

Regional Reporter

News and Events from the
Commonwealth Regional Council

Volume 14, Issue 1 – 2020 Year-in-Review



Cumberland and Nottoway Join CRC

For the first time since 2005, the Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC) has a full house with all seven (7) eligible counties as members. The CRC would like to welcome the Counties of Cumberland and Nottoway as official members. Cumberland joined in April, and Nottoway joined in July.

For Cumberland County, Brian Stanley is the Primary Representative to the Council. He represents District 1 on the County's Board of Supervisors, having been elected to the seat in 2019. Don Unmussig, County Administrator, is the County's Alternate. For Nottoway County, Steve Bowen is the Primary Representative to the Council. He represents District 1 on the County's Board of Supervisors, having first been elected to the seat in 2007 and now serving his fourth term on the Board. John Prosis, Assistant County Administrator, is the County's Alternate.

The Council looks forward to renewed relationships with these counties.

CRC Staff Updates

New Regional Planners – Mary Kay and Samuel Torpy

Mary Kay, a Cumberland County native and recent graduate of Texas A&M University, is a Regional Planner for the Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC). She started with the CRC on August 6.

At Texas A&M, Mary studied at the Bush School of Government where she earned a Master of Public Administration degree. While there, she served as a Bush School Ambassador and was on the executive team for the Texas A&M Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Prior to her move to College Station, Texas, she graduated from Virginia Tech in 2017 as a double major in Animal Science and Communication.

Mary says what attracted her to the CRC most was the opportunity to give back to the region that has given so much to her. "My graduate program and its founder, President George H.W. Bush, placed an emphasis on public service and strived to produce well-educated and -rounded young individuals to go back into the community and make a difference," she said. "The CRC does so much great work for member counties, and I am excited to be a part of it."

Samuel Torpy, a Fauquier County native and recent graduate of Longwood University, is a Regional Planner for the Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC). Torpy started with the CRC on November 16.

At Longwood University, Torpy studied at the College of Business and Economics where he earned a Bachelor's of Science in Business Administration with a minor in Communication Studies. While there, he served as Executive Treasurer for the Student Government Association, President of the Dean's Student Advisory Board of the College of Business and Economics, and President of Mortar Board.

Torpy says what attracted him to the CRC most was the ability to have a tangible impact on the communities in the region that have become a second home for him. “I was an intern with the Longwood University Small Business Development Center during my last year at school and I absolutely loved taking part in initiatives that helped the local business owners in the region”, he said. “Having the opportunity to continue that type of work on a community level with the CRC is so exciting for me and I cannot wait to see what the future holds.”

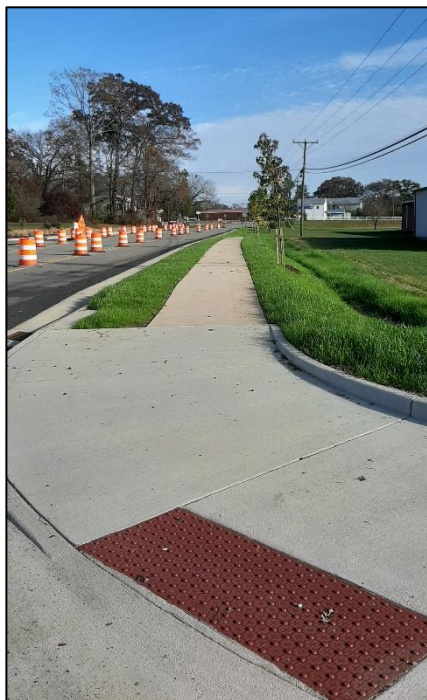
Johnson pursues career at Department of Defense

Cam Johnson recently resigned as the CRC’s Regional Planner to accept a position with the U.S. Department of Defense. Cam was originally slated to begin this exciting new career path in April, but COVID-19 pushed his start date back. True to his hardworking nature, Cam continued to work virtually for the CRC from his new home in Northern Virginia until the end of June. We wish Cam the best of luck in his new career and thank him for all he did for the CRC. Two other staff also recently left the CRC: Kara Robertson in August and Amy Shiffer in April.

Gleason and CRC Staff Honored

At its August 2020 Council meeting, the CRC held a breakfast in honor of the retirement of Council member Thomas R. Gleason. Since his appointment to the Council in 2016, Gleason has been a champion not only for his home county of Amelia, but the entire CRC region. The CRC staff and Council would like to thank Mr. Gleason for his selfless service and extend the warmest of wishes for a well-deserved retirement.

Chairman Mike Hankins was also quick to recognize the CRC staff for their efforts to bring Cumberland and Nottoway Counties back to the CRC table.



Dillwyn Streetscape Nears Phase V Completion

Construction is nearing completions for Phase V of the Town of Dillwyn’s streetscape project. The contractor, S. Walker Construction of Blackstone, and their subcontractors have installed new/replacement sidewalks and crosswalks, performed gutter and curb upgrades, and made other enhancements. Traffic calming measures were also involved and included closing one entrance on U.S. 15 to Reid Super Save Market and reconfiguring the Y-intersection at Goldmine Street to single-access.

The project is funded by grants provided by the Virginia Department of Transportation from the Transportation Alternatives Program, with local matching funds. New sidewalks, benches, trash receptacles, and natural landscaping, including trees, were all components of the project.

The project aims to enhance the appearance of the U.S. 15 corridor, improve safety, and provide adequate access for disabled persons. Currently, some intersections in the area do not have adequate access for persons with disabilities. Phase V will provide ADA access in areas where it currently does not exist. Completion of the project is expected by late February.

The Town has completed four previous phases of the project. Phase I and Phase II consisted of the pedestrian plaza and crosswalks on U.S. 15 at the Town Hall and the plaza. Phase III included improvements on U.S. 15 from Main/Oak Street to Conner Street. Phase IV covered improvements on U.S. 15 from Conner Street to Rosney Road.

Dillwyn Housing Rehab Project Making Progress

The CRC is currently assisting the Town of Dillwyn with a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) that it received from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for a Housing Rehab Project. A total of five houses are slated to be rehabbed or substantially reconstructed during the project, which is expected to be closed out in March 2021. As of December 2020, three houses have been completed. A fourth is currently under construction with the bid for the fifth house being awarded in December.



CRC Staff Help Facilitate Regional Election Emergency Planning Workshop



Commonwealth Regional Council staff, local registrars, and local emergency managers representing all seven counties attended a Regional Election Emergency Planning Workshop on August 25, 2020. Voting officials prepared on all fronts for not only the heightened awareness of a presidential election but also ensuring measures are taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Amelia County Emergency Management Director Kent Emerson hosted the workshop and facilitated discussion on possible contingencies. Local government and registrars all agreed that the session was extremely helpful. Moving forward, the CRC will be assisting counties to address election security requirements per recently enacted state law.

CRC Receives Mitigation Grant for Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

On October 20, the CRC received word from the Virginia Department of Emergency Management that it had been awarded \$112,500.00 through FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program to undertake an update of the CRC's Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. The funding comes with a match requirement of \$37,500.00, which will be met by participating localities through in-kind (staff time) contributions. The Plan was last updated in 2018. Completion of the update keeps covered localities eligible for funding under certain types of FEMA programs, including the Building Resilient Infrastructure in Communities (formerly known as the Pre-Disaster Mitigation) Program, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program. Work on the Plan update is expected to be completed in mid-2023.

More than Half a Million Dollars in CARES Act Grants Awarded to Fast-Track Broadband

Five counties have been awarded a total of \$502,491.00 in grant funding for fast-tracking broadband from the Commonwealth of Virginia as part of the federal CARES Act. Amelia, Buckingham, Cumberland, Lunenburg, and Nottoway counties have each been awarded \$85,000.

The Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC) assisted all five counties in submitting the applications. The project, in partnership with Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corp (MBC), will improve broadband in these counties. MBC will partner with existing Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in each county to expand broadband services to target areas. The project will benefit approximately 2,445 households and 400 businesses.

The funding will allow MBC to invest in and install new optical networking equipment. Internet access, bandwidth capabilities, and functionality will all be improved, specifically benefitting students participating in remote learning, residents teleworking, and local businesses seeing Wi-Fi demand increases as businesses shift to virtual environment.

“MBC was created to establish open-access high-capacity fiber backbone network connections to enable ISPs to provide robust broadband services in Southern Virginia, where sometimes infrastructure investments can be tough to justify. This CARES Act funding will help us keep fulfilling this mission for Southern Virginia,” said Tad Deriso, MBC President and CEO. “The diligent work of the CRC to secure CARES Act broadband funding will pay big dividends for their localities.”

This project will not only have immediate impacts but will facilitate ongoing broadband expansion projects well into the future providing both short- and long-term benefits for MBC’s ISP customers.

Nottoway County Public Schools (NCPS) was also awarded \$77,491.00 to purchase 395 hotspot devices with pre-paid data plans. These devices, combined with 400 hotspots previously purchased with separate CARES Act funds, will provide at least 84 percent of the student body with a reliable form of internet. The remaining 16 percent of the student body live in areas with connections that cannot sustain a hotspot device.

“This grant funding is great news for the students and families of NCPS,” said Marcia Martin, Director of Instructions, Grants, and Technology for NCPS. “The ability to purchase additional hotspots will create more equitable access for students in the school division. We are most appreciative for being selected as recipients.”

Both broadband projects are scheduled to be substantially completed in December 2020.



Miles Appointed to Tobacco Commission

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam announced on November 20, 2020, the appointment of Thomas Jordan Miles III to the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC). Miles is the Buckingham representative to the CRC and also serves on the Buckingham County Board of Supervisors.

“I’m honored and humbled to serve and represent rural Virginia – which has always been my home,” Jordan said. “I appreciate and thank Gov. Northam for his confidence in my experience and leadership.”

Miles said his new position will allow him to not only support the work currently being done by the TRRC, but also to ensure its new investments meet the rigorous economic development priorities in rural Virginia.

CRC Receives Additional Planning Grants through SHPS

On September 16, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) announced grant awards for the 2020 round of the State Homeland Security Program (SHSP). For competitive grants under SHSP, the State received 153 applications totaling nearly \$14.4 million. Sixty-four (64) projects totaling \$3.7 million were awarded funding. The awarded projects include four (4) submitted by the CRC. They are:

- Two grants for police radios – Farmville Police Department and Hampden-Sydney College Police Department
- The CRC was awarded \$38,556.00 to undertake additional emergency planning activities including: development of a Regional Resource Inventory; assistance with GIS mapping; coordination and facilitation of a training class for volunteers, per the recently completed Regional Volunteer and Donation Coordination/Management Plan; development of a Regional Continuity of Operations Plan; and development of a Regional PPE Stockpile Plan.
- The CRC was awarded \$98,069.00 to help local registrars undertake election security measures per the recently passed Virginia House Bill 2178. Per guidance from VDEM, FEMA has placed a hold on this funding since this project was funded under one of the national priorities as established by FEMA – meaning this project would not start until Spring 2021 at the earliest.

Charlotte Court House Evergreen Sidewalk Project Completed

On May 26, 2020, the Town of Charlotte Court House completed the Evergreen Sidewalk Project with the assistance of the Commonwealth Regional Council. The project was funded by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) through the Transportation Alternatives Program and was completed with assistance from the Commonwealth Regional Council.

Construction began February 20, 2020. The project totaled \$344,152 and put in just over 2,100 feet of sidewalk along Evergreen Road. The sidewalk will be a great asset to the Town with the community finding immediate use of the new walkway.



Other Projects Through the Region Receive Grant Funding

Throughout 2020, CRC staff have assisted numerous local agencies, localities, and non-profits in seeking grant funding for various projects. The award announcements we have been able to make over the year include:

Locality/Awardee	Project	Award Amount
Amelia County	Fast-tracking broadband	\$85,000
Buckingham Co. Rescue Squad	New ambulance	\$154,400.00
Buckingham County	Heart monitors/Defibrillator	\$88,915.50
Buckingham County	Fast-tracking broadband	\$85,000
Charlotte County	Project Peanut (grant/loan)	\$49,000
Charlotte County E911	Emergency Medical Dispatch System	\$47,927.20
Charlotte Court House Fire Dept.	Quick response vehicle	\$44,000.00
Commonwealth Regional Council	Regional Emergency Planning	\$38,556.00
Commonwealth Regional Council	Regional Election Security Planning	\$98,069.00
Commonwealth Regional Council	Update Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan	\$112,500.00
Cumberland County	Fast-tracking broadband	\$85,000
Farmville Emergency Operations Center	Emergency medical dispatch	\$95,444.90
Farmville Police Department	Police radios	\$82,261.00
HS Volunteer Fire Department	Heart monitors	\$27,948.14
HSC Police Department	Police radios	\$38,634.00
Lunenburg County	PPE related to COVID-19	\$21,734.76
Lunenburg County	Fast-tracking broadband	\$85,000
Nottoway County	Fast-tracking broadband	\$85,000
Nottoway County	Mobile Hotspots for NCPS Students	\$77,491.00
Prince Edward County	PPE related to COVID-19	\$35,265.24
Town of Charlotte Court House	Route 47 Pedestrian Improvements	\$363,812.00
Town of Kenbridge	AED for Town Hall	\$2,000.00
Town of Kenbridge	Public works dept. safety equipment	\$2,000.00
Town of Victoria	Emergency Generator at sewer station	\$35,884.00
Town of Victoria	Update three dam safety plans	\$33,438.00
2020 TOTAL		\$1,874,280.74

Member Profile: Cumberland County and Nottoway County

This edition, we feature our two newest counties – Nottoway and Cumberland – and elaborate on what factored into their decision to rejoin the CRC. In this day and age of COVID-19, budgets and time are even more strained than usual for local governments. Both Nottoway and Cumberland recognize how the CRC could serve as an asset as they navigate through these uncertain times and also how the Council can help meet long-term goals.

Steve Bowen, Nottoway County Board of Supervisors, said, “I am truly grateful Nottoway is not only back in the CRC but that all member counties have eagerly welcomed us with open arms.”

After the Nottoway County governing body disbanded the Nottoway Planning Council, it saw it best to rejoin the CRC. Several factors influenced their decision including receiving annual reports from CRC staff and assistance on projects when needed. The Board of Supervisors also noticed and sought to be part of the CRC’s success. In essence, goals aligned. Nottoway saw how joining the CRC could make their 2020 vision for growth a reality.

Cumberland County Administrator Don Unmussig also stated the varied portfolio of services the CRC provides to members was a main factor in Cumberland County rejoining. As a small county that is short on staff, Mr. Unmussig emphasized how important it is to have grant support, planning assistance, and research capabilities readily available.

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