

The State's Rural Development Council

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) functions as the State's rural development council under the National Rural Development Partnership Program. Since 1994, the RMC has brought together citizens, community-based organizations, federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to collectively address the needs of rural Maryland communities. The Council provides a unique venue for members of agricultural and natural resource-based industries, health care facilities, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, for-profit and nonprofit corporations, and government agencies to cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address in a more holistic way the special needs and opportunities in rural Maryland.

The overarching vision of the RMC is the ultimate realization that citizens living in rural communities are achieving success in education and employment, have access to affordable, quality health care and other vital services, and live in an environment where civic and business entrepreneurship thrive and where natural and cultural resources are being sustained for future generations. As a collaborative partnership, the RMC operates under the guidance of the 42-member executive board, in a nonpartisan and nondiscriminatory manner in helping to rural communities in 18 Maryland counties to flourish.



WORKING COMMITTEES

To effectively address the many public policy issues affecting Rural Maryland, the RMC's Executive Board has created several Working Committees to provide the Board and public policy makers with information, suggestions, and recommended positions on issues that uniquely impact Rural Maryland.

These committees also serve as a conduit for citizens and government agencies to exchange information and develop innova-

tive solutions to different problems. The committees are made up of Executive Board members, interested rural citizens and officials from relevant government agencies, advocacy groups and academia. Working Committee members establish their own meeting and work schedules. The RMC Board may also refer issues to the Committees for study and the development of recommendations. Committee membership is open to any interested Maryland citizen and all are welcome.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

The Agriculture and Natural Resources Working Committee works to improve the employment opportunities, income generation, and general well being of Maryland's rural residents and businesses by strengthening their capacity to compete in the regional and global economy through sustainable development of natural resources. Recently, the Committee was instrumental in developing the framework for the Maryland Agricultural and Resource Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO), a quasi-public development organization established in 2004 by the Maryland General Assembly to promote the viability and profitability of Maryland's agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, and seafood industries through the provision enhanced economic development assistance opportunities.

Health Care

The provision of adequate and affordable health care is vitally important to Rural Marylanders. Moreover, the impact that health facilities and occupations have on rural economies is substantial but increasingly at risk of being lost in the new managed care environment. The Health Care Committee works closely with the Maryland Rural Health Association, and others with a stake in the health of rural Marylanders, to examine policy issues, raise awareness, and make recommendations to policymakers. One recent area of emphasis for the Committee has been to collaborate with representatives from the State Health Department, senior citizens organizations and the Maryland General Assembly to examine the ways in which the Medicare Modernization Act will affect rural Marylanders, including making recommendations on which State pharmacy programs are most significant to meeting the health care needs of rural citizens.

Housing and Community Development

Because of the interdependent relationship between social and economic development, the Housing and Community Development Working Committee identifies, studies, and promotes solutions to problems in rural areas related to human and community needs. The Committee also identifies barriers to housing choice as well as devises and attempts to institutionalize practical solutions to overcome those barriers. The Committee makes recommendations that empower local citizens to develop, promote, support, and improve the quality of life in their communities. One recent notable area of success for the Committee has been to help make the State's "Smart Growth" regulations work effectively and equitably for rural communities.

Infrastructure

The Infrastructure Working Committee considers the physical infrastructure needs of Rural Maryland and develops strategies that enhance both the environment and the economic development prospects of rural communities. The Committee in the past has focused on transportation, water, wastewater, and telecommunications as key issue areas. Funding for studies and improvements to older sewerage facilities spread throughout Rural Maryland has been a top priority for quite some time. During the last two years, the RMC staff has been called upon to provide important leadership to the State's Interagency Wastewater Technical Assistance Advisory Committee, as well as to play a critical role in supporting the work of the Maryland Task Force on Broadband Communications Deployment in Underserved Rural Areas.

The success of the RMC depends on the strength of its executive board, working committees, and membership.

Membership is free and open to any interested Maryland citizen. Call us or see our website for an application.

"Add Your Voice!"

Rural Maryland Today

Approximately 1.4 million people live in Maryland's 18 rural counties that are located in the State's western, southern and eastern shore regions, and interestingly, over one-third of the State's rural citizens reside in 100 small incorporated cities and towns. Rural communities in Maryland today are facing a host of difficult challenges relating to changing economic conditions, an aging population and an out-migration of youth, an inadequate access to quality health care and other services, and a deteriorating or inadequate physical infrastructure. Local governments, educational and health care institutions, and private nonprofit service providers in rural areas are struggling to effectively respond to all of these challenges.

A common perception of Rural Maryland is a pleasant one of sparsely populated small towns dotting a pastoral landscape of farms and forests, but this tends to mask a reality that many rural communities are facing serious challenges relating to economic and technological dislocation. Agricultural and other resource-based industries continue to underpin the local economies of rural communities, but are increasingly under threat from national and international competition, land development pressure, and regulatory influences. A lack of access to affordable high-speed broadband communications services puts the more outlying rural communities at a tremendous disadvantage from an economic development standpoint. And a persistent lack of decent paying employment opportunities (and the related local tax base ramifications) places rural county and municipal governments under great stress as they attempt to meet all the community development and human services needs of their citizens.

History of the Rural Maryland Council

The Rural Maryland Council was created in 1994, known then as the FORVM for Rural Maryland, as part of a national rural development initiative. The RMC is now one of over 40 state rural development councils established to bring together diverse partnerships of people, organizations, businesses, and agencies, and has been nationally recognized for its work with rural development policy. The RMC continues to work successfully to meet the following objectives:

- Provide a neutral sounding board for developing and implementing government policies;
- Help ensure that federal and state resources are used creatively and effectively; and
- Conduct policy research and analysis and share ideas and information to develop more effective leadership statewide.

Goals of the Rural Maryland Council

The goals of the Rural Maryland Council are to:

- Enable citizens in rural communities to achieve success in employment and have access to quality, affordable health care, and other services;
- Preserve agriculture and other natural resource-based industry as an integral part of Maryland's rural economy and culture;
- Advocate for a manageable regulatory process and reasonable and effective compliance; and
- Address the impact of changing conditions on the environment, heritage and economic well-being of rural Maryland.

The RMC performs two essential roles that are very important to rural communities, especially in the policy development context: 1) the "convening, facilitation, and neutral brokering" role; and 2) the "rural voice" role. The RMC provides a venue for members of agriculture and natural resource-based industries, health care facilities, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, for-profit and nonprofit corporations, and government agencies at all levels to cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address in a more holistic way the special needs of Rural Marylanders. The issues that are addressed by the RMC can be narrow in scope and focus or systematic problems that have previously defied the development and implementation of adequate solutions. Collaboration and consensus building are principles that form the foundation of the RMC's work effort.

Once rural needs have been clearly identified and proposed courses of action formulated, the RMC offers this rural perspective (a "rural voice") to state and federal administrators and policy-makers with the aim of making government programs and service-delivery work more effectively and efficiently for traditionally under-served rural areas. In this role the RMC also represents the needs of rural communities before various governmental bodies in Maryland where there otherwise would be a void in relevant information sharing. In addition, the RMC is occasionally called upon to provide staff support to State-created task forces and other formal or ad hoc study groups, e.g., the Task Force on Rural Broadband Communications Access (in 2003-2004), and the Task Force on Resource Based Industry (in 2000-2001). The RMC has also played a key role in helping to organize MARBIDCO (in 2004-5)



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Promoting Economic Prosperity and Providing a Collective Voice for Rural Maryland



**RURAL
MARYLAND
COUNCIL**

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