like Boston.

Can we showcase what is happening with science here. We are the home of the human genome. Create marketing focused on the history of life science in the city/county.

Town center needs entertainment. Off metro we need more wayfinding and sense of arrival. Could we have a representation visually of the international nature of our community. Gazebo or pavilion

highlighting Chinese or Asian culture? Directory in Town Center and at Metro showing all the restaurants in walking distance. The Metro Station is the eye for the City – the Center. Rockville is the eye of the County. Love Redgate for an amphitheater. Do we need more conference space?

We could have a cute map of the city – that shows key sites. Give the city a color (blue signs).

We need to work on the expression of our international community.

We need to communicate our pipeline of available space and highlight hubs for shopping. Look at marketing amenities for the remote worker. Think about comarketing and crossmarketing area as a destination that meets all your essential needs.

Group 2

Notetaker: Cliff Viers

The strategic plan/statement from last year is very broad. We need different messages for different channels. Consider site selectors/brokers, businesses, employers, venture capitalists. We should think about the location of where we are sending a message – if international or local.

We need to defeat the perception of our not being business friendly. There is data to the contrary. Let's get the facts out.

We should partner with chambers and businesses to co-brand/co-market. We should champion apprenticeship programs. But we should drive our own ship and not rely too much on local partnerships.

We should develop a pipeline of targeted prospects and develop messaging for them.

Group 3

Notetaker: Justin Yang

Rockville Town Center remains a challenge because of the overall design and lack of density. Could greenways be mapped for walking/biking. (Greenway plan).

Highlight strengths and programming like VisArts. Community engagement, art festivals – let businesses know about events.

Diversity is a key theme. This is reflected in food. In particular, Chinese food draws from a multi-state market. We could do more promotion around that. Lean in and champion AAPI restaurant week. Have a food Blog/Vlog.

We should have a "This is Rockville" plan. We should work with tourism. Why do people come here? Medical Center area/Twinbrook – look at all the areas. Live, work, play.

Rockville master plan – how are we situated in the County – the County Seat/At the heart. Note we have empty office around Town Center. Consider medical center infrastructure – doctors offices/Shady Grove area.

Group 4

Notetaker: Nancy Regelin

Rockville needs to tell the story – elevate the voice and marketing from FY23. We need to refine who are audience is for FY24 and create a strategy for target markets. We also need to align with our partners and other initiatives. Bio/Computing/Women businesses/International Restaurants.

The City is creating its new brand, and we should leverage what they are doing.

We need to communicate the sense of place to attract talent – and leverage effective channels, including traditional marketing. Think about equity – not everyone is online.

Revamp business appreciation week with a video campaign. Tell authentic stories. Let Rockville residents and businesses know who is here in this 13.5 square mile city. Rockville is the center of the area.

Build on the business survey to identify what businesses are in Rockville and clarify industry and market segments. Tailor the marketing language to reach the target market.

Post branding with Medium Giant – tailor language message for bio life science in an expanded ecosystem (who are the suppliers/manufacturers in that satellite sectors).

Leverage partnerships with higher education.

KEY THEMES

BRE&A

1. Provide collateral and input to the State to help them formulate the state level plans – especially with regard to Life Sciences, Cyber, and Emerging Technologies.
 - a. Look at setting up a stakeholder group with Bill
 - b. Provide our collateral
 - c. Suggest: Secretary of State, Secretary of Commerce, and Secretary of Community Development and Housing
 - d. Focus on need for enticing more capital/seed investment in Maryland

- e. Focus on bringing together all efforts made for life sciences – we may be spending as much as Massachusetts and just not be telling the story effectively
 - f. How can we incentivize the creation of more lab space?
 - g. How can we provide more support on how to run a business to the scientists/inventors who may not be business oriented?
 - h. Can we leverage our metro line (red line) to encourage more clustering?
2. Look at leveraging partnerships to have targeted messaging to international markets.
 - a. Identify what countries to target
 - b. Work with the County and State
 - c. Consider participating in missions
 - d. Leverage our Sister City and State programs
3. The Zoning Ordinance Update will be an opportunity to create an edge for Rockville.
 - a. Streamline approval process – make it easier to understand
 - b. Promote existing Fast Track and Invest in Rockville programs
 - c. Look at parking ratios
 - d. Can we develop timing certainty to make it more attractive to come to Rockville and for lenders to fund projects
 - e. Do we need to refine the inspection process to make sure it is more consistent?
 - f. Can we bake in approval for standard life science needs?
 - g. Can we streamline office conversion to life science or residential?
4. Develop messaging for capital investors and possibly convene banks to brief them on businesses and opportunities. Focus on telling them about Rockville and the type of research that is occurring and the volume of investment activity over the years.
5. We need to communicate our pipeline.
 - a. We need a pipeline of targeted businesses – and to create tailored marketing for them.
 - b. We need to market our pipeline of new construction projects/activity and available space. We can start to do this with the landing page being created by Medium Giant.
6. Have a business summit (with USG?)– could leverage the branding initiative to do a roll out that engages businesses. Would give a forum to also find out what obstacles they may have that could be addressed by the government.

Marketing

7. Refine our target audiences.
 - a. Messaging for site selectors/brokers
 - b. Messaging for businesses in key industry areas
 - c. Messaging to residents
 - d. Messaging to partners (State/County/City)
 - e. Messaging to Investors
8. Continue the life science branding project
 - a. It's important that this is a larger area than just Rockville
 - b. This will help us identify target markets (and international)
 - c. This is another opportunity to engage with businesses and site selectors.
9. Continue building out the Global Bites pilot program
 - a. This emphasizes the quality of life and international nature of Rockville
10. Education of the public on the benefits of Economic Development
 - a. New Council will be constituted in November
 - b. Residents
 - c. Testimonials from businesses were seen as very important/use them as our ambassadors
 - d. Recent tours of life science emphasize amazing things that are happening here that may not be widely known – but which tell a compelling story

Placemaking

11. Continue to work with the City on positioning RedGate for an amphitheater and programming.
12. Need wayfinding for the metro and town center. Highlight restaurants and parking options with the wayfinding.
13. Consider creating a park or public area dedicated to celebrating our international diversity in the City.
 - a. Could be a gazebo
 - b. Could have directories with all the restaurants
 - c. Could have international flags
14. Not discussed – but next steps for Rock East
15. Noted importance of working with Destination Marketing

- a. Explore Rockville
 - b. Highlight hubs for shopping
 - c. Highlight restaurants
 - d. Cute map of highlights?
16. We need to create a sense of arrival at the metro stations and at the boundaries.
17. Could we work with City staff to map greenways through the city – show the spine for walking, biking, and green spaces.

Small Business/MWBC

18. Continue the plan developed last year for MWBC, including having a better grasp on resources for small businesses in the region and understanding the market needs.
19. Continue to support small business.
- a. SBIF
 - b. Mentoring
 - c. Marketing Support and Networking
 - d. Better understanding of how to navigate public approvals/permitting
 - e. Continue to promote and build Explore Rockville
20. Can we find ways to encourage co-marketing and cross-marketing with area businesses.