Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission (UERPC)
Board Meeting (Working Session)
April 19, 2012
MEETING NOTES

Board Members Present: Vicki Rowland, Paul Ryan, Charles Frana, Les Askelson, Larry Schellhammer, Ron McCartney, Randy Uhl, by phone: Larry Murphy

Others Present: Ardie Kuhse, Fern Rissman, by phone: Nichole Warren, Tim Ostroski, Doug Elliott

**CALL TO ORDER**
Randy Uhl called the Commission Board Working Session to order promptly at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 19, 2012 in the Conference Room of the UERPC office in Postville. This was not a required meeting and a quorum was not needed. Eight board members were present. There was a motion by Paul Ryan/Les Askelson to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously. Note: The working session was being called for the purpose of updating board members on the progress of selecting a new Director and for allowing input to and from IARC, the firm hired to assist in the Director search process.

Randy gave a brief update on the director search process to date:

- Search Committee met several times and decided to hire IARC (Iowa Association of Regional Councils) to do some of the legwork to give us a wider net from which to draw applicants
- IARC will provide us with 8-10 applicants from which we will select 3-4 to interview
- April 27th is the deadline with a hope of having a Director in place on the 1st of July.

**IARC TELECONFERENCE**
At this point a call was placed to IARC with Nichole Warren, IARC Executive Director and Tim Ostroski, COG Director from Southern Iowa and Doug Elliott, COG Director from East Central Iowa (Cedar Rapids). It was decided that UERPC would ask their questions with answers and discussion to follow each question asked and that the questions would be directed to Tim and Doug.

Question: How important is it that the director has a high degree of comfort in working with and for a wide variety of people?

- Very important because due to the nature of the work there is a wide variety of people including elected officials, staffs of public agencies, non-profits, constituents of the COG programs
- COG business can and does deal with everybody at some point in time

Question: How critical is it that the executive director be a strong advocate of the staff's welfare?

- Critical that he/she be a strong advocate (father/mother figure of the organization); be behind and in front of the staff; be supportive of staff; staff is responsible to the Director but Director should take the staff seriously; the leader of the staff hoping to have a united front between all staff and director; Director's position is board first, staff second, members third
- Director serves at the pleasure of the Board; all other staff serves at the pleasure of the Director as the Director in that position has the authority to hire/fire/discipline staff

Question: How critical is it that the new director be diplomatic, fair and open with the staff?

- Needs to be very open with staff; share information as appropriate; should be an advocate for staff to the Board
- Board has to be in charge; Board should be in charge of policy for the organization; Director should be in charge of administration and management decisions

Question: Given the recent difficulties UERPC has faced, how critical is it that the next executive director has strong public relations skills and how important is it for the director to be cool, tactful and thoughtful under pressure?

- Important to have these skills; need to hire someone with strong public relations skills
- Tim and Doug both felt that our thoughts on needing the UERPC Director to be a working director to take on projects might be expecting too much since you already want the director to mend public relations, relations with the staff, relations with the board and mend relations with constituents and these duties will be a full time job on their own and if you want them to excel and succeed at these, you can't expect a director to take on many if any extra project based work; Public relations should place higher on the hiring scale than their ability to do the work of the staff
- For UERPC, the task of mending fences is needed and should be a high priority; the first six months especially, the director should concentrate on this

Question: Is the fence mending that UERPC needs to do going to limit our applicants?

- The applicants will probably be challenged by the need but if they are allowed to do "Director stuff" and if they possess the qualities that are needed they will do okay; there will be people that will be attracted to this challenge
- There are very few COG directors around the state that are taking on specific projects but they may do RLF and Housing Trust Fund projects; the director does need to know what the projects are and have constant communication with staff but are not directly involved in the administration of the project; director needs to know what the needs of the area are and then see that staff addresses those needs; you don't hire a director to do staff work – you hire staff and you hire a Director to do director work
- The interview process should show that the applicant brings the experience you are looking for and hopefully that is brought out in the interview; you hope that it works out (knowing even sometimes it won't)

Question: How important is it for a COG to market its programs to the communities instead of simply waiting for projects to come to them?

- It is essential; you are a membership organization and at least every two years, you need to go out and educate or market yourself because there is inevitably a change in membership due to elections, retirements etc. (mayors, clerks , councils and Supervisors), this is a continual process; 50% of what you do is probably Public Relations, 25% is marketing and 25% is overseeing staff; you always have to inform people "who you are"
- Marketing is essential for continuing your operations from year to year and also essential in developing new programs that the city or county may want or need

Question: What do you see is the biggest challenge of leading a COG staff and how is staff respect gained?

- It is balance and applying oneself; balance of workloads; balance of time for staff acknowledging his/her availability and open door policy
- acknowledge that staff has the resources they need and director should let them do their job
- Director should be cautious at beginning, feeling out who staff is and getting to know them; feel out what is going on; director should let the staff do what staff does and shouldn't feel the need to micromanage
- Respect is earned both ways; director needs to prove himself/herself and the staff is going to have to prove themselves as well, but overall the Director is the Director

Question: How important is the ability to network with other agency leaders and community leaders throughout the region?

- Networking is a must and this is a big job for the new director; it is better to critique rather than create so networking is a way of sharing ideas, thoughts and things that have already been done and perhaps

making it better or making it fit our agency/region; networking is a way of bringing in new ideas to the region by learning from others; being able to show ability to network is a big part of the public relations skill also
- Director needs to be the "face" of the organization, he/she really is the "brand" for the organization

Question: From what you know about UERPC today, what do you think should be the primary focus of the new director over the next six months to one year?

- Public Relations; learn the lay of the land and spending time talking to people; getting to know the board members and perhaps paying a visit to each of their home towns; getting to know staff; know the region that UERPC covers
- Run the organization as a business and not as a government entity – having a good business structure, marketing, recognizing the needs of the communities
- Making sure there is enough money coming in to keep staff and keep them paid for the work they do; director's job is to create enough revenue for paychecks by knowing how to get contracts, grants, planning documents, running and advocating for new programs
- Director will need to know and understand how to run the organization; needs to be a political beast in dealing with politicians
- Director needs to be out front on behalf of the board, staff and members
- Board needs to be on board also and back the director as the person running the organization changing policies if need be
- Meet with counties and cities at least once a year (major county seat cities, etc first and then making the contact with the lower tier of towns if not every year then every two years; if the director is visible, the counties and cities will know that they can also contact the agency in reverse for projects or help they may need and not wait for a visit from the Director
- Board members should also know that they should be promoting the COG to their county or city as well and help make contacts for the director to follow up on or bring back to the Director any needs that they may be hearing about from their particular county/city
- Perhaps just doing a "drop in" visit leaving off a marketing tool like a wall calendar at the end of the year, etc. just to keep UERPC name out there – as it serves as a reminder that we are here to help them

Question: What would be a good goal to help us gain "years of service" (longevity) out of a new Director? (establishing a longer term relationship with a new director)

- Salary and benefits, of course, will have something to do with it; clarity of the relationship that is established with the Director
- Need to let the director be the advocate for the staff; staff works for the director the director works for the board; letting the director do "director stuff"
- Keep this in mind: mortgage, marriage, relations and children - if you put these four elements together, the director will stay around a long time. Explanation: the director first of all has to fall in love with UERPC and perhaps even be from the area helps in terms of having relations to the area and wanting to keep that as one of their personal priorities for family reasons as well as other reasons,
- Something you can't predict or change as it happens
- If Director performs well and the agency is performing well, then you will most likely have a happy and longer relationship

Salary Discussion and longevity: How do we compare to other COG's around the State and is there a theory out there on a good time frame for a director to be useful and not get stalemated?

- Salary should correspond with experience and job description; should not be based on what the counties pay for salaries as those jobs are different in comparison

- COG's are the only agencies that the counties give money to wherein the money is returned back to them by grants that are written and awarded to them through our agencies (they get a return on their investment)
- A salary survey amongst the COG employees is done every year. Right now there are 4 directors with 20 years or more of service; 10 COG's with directors having 7 to 17 years of service currently; 4 directors have 8 years of service and the remainder is at 3-4 years, Right now the norm is for directors to stay in their positions.
- The last statewide salary survey (Nov of 2011) there were 6 directors making less than Aaron Burkes at that time so the majority pay their directors more but keep in mind that many of the directors as pointed out have been here for a length of time and are not new so have worked themselves up on their pay scale.
- So with that said it was stated that a good salary range may be between $65,000 and $80,000-$85,000 keeping in mind whatever experience they are bringing; advice might be to lower the salary and then increasing salary after 6 months could be a good incentive for the new director; but it does boil down to UERPC budgets and what can be feasibly afforded at this time

Question: How do other COG's fund Executive Director positions without having them work on projects?

- It is understood that UERPC's funding is so tight that perhaps we need to require our Director to work on projects in order to justify funding him/her
- Again it was stated that programs such as the RLF program and the Housing Trust Fund program could generate other revenues to help fund the director if he/she took those projects on or any other revenue generating programs – a director could direct bill to these types of activities; there are some Economic Development projects that a director can bill to without necessarily working on that particular project – up to 85% of time could be indirectly billed as an eligible cost

Closing Comments:

- Doug, Tim and Nichole were thanked for their time and input and valuable information.
- Nichole thanked us for allowing them to be a part of the process firmly believing that it was a good move to be having IARC help with the director search process and that it should generate some very good qualified candidates for us; from a statewide perspective they want terrific, strong organizations with all of their COG's and of course, want this for UERPC also
- Nichole also noted that once a Director is hired for the position, IARC has a very good director orientation program in place that could give a lot of help and assistance to the new director; this is done with the assistance of seasoned COG directors from around the state; the state directors are all very supportive of one another and of IARC so a lot of help can be garnered from that support. IARC will be there as an ongoing resource for the new Director.
- Tim asked the board to think about what a new director might ask the board such as: how involved are you as a board in the day to day operations of the staff; what is your role as a board in working with the director in making UERPC the best COG that it can be. The Director needs to know how the Board will help him/her and what strengths they will offer to him/her. There needs to be a team effort to being successful
- Randy asked about the general size or makeup of a Board of Directors from COG's around the state and it was noted that an average is 25; several agencies have as few as 8 but everything is done through the Executive Board, which does a major part of the day to day operations for the agency
- Les asked if we could see a copy of the By-laws from Tim's region
- Board members are encouraged to continue to ask questions of IARC (Nichole) and they will be available to take those questions anytime or Tim could be contacted as well

Closing thoughts:

- Board members shared concern about our track record in keeping a director on board
- Board members are aware that they should be more educated and informed also
- Maybe should use a marketing tool such as the wall calendars
- NEED STABILITY – NEED TO TOOT OUR HORN – NEED TO BRAND OURSELF

**ADJOURNMENT**

Randy thanked everyone for coming to listen to IARC and to share thoughts and input. He felt it was a very productive work session. The notes will be typed up and shared with all board members.

There being no further business to come before this working session, there was a motion by Paul Ryan/Vicki Rowland to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

The above constitutes my interpretation of the matters discussed and the decisions reached. Please contact the undersigned for any corrections or omissions.

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Ardie Kuhse, Board Secretary