



Virginia Israel Advisory Board

Office of the Governor

Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting

March 26, 2014 10:00 AM to 11:45 PM, House Room 2, Richmond, Virginia

Attended in Person: Anna Birkenheier (OAG), Mel Chaskin, Fran Fisher, Ron Glaser, Todd House, Maurice Jones, Joel Kanter, Chuck Lessin, Jay Myerson, Ralph Robbins

Via Conference Call: Jeffrey Brooke, Mark Dreyfus, Maya Eskstein, Bill Kilberg, Larry Krakover, David Oblon, David Tenzer

1. Board Minutes of December 5, 2013 were presented. There were no comments.
2. **Project Jonah Update.** Both Ralph Robbins and Chuck Lessin provided an update on the project which includes the following highlights:
 - The VIAB is working with various public bodies to maximize the potential public funding that could be available for Project Jonah. To date, commitments for public funding amount to approximately \$12 million for this \$150 million project that will create 426 jobs in the SW part of Virginia. Some of the commitments are conditional on the company's ability to raise the necessary private equity.
 - The VIAB views the project as a transformational project that will add more than one new business to the area, but rather an entire new vertically integrated industry of aquaculture.
 - The VIAB has developed an ecosystem of support that includes assets in the area: Virginia Tech Food Science Department, local community colleges, workforce retraining capabilities, support from a regional food chain, aggressive support by local government, and support of special funding opportunities in the region.
 - The Israeli company behind Project Jonah is ramping up their activities in Virginia. They have incorporated in Virginia and have offices at Virginia Tech.
3. **Hillel Milo visit to Virginia.** The VIAB arranged for Hillel Milo, a leading Venture Capitalist who has started over 55 companies. His newest fund concentrates on agro technology. He has also been hired by Project Jonah to raise the necessary private equity for the project. Ralph reported that the VIAB went out of its way to demonstrate to Mr. Milo that not only does Virginia support Project Jonah, but that he should view Virginia as a "beta state" for his portfolio of emerging companies. Ralph reported that another portfolio company of Hillel's is already performing validation studies at the Virginia Tech Hampton Aquaculture facility.

A carefully planned tour assembled by Chuck Lessin and Ralph Robbins included visits with: Food City CEO, business and political leadership of Tazewell (projected location for Project Jonah), Virginia Tech, Eric Cantor, State Senators, and Governor McAuliffe who hosted a private breakfast that both Secretary Jones and Secretary Haymore also attended. In our opinion we succeeded in conveying that Project Jonah will receive extraordinary political, business and financial support for the project.

Ralph explained that the aquaculture program is part of the overall vision of bringing Israeli agro technologies to the overall ecosystem that is being created in the Southwestern part of the Commonwealth. The other areas of concentration include “turnkey smart greenhouses” and onsite waste treatment facilities. The “Sabra chickpea development” also falls into this overall vision. All of these activities will be much needed job creation to this area of the State where both tobacco and coal have declined significantly in terms of economic contribution to the area.

4. Other VIAB economic activities reported by Ralph:

- a. Working with an Israel plastic manufacturer who wants to establish operations in the US. Virginia is competing with Dallas, Texas where the company has been offered an entire facility with equipment. The VIAB will work with the VEDP to build our case and presentation.
- b. Chickpea update. During a recent meeting by Chuck Lessin and Ralph Robbins with Dr. Harbans L. Bhardwaj, the professor developing the “Sabra Chickpea” at VSU, he reported that his confidence level for a successful outcome has risen to 65%. He is now in the third year of development and believes that a commercial roll out can begin in 2016. He also reported that when Sabra will manufacture at full capacity once their expanded facility goes on-line, the amount of land needed to supply the company will total approximately 150,000 acres and could employ between 8,000 and 10,000 farmers and other direct labor.
- c. The VIAB continues to engage with an Israeli Tahini manufacturer who Sabra Dipping would like to see establish manufacturing near their facility in Virginia. We expect a trip by the management to Virginia in the coming months.
- d. The VIAB is teaming with FCEDA (Fairfax County Economic Development Authority) on an HLS event in Tel Aviv in March 2014.
- e. The VIAB is exploring a targeted Cyber Security program with Hampton Roads. We are in discussions with a potential “anchor” company that can lead a delegation to Israel to meet with fifteen targeted Israeli companies. The VIAB will be responsible for developing the targeted list and for leading the delegation. As with other successful VIAB programs, five selected companies will be invited back to the region for a series of business development meetings. The goal is to “wow” the companies via a demonstration of the regions assets so that the companies will view Hampton Roads as a natural location from which to expand into the US market.
- f. The VIAB will approach the VEDP leadership with a program that in our opinion complements the VEDP’s own program of outreach to assist Virginia defense and HLS companies to explore potential new markets. This is especially important because of the decrease in government defense spending. Israel is probably one of the best markets to explore with this objective in mind.

5. Ralph reported on “tweaks” being made to the VIAB organization that include:

- a. Hiring a new part time employee to replace the work done by Lala Korall who has resigned from the VIAB so that she could work for Project Jonah as an employee of the company. The individual selected is Aliza Asher who has the needed skills including a good command of Hebrew.
- b. Julie will continue to work primarily on NOVA activity.

- c. Mindy Johnson will work on Hampton Roads activity.
- d. In response to a question, Ralph reported that the VIAB is consulting with both the AGs office and Dennis Johnson, who is responsible for VIAB's accounting and budget, to assure that the VIAB abides by all state guidelines.
- e. Ralph reported that Chuck Lessin, the VIAB Vice-Chair, has become very active in various VIAB projects. But doing this, he has expanded dramatically the breath of the VIAB activities.
- f. The VIAB will explore making a formal connection with Virginia Tech so that the VIAB will be able to evaluate and develop new agro tech projects in a professional manner.

6. **Minds in Motion - Cultural Exchange.** The **Minds In Motion** program will take place in Emek Hefer in January, 2015. The Arab village of Qalanswa will also participate in the program. Funding for the program was made via a contribution to the Richmond Ballet by Abbey Moore and Neil and Sara Bell November, two families from Richmond. The VIAB will make a book of the program to present to the donors as appreciation for their support. The next Board meeting is scheduled for July 29, 2014.

7. **The next VIAB Board meetings will be:**

- a. July 29, 2014
- b. December 2, 2014
- c. March 24, 2015

8. **The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 PM.**