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Pact to ban business 'poaching' is possible

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By KELLY HANNON

Talks continued yesterday between Fredericksburg area governments on whether signing a regional "non-poaching" agreement not to compete for business and tourist attractions was a worthwhile effort.

Phillip Rodenberg, Fredericksburg city manager, floated the idea of a non-poaching agreement in May, during a meeting of the George Washington Regional Commission.

Elected officials from the city, Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania and Stafford sit on the Commission's board.

Last night, Rodenberg said administrators from Stafford, Spotsylvania and the city met to discuss a possible "non-poaching" agreement.

"I think we did agree this is a problem that needs to be addressed," Rodenberg said.

The three administrators and the senior economic development official for each locality will work together to create an agreement, Rodenberg said.

The Commission will see a draft version in a few months.

Stafford supervisor Mark Dudenhefer, who chairs the Commission, said he was "getting a lot of pushback in Stafford" over the idea. He questioned the necessity for the document, asking for examples of business poaching.

Spotsylvania supervisor Hap Connors, a Commission board member, pointed out the Fredericksburg Regional Alliance already has a set of standards on this subject.

Rodenberg said he was not comfortable sharing specific examples. Instead, he pointed to protracted battles between Hampton Roads localities in the 1990s. That experience led many Hampton Roads communities to sign a poaching ban. Rodenberg provided a copy of that agreement to the board.

"It tells me we need to do something else to change what's in place to make it stronger," Rodenberg said.

It's unclear how a voluntary agreement would affect plans for the Museum of the Confederacy to locate a facility in the Fredericksburg area. The museum is considering Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania sites.

Also, the city recently offered incentives to Spotsylvania-based Creative Dimension Group, a millwork firm. When CDG approached the city last spring saying it could not find adequate space in Spotsylvania, Fredericksburg's Economic Development Director Kevin Gullette contacted Spotsylvania officials and told them he would not offer CDG incentives if there was a possibility they could find space in the county.

The city eventually offered the company incentives to buy a building in the city, but before the deal closed, county officials discovered adequate space was available in Spotsylvania, and countered with a richer incentives package.

Fredericksburg Mayor Tom Tomzak said after that development that he thought regional officials needed to talk about how incentives were used across jurisdictional lines.

Staff writer Emily Battle contributed to this story.

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