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Planning District Commission

Sustainable solutions to regional issues

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Harrison B. Rue

To: Commissioners
From: Harrison Rue
Date: April 24, 2008
RE: Executive Director Search Options

As discussed with the Chair, the Commission has several options for finding my replacement. This is entirely a Commission decision, typically run directly by you, so this memo is just to help kick off your discussion. We talked about this at our Leadership Team meeting, and I am also basing this on the process you used to hire me 6 years ago, as well as my own experience with recruiters recently. There are probably Commissioners among you who have significant experience in this as well. As I mentioned to you last week, we have a well-organized team here, and they can carry the ball well for now - so there is no false urgency to find, hire and get someone in place by my departure in mid-June. However, we are still short-staffed and all are working hard, so staff would like to know the extra load is time-limited.

First recommendation is to appoint/recruit a small subcommittee to direct the search, who have time to meet regularly between Commission meetings (authorized to direct the process, with hiring decision made by the full Commission). I assume you will also want to include input from staff and partners. I was interviewed by three groups – Commissioners, staff, and County/City Administrators, with the latter groups' recommendations being advisory to the Commission decision.

For those of you who participated in the search almost 7 years ago, I think this one is a bit different in character. In 2001, you had a long-time director who was retiring, so there was a 6-month notice; I have only been able to give 2 months (about the maximum time another employer is willing to wait). I think the Commission's overall mission and goals are very current (as reviewed in last Fall's retreat), so your major initial discussion might be focused on what type of individual, with what experience, will be best able to continue to deliver results. The only significant new issue that will impact workload, type of experience, and possibly budget available is the pending decision on whether or not TJPDC should continue to administer the PWN workforce programs.

While funding for a professional search is not yet in the budget, we are in good shape to allow you to make that decision; we have more than doubled our reserves in the last six years. Your options for staff/consultant help could include (not in any order of recommendation):

- Conduct a Commission-led search; small active sub-committee, with possibly locally-contracted admin support.

- Contract with a 'semi-pro', possibly retired or part-time professional to conduct the search. This is the option you used to recruit me; Bob Devoursney at UVA was also part time director of the state VAPDC association, and I assume did it for a reasonable price.
- Contract with a similar type non-profit trade group – SERDI (Southeast Regional Directors Institute, based in Georgia) is one such possibility.
- Do a full-fledged search with a professional search firm. There are a range of services, approaches, and costs; the good ones have many contacts, a proactive, hands-on approach, and make a lot of calls to industry contacts in addition to the usual advertising. I can give you several names of firms if you want to at least get some proposals or talk with them about your options.

I will be glad to advise you on the pros and cons of each option when we meet, but would personally tend toward hiring a professional firm – unless an experienced potential search committee chair with time on their hands steps forward. Of course, I am also available to discuss this with any of you individually, or with the search committee, but this will be a Commission-led effort. I have attached the ED Job Description that was used in my recruitment; this will need to be reviewed and updated. The Leadership Team also asked me to think about 1) appropriate organizations/publications to 'get the word out;' and 2) any possible individuals I know who might be interested. I have also received calls from a couple potential candidates, and will pass those on to the Search Committee when appropriate.