

NEW RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL COMMISSION
Minutes of the Commission Meeting
held on
November 30, 2023
6:00 p.m.— Pulaski County Innovation Center, Fairlawn

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Johnson, Chair, called the meeting to order.

PRESENT: Mr. H. Johnson, Town of Christiansburg, Chair; Mr. S. Fijalkowski, Montgomery County, Vice-Chair; Mr. L. Law, Giles County, Treasurer; Ms. S. Anderson, Town of Blacksburg; Mr. L. Clevinger, Town of Pulaski; Mr. W. Griffin, Town of Floyd; Mr. D. Horton, City of Radford; Mr. J. Martin, City of Radford; Mr. M. Maslaney, Floyd County; Mr. M. Patton, Town of Floyd; Mr. M. Reis, Mr. J. Reeves, Pulaski County; Town of Pulaski; Mr. T. Spangler, Town of Narrows and Mr. T Wilson, Town of Christiansburg.

ABSENT: Mr. D. Breslau, Town of Blacksburg; Ms. C. Clark, Town of Pearisburg; Ms. A. Covey, New River Community College; Dr. A. Joyner, Radford University; Ms. L. DeVito Kuchenbuch, Floyd County; Mr. R. Jones, Town of Rich Creek; Mr. R. Lawson, Town of Pembroke; Mr. R. McCoy, Giles County; Ms. L. Morris, Virginia Tech; Ms. M. Trigiani, Virginia Tech Foundation; Dr. D. Warren, Pulaski County and Mr. B. Wheeler, Montgomery County.

Staff Attendees: Kevin Byrd, Aphi Fancon, Julie Phillips and Leo Priddy.

II. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes for September

Mr. Johnson called for approval of the consent agenda item if there were no questions or changes.

Motion: Mr. Horton moved for the approval of the minutes. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried.

B. Approval of Treasurer's Reports for September and October

Mr. Johnson called for approval of the consent agenda item if there were no questions or changes.

Motion: Mr. Wilson moved for approval of the Treasurer's Reports. Mr. Law seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried.

III. COMMONWEALTH INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

A. Projects (Signed-off by the staff)

1. SWVA BioChar-Fertilizer Production Expansion Project

B. Regular Project Review

1. Virginia Tech Transportation Institute Buffer, DEQ 23-167S
2. Virginia Tech Mitchell Hall, DEQ #23-173S
3. Virginia Tech Greenlink Priority 2 Project, DEQ #23-175S

IV. PUBLIC ADDRESS

None

V. CHAIR'S REPORT

Mr. Johnson reported that this will be Mr. Patton's last meeting representing the Town of Floyd and thanked him for his years of service. He then reported that the full board will not meet in December; however, the Executive Committee will meet.

VI. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Byrd provided a summary report in the Regional Commission agenda packet. The NRV Recovery Ecosystem Program is in the process of getting under contract with the Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA) and executing operating agreements with local partners. Four new employees were recently hired to launch the regional program. Walter Midkiff, Community Accountability Coordinator, and Anna Champion, Project Manager, will start December 1st. Kinsey Weaver, Community Accountability Coordinator, will start December 16th and Julie Fox, Education/Training Coordinator, will start on January 1st.

The bank accounts for both the Montgomery/Bland and Pulaski County Broadband projects have been set up with First Bank and Trust following an RFP process. The first project reimbursement for Montgomery/Bland took place in October. The Pulaski County project is finalizing field verification for pole attachments and anticipates their first reimbursement request in the coming weeks.

The NRV/Danville Tech Hubs proposal for Additive Manufacturing and Advanced Materials was selected for a Strategy Development Grant by the US Economic Development Administration! This was a highly competitive national program. Collaborating with Virginia Tech's Center for Economic and Community Engagement proved to be a successful partnership in developing the consortium proposal. Approximately 200 consortia applied for designation, 31 were awarded the destination while an additional 18 regions received the strategy development grant. We are awaiting a contract from US EDA and will be holding a consortium kick-off meeting in the interim on 12/13. The Regional Commission will be advertising for a Regional Innovation Officer position to support this project in the coming weeks.

A GO Virginia grant request for their capacity building program that dovetails with the Tech Hub program was recently recommended for approval by the GO VA Region 2 Regional Council. The state board for GO VA is scheduled to act on the proposal in December.

The NRV Passenger Rail Station Authority will meet on December 15th at 11:30am. The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority staff will be discussing upcoming public engagement focused on the required environmental review process. The nominating committee will also present a slate of officers for 2024.

The Plant Southwest Virginia Natives program recently completed the Native Plant Guide for the region. Guides were shipped to the Regional Commission office and the staff has been delivering boxes of the guides to government offices, libraries, partner organizations, and businesses across the region.

The NRV Housing Trust Fund (HTF) made their first investment of \$1.8M and selected projects in Pulaski and Blacksburg that represents 106 units of affordable housing being added to the regional inventory. The Pulaski project is a conversion of the Claremont School, a former elementary school, and the Blacksburg project is new construction on South Main Street.

Thanks to Pulaski County and Volvo for hosting a terrific annual dinner event in October. It was a great turnout and an impressive venue. A press release celebrating the award recipients ran in numerous local media outlets promptly after the event.

Leo Priddy was hired in October to fill the Economic Development Specialist role. Leo has experience working with the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Development Center serving as the New River Valley advisor. He has hit the ground running getting the Regional Economic Strategy committee membership updated along with the Revolving Loan Fund committee. Both will meet in December.

Hats off to both Kathleen Armstrong and Leo Priddy for being nominated as Community Service Individual of the Year by the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce! Award winners will be announced on December 7th at the Chamber Annual Meeting.

Staffing of the Regional Commission is going through the planned expansion that was included in the FY24 budget. Four people were hired to support the NRV Recovery Ecosystem, interviews are underway for an additional Finance Technician, and a Regional Innovation Officer will be advertised soon to support the Tech Hubs program. The organization will be at 22 employees in the next month or so, the largest to date. To accommodate the growth, seven existing staff members have moved workstations/offices and three areas in our leased space have three to five employees sharing space. Everyone's willingness to accommodate the growth and change has been greatly appreciated.

VII. REVIEW OF MUTUAL CONCERNS AND COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Mr. Wilson reported in the coming weeks the Town of Christiansburg will have a holiday parade, Santa will ride through neighborhoods on a fire truck, and a food drive will be held. He also shared an initiative to move Small Business Saturday away from the Saturday after Thanksgiving to the following Saturday due to many competing interests for consumers.

Mr. Horton reported the City of Radford will have a holiday parade the first weekend in December and will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of Glencoe Museum. Radford High School Football will play in the state semi-finals on Saturday. Radford University, the Big South Conference and Nike will hold New River City Day at the Highlander basketball game Sunday.

Ms. Anderson reported the Town of Blacksburg will hold a parade and tree lighting December 1st. Election results were recently finalized for Town Council. Jerry Ford and Michael Sutphin won re-election and Liam Watson was elected to his first term.

Mr. Griffin reported the Town of Floyd will have a tree lighting ceremony on December 1st. The Town recently purchased a significant 5 acre parcel and a smaller parcel. Together, they represent considerable redevelopment opportunities for the town.

Mr. Reis reported the Town of Pulaski will have its holiday parade on December 7th. He shared the Peppers Ferry Wastewater Treatment Authority recently came to agreement on how to handle specialized effluent treatment in the system. This has been discussed over several years, so it is good to have resolution.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

None

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport
Mike Stewart, Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport (ROA) Executive Director, presented on the air service opportunities and how making the business case for the region is top of mind in discussions with the airlines. He also highlighted opportunities for growth included in the Airport Master Plan that was submitted to the FAA this summer for approval.

B. Setting FY25 Per Capita Assessment Rate (Dues)
Mr. Byrd explained the current assessment rate is \$1.32 per capita based on estimates from the 2020 census. The Executive Committee is recommending a return to using the Weldon Cooper Center population estimates for FY25 while keeping with the existing rate of \$1.32. The Commission typically adjusts the rate every two years, and this would be the third year of a level rate, although moving back to using Weldon Cooper data. The table includes a comparison of rate increases of two, three, and four cents for discussion purposes.

Mr. Johnson called for approval of the FY25 Per Capita Assessment Rate to be set at \$1.32.

Motion: Mr. Horton moved for the approval of the FY25 rate at \$1.32. Mr. Patton seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

C. Appointing Regional Economic Strategy (RES) Committee Members
Mr. Byrd explained the proposed RES Committee list was included in the packet.

Mr. Johnson called for approval of the recommended RES Committee members.

Motion: Mr. Wilson moved to approve the RES Committee list. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

D. Appointing Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Committee Members

Mr. Byrd explained the proposed RLF Committee list was included in the packet.

Mr. Johnson called for approval of the recommended RLF Committee members.

Motion: Ms. Anderson moved to approve the RLF Committee list. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

E. December Commission Meeting

Motion: Mr. Horton moved for the approval of canceling the December meeting due to the Christmas Holiday. Mr. Maslaney seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Johnson called to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 pm.

H. Johnson, Chair
New River Valley Regional Commission