



Central Virginia Planning
District Commission
828 Main Street, 12th Floor
Lynchburg, VA 24504
Office: (434) 845-3491
cvpdc.org

Central Virginia Planning District Commission Executive Committee Meeting – Minutes November 21, 2024, 5:00 p.m.

Meeting Location - CVPDC Offices
828 Main Street, 12th Floor
Lynchburg, VA 24504

Members Present:

Chairman Reggie Bennett, Town of Altavista
Frank Rogers, Campbell County
Tom Lawton, Campbell County
Jeremy Bryant, Amherst County
Drew Wade, Amherst County
Robert Hiss, Bedford County
John Sharp, Bedford County
Jeff Helgeson, City of Lynchburg
Dwayne Tuggle, Town of Amherst
Gary Shanaberger, Town of Altavista
Bruce Johannessen, Town of Bedford
John Spencer, Appomattox County
Richard Conner, Town of Appomattox
Rob Fowler, Town of Appomattox
Megan Lucas, Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance

Members Joining Virtually:

Wynter Benda, City of Lynchburg

Staff Present:

Alec Brebner
Sandy Dobyns
Patti Lassiter
Ada Hunsberger

Others Present:

Katie Conner, VA Tourism Corporation (Guest Speaker)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Reggie Bennett welcomed the Board and guests. The meeting started at 5:00 p.m..

2. Consideration of Requests for Electronic Participation

Wynter Benda was approved to join the meeting virtually.

3. Special Guests: Virginia Tourism Corporation – Katie Conner

Katie Conner gave a presentation on the tourism industry in Virginia. Virginia Tourism is an entity of the Secretary of Commerce and Trade within the Governor's office. Their role in Virginia is to market Virginia both domestically and internationally. "We want to make sure we're giving the most people the opportunity to spend the most money and stay the longest in our communities. We do this by promoting Virginia as a premier travel destination."

Katie shared that the Economic Impact Study from 2023 showed tourism accounted for \$33.3 billion in spending in the Commonwealth. Jobs accounted for over 224,000 jobs in the tourism industry. The most impactful is looking at what tourism means and how tourism daily spending in Virginia is. Per the study, it is \$91,000,000. "What does that mean here in your region?" The footprint represented in this room is over \$518,000,000 in visitor spending, of which the most significant spend is from the food and restaurant industry.

Katie discussed the 10 tourism regions and why they are essential to note. In the travel guides provided, the travel regions are laid out in print and on VTC's website. Visitors travel based on their experience. They may be staying in one area, but they may also explore the surrounding areas. It really is about a collaborative effort.

The Chair asked, "The first step of this process is to talk to you and set up an appointment. Then, work out the details with the budgets and stories, events, places, and how you would like those presented about your area. That all begins with you. Then, after you gain a plan, you have different avenues to distribute this." Katie responded, "Every community has a story to tell, and it's our goal to make sure we're telling it in the most accurate way possible. The best way to do that is through these conversations."

Jeremy Bryant asked how to communicate with Katie's office when their localities are having events so the message is being pushed out to a bigger audience. Katie responded, "That's an event that can be listed through the account within virgnina.org," "We don't add the listings, but make sure that you have the tools to list it there."

Tom Lawton asked, "Under one of your slides about a grant program for special events. Would a county fair fall into that category? If so, what can these grant funds be used for? Katie answered that with special events and festivals, it's a minimum of two consecutive years that have been conducted, and you have to show how many attendees you have. "We do have some thresholds to be mindful of, as well as what that marketing budget looks like as long as you meet some of those peak criteria and the terms and conditions of the grant." Katie believes that with the Fairs, as long as they reach and meet those criteria, then absolutely.

Tom asked, "If we were eligible, does it have to be used for marketing, or can it be used for

infrastructure?” Katie responded, “It does not allow for permanent infrastructure, but there are allowables. For example, temporary staging and parking needs. Without further questions or comments, the Board thanked Katie for her presentation.”

The Chair took a few minutes to recognize Councilman Jeff Helgeson, as this will be his last meeting as a commissioner. He has served CVPDC as the Vice-Chairman for FY2024 and has served 20 years on Lynchburg City Council. “We appreciate all the hard work you do,” said Reggie Bennett. Councilman Helgeson said it was nice to be at the meeting and to see the areas where we can work on things regionally because there is a lot of good crossover.

4. Approval of Regular Meeting Minutes, September 19, 2024

Reggie asked if there were any changes to the minutes of the September 19, 2024 meeting. Tom Lawton mentioned his name was misspelled, but no further comments or corrections were made. Tom Lawton made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Megan Lucas. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

5. Central Virginia Commuter Assistance Program Strategic Plan

The Chair presented the request for adoption of the CVPDC Central Virginia Commuter Assistance Program Strategic Plan as presented by Ada Hunsberger to the Commission at its regular September meeting. The plan is in draft form, and to date, staff has not received any comments or corrections. The adopted strategy is due to the Department of Rail and Public Transportation.

The Chair requested that the Commission adopt the CVPDC Central Virginia Commuter Assistance Program Strategic Plan as presented. Richard Conner made a motion to approve the plan, which was seconded by Drew Wade. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

6. Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Research: Next Steps

Alec Brebner gave a brief update on this project and its status. Virginia Clean Cities has proposed a scope of work at no cost to the PDC, which includes conducting research and analysis to identify sites, providing cost estimates for installing EV charging infrastructure at those locations, coordinating outreach efforts to local businesses, developing project plans and budgets, and fair funding applications.

Alec explained that this is not something the local governments are taking on but is an opportunity to coordinate between Virginia Clean Cities business owners and funding sources that might derive from VDOT as a program. PDC staff time would be required to coordinate. There are no funding obligations involved. Alec asked the Commission if they would like, as a region, to support this venture and, if so, for direction accordingly.

Discussion ensued about the support for and against this project. Since there was no need for a vote, the Chair asked for a show of hands for a consensus on what direction to take. If there is a majority, then staff will seek to contact the Virginia Clean Cities. If a majority is opposed, then staff will not. Councilman Hegelsen asked if there was a timeframe for this. Councilman Hegelsen suggested that the Commission table this item for a year to see what is happening after the newly elected officials are in office. The Chair asked for a show of hands of members' interest in tabling this for a year. A majority of members wanted to table this opportunity for one year. It will be revisited in November 2025.

7. Organizational Reports

b. Financial Report – Fiscal Year 2025

Alec updated the Commission on the new format for the financial report. Staff would like to start using the reports directly provided by Quickbooks instead of the Excel Spreadsheets. Staff believe this allows for more transparency and less room for error. Alec asked Sandy to give some highlights about the new financial report. Sandy stated that it was a much cleaner presentation. The only difference between the Quickbooks versus the Excel spreadsheet is the breakdown of the grants. Sandy is confident that if members had any questions about the grants, the staff would be happy to provide a breakdown.

Tom Lawton asked how often the Commission can see the balance sheet. Alec answered, "As often as you'd like." Tom asked that the balance sheet be provided to the Commission as part of the financial reports. The staff responded affirmatively.

b. Executive Director's Report

i. FEMA

Alec mentioned that a group from FEMA has been visiting Planning District Commissions on this side of the state because of the impact of Hurricane Helene. Earlier on the day of the meeting, they visited CVPDC offices. FEMA discussed relief opportunities that exist as a result of the disaster recovery response, hazard mitigation, and preparedness. There will be an announcement soon regarding the availability of \$50 million. FEMA encouraged participants to think about the projects they have, tie those projects to the disaster, and get them funded. If you can't tie a project directly to the funding, other funding opportunities are related to resilience to storms and better preparing our infrastructures against these impacts.

ii. United Way of Southern Virginia

Alec updated the Board on a request he received from Kim Soerensen, who attended a meeting in July and gave a presentation about an initiative she's working on for childcare in our Central Virginia area. They are seeking a planning grant from GO Virginia for \$100,000. With this grant, they hope to develop a strategy and perhaps pursue additional implementation dollars. What they are seeking from the Commission is letters of support. If you would like to send a letter of support, staff would be happy to provide Kim's contact information.

iii. Regional Water Supply Plan

Alec updated the Commission on the unfunded mandate from the state for a Regional Water Supply Plan. In October, a letter arrived at localities stipulating that every locality needed to indicate to DEQ a representative who would participate in a water supply plan. DEQ has identified some regions that they want to work together in, and they have. Some options to consider include a planning district commission agreeing to do that, or DEQ having to do it themselves. The latter was discussed as the preferred option, at least in the near term, between Alec and the CAOs. The PDC did a water supply plan almost 15 years ago; now the updates are overdue statewide. All regions have been waiting for these

regulations to come out. At this time, there is no necessary action from the Commission. John Sharp asked why this is being required. Alec commented that DEQ is trying to understand what the impacts may or may not be on regional draws. Discussion ensued regarding our region's collaborative efforts already being done regarding this.

iv. Central Virginia Planning District Commission – Membership Contributions

The chairman introduced the next item on the agenda, Membership Contributions. The Planning District Commission must develop recommendations to member local governments regarding membership contributions in November. Once recommended by the Commission, staff transmits requests to all members for consideration in their budget deliberations. After local government budget development, the PDC prepares its annual budget for action in April and May. The request of the Commission is approval of a schedule of membership contributions based on \$0.675 per capita. No increase is recommended.

Alec discussed the population estimates published by the Weldon Cooper Center. The Towns will pay the same amount as last year, and the per capita rate will stay the same, but the localities may have increased by a few people since last year.

The total revenue for the upcoming fiscal year is \$184,132. The suggested contribution for FY2026 is \$185,330. The revenue is used by the Planning District Commission to match those state and federal grants that have been agreed upon or would be expected to receive in the coming fiscal year.

John Sharp moved to approve the membership contributions, which was seconded by Jeff Hegelsen. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

v. Tobacco Commission Strategic Plan Input Session

Alec has been invited to provide input into the Virginia Tobacco Regional Revitalization Commission Strategic Plan. Alec seeks input from the Commission on the questions being presented by the Tobacco Commission regarding how you'd like to see the settlement funding spent.

Conservation was started by Robert Hiss for question number two about workforce education. There has been much discussion in Central Virginia about this topic. In the past the focus has been to get big industries to come and train people to fit in this industry. That's great, but what about nursing, educators, fire, and EMS? Is there a role to enhance workforce education capacity and certification in some of those hard-to-fill sectors at the core of our community's functioning? What we see happening is that the supply into the profession of Fire and EMS is not what it needs to be. It seems like the current employees are local to a locality but are drawn to who will pay more, so localities seem to be "swapping" employees.

Alec added that in this question, there seems to be an implication that the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement will now add these additional services or training that will duplicate what the Tobacco Commission

may have done in the past. This is not the experience in Central Virginia. The new department is a reorganization at the State level. Staff is not seeing new programs or resources in any significant or recurring way that the Tobacco Commission doesn't need to be in this space. To date, the Tobacco Commission's efforts in the workforce have focused on those 18 and up. There's an increasing need for EMTs and other professions that need to start in high school before they make career decisions for a degree they can't use. The focus should be to have them get into fields where they can be successful and contribute to our region.

Alec added that at the federal level, there is an increasing likelihood that the balancing of programs specific to the requirements of workforce development will change and focus more on training in Virginia, especially in Central Virginia. This doesn't make sense in this area when we have such a robust Community College system when our staff members on the workforce development board are already doing this. So those aspects of workforce training, especially for people who have been laid off, are valuable, and staff would hate to see this decrease from the Federal level.

Frank Rogers agreed with Robert's point of view. The Tobacco Commission, particularly in rural counties, could reinvest some additional attention and resources in the public safety system. It's fundamental to economic development, which is desperate for additional workforce development investment. While this is very specific, it would help achieve some of their macro-level goals, as rural counties would have some help in the area, which would help the region as a whole.

11. Other Business

The Chair introduced the next item for conversation, the schedule of events including a social gathering in 2025. After the past two years of trying to hold a holiday social gathering downtown, staff has suggested trying something new. Alec suggested that perhaps we have the gathering in the Chairman of that year's town. The Chairman's community would host and have a "show and tell" of the things happening there. Alec also suggested maybe doing this in February. Discussion ensued about this idea and the timing. It was decided to schedule this in February on the 3rd Thursday of the month, being mindful of budget sessions and holidays. It was also agreed that the Avoca would be the place for the dinner after a tour of the Spark Innovation Center.

12. Adjournment

The chair entertained the motion to adjourn. Gary Shanaberger made the motion, and Frank seconded it. The meeting was adjourned at 6:14 p.m.

x  _____
Signature attest

 _____
Date