



Central Virginia Planning
District Commission
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Central Virginia Planning District Commission Regular Meeting Minutes March 20, 2025 @ 5:00 PM

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

Members Present:

Drew Wade, Amherst County, Vice-Chairman
Frank Rogers, Campbell County
Tom Lawton, Campbell County
John Spencer, Appomattox County
Dwayne Tuggle, Town of Amherst
John Sharp, Bedford County
Richard Conner, Town of Appomattox
Michael Campbell, Town of Appomattox
Megan Lucas, Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance

Members Joining Virtually:

Jeremy Bryant, Amherst County
Curt Diemer, City of Lynchburg

Staff Present:

Alec Brebner
Sandy Dobyns
Patti Lassiter
Richard White
Traci Blido
Tim Saunders

Others Present:

Kent White, City of Lynchburg
John Provo, GO Virginia (Virtual)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Vice-Chairman Drew Wade welcomed the Board, guests, and new board members. For new members who could join, a brief introduction was given. The meeting started at 5:02 p.m.

John Provo with GO Virginia was invited to speak about some upcoming input opportunities. John thanked the board for allowing him this opportunity and stated it was nice to see some familiar faces.

John gave a brief overview of the program, stating they have funded a range of projects in Lynchburg. John acknowledged Megan Lucas and that GO Virginia has supported several industrial site development initiatives and efforts related to entrepreneurship. GO Virginia's funding has also contributed to the expansion of Central Virginia Community College, the CTE Academy, developments at Vector Space, the Bedford metals training project, and the Appomattox welding project.

GO Virginia's goal is to help grow the industries in the region. GO Virginia believes this cannot be accomplished solely by examining data on a spreadsheet. John provided a link and a QR code for a brief survey. John stated that feedback is important so that GO Virginia can better understand the overall conditions.

GO Virginia has scheduled meetings for May, with a couple to be held in Lynchburg. They will share the specific dates soon, and Alec will distribute that information to the group.

John hopes the board members can take some time to provide input that will help shape the planning process. GO Virginia aims to establish clear guidelines for the types of funding that this program can offer. John looks forward to working with the PDC in the future and is happy to answer any questions.

Megan Lucas reported that LRBA has secured over \$3.5 million in GO Virginia grants for the region. John noted that the region is well represented in the funding pool, with Megan's organization possibly being the second or third largest grant recipient. Megan highlighted LRBA's due diligence on local sites and focus on entrepreneurship as key to their efforts, emphasizing work in identifying and developing sites and buildings.

Frank Rogers appreciated the survey opportunity and asked about the program's future. John explained that GO Virginia updates its economic data every two years, focusing this year on the growing energy sector to benefit all stakeholders. Despite challenges in regions with limited federal employment opportunities, collaboration with federal-sector companies remains crucial. John is optimistic about the success of the energy companies.

Additionally, a significant portion of GO Virginia funding is allocated to workforce development, with about half directed toward workforce initiatives, while also supporting site development and entrepreneurship. This can be a valuable resource as the region adapts to changes in the labor markets.

2. Consideration of Requests for Electronic Participation

Vice-Chairman Wade asked for a motion to allow Jeremy Bryant and Curt Diemer to

participate electronically. Richard Connor made the motion, which Megan Lucas seconded. All voted in favor of the motion. Jeremy and Curt were approved to participate in the meeting virtually.

3. Special Guest, Traci Blido, Virginia Career Works – Central Region

Traci introduced herself, noting her background in economic development and current role addressing workforce shortages observed during the pandemic. She thanked Alec for the invitation and mentioned her previous appearance before the Commission with Nicole Overly from Virginia Works.

As part of the Central Virginia Workforce Development Board (CVWDB), Traci collaborates with local officials, including Drew Wade and John Sharp. The board includes representatives from community colleges and Job Corps programs, with over 50% of its members from the private sector. CVWDB aims to align local training resources with employer needs, partnering with organizations such as Alliance and Beacon of Hope. With LinkedIn predicting that by 2030, about 70% of job skills will change due to automation and AI, CVWDB is focused on these trends to shape its workforce development strategies.

Traci discussed the employment landscape in Central Virginia, noting a steady population growth and a year-over-year wage increase of 4.6%. The current average wage is \$53,303, which is lower than the national average of \$72,609; however, the cost of living is also lower, allowing residents to maintain a high quality of life.

Healthcare is the largest industry, employing about 17,000 workers, followed by education with nearly 15,000 and manufacturing with around 14,000—higher than both state and national averages. Manufacturing, which offers higher wages, makes a significant contribution to the economy.

The region has many lower-paying retail and hospitality jobs, but growth in higher-paying fields like healthcare and manufacturing could lead to change. CVWDB, in partnership with the Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance, has developed strategic initiatives such as the Educator Workforce Academy and the “Worlds of Opportunity” event in October, which engages students in hands-on demonstrations.

BWXT recently announced a \$2.1 billion contract that is expected to create many jobs in the region by 2030. Nat Marshall from BWXT discussed the challenge of hiring, as many employees nearing retirement make it difficult to estimate the number of new hires, potentially ranging from 100 to 1,000. Attracting skilled workers is especially crucial.

Traci highlighted the numerous job opportunities at BWXT through 2030, emphasizing the importance of preparing today’s students as future employees. Framatome also plans to hire 500 people in the coming years.

Megan noted that LRBA is working with schools to integrate a nuclear industry-developed K-12 curriculum into education systems to be available as a free resource.

Traci introduced Tim Saunders, the assistant director of CVWDB, who created 21 short videos showcasing local industries like welding, the Blue Ridge Water Authority, and mechanics. Thanks to the Educator Workforce Academy led by the Alliance, these videos are now available for teachers to use, making other states envious of our resources.

Traci highlighted CVWDB's worker training program, which has upskilled nearly 48 employees over the past year and a half, with an investment of \$40,000 to \$45,000 in 2023. The program helps retain both employees and companies by offering training on new equipment.

CVWDB served 107 adults and 86 young people aged 16 to 24 last year, focusing on those facing barriers to employment, including recent graduates in challenging situations. Traci seeks feedback from employers on workforce needs and encourages individuals to consider community college programs, especially with tuition support through initiatives like Fast Forward.

CVWDB must promote workforce opportunities to young people. Traci found that there are currently 7,300 job openings in our region, with at least half of the jobs requiring certification. Notably, healthcare roles, particularly those of Registered Nurses (RNs) and Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), are in high demand.

Frank Rogers highlighted that Campbell County reflects Virginia's workforce challenges, noting that long-term employees are staying put despite opportunities elsewhere. He emphasizes the need for public service considerations as the county struggles to attract young talent and lacks the resources for substantial incentives. While private-sector growth is important, local governments face pressing challenges that also need to be addressed.

4. Approval of Regular Meeting Minutes, January 16, 2025

Vice-Chairman Wade inquired about any changes to the minutes from the January 16, 2025, meeting. With no comments or corrections, Megan Lucas made a motion to approve the minutes, which Richard Connor seconded. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

5. Two-Year Appointments to LRBA Executive Committee

Alec mentioned that Megan had updated him on the board's review of the LRBA executive committee rotation, as it had been a while since nominations were made. Executive committee meetings have been scheduled for the second Thursday of each month at 3:00 PM.

Eligible participants are the chief administrative officers from local governments that are members of both the PDC and LRBA. Currently, only Frank Rogers and Michael Campbell are present. The board can either nominate individuals now or wait until the next meeting.

Megan suggested postponing the nominations. She also proposed paralleling the Red Team,

which focuses on regional economic development and has a rotating chair. This year, Victoria (Amherst) is chair, and next year, Pam (Bedford County) will take over. The board decided to table this item until the next meeting when more members are present.

6. Organizational Reports

a) Financial Report and Balance Sheet

Sandy provided a brief overview of the financial report. Activity has increased by approximately 25%, primarily due to the addition of new staff. Patti has been handling a significant amount of billable work, and with Richard now on board, the staff has been able to increase billing. As a result, CVPDC has more activity this year. From a financial standpoint, everything looks positive so far this year.

Alec mentioned that CVPDC currently has an open position for a transportation planner. CVPDC has struggled to find qualified candidates in that area, so staff are actively searching again. Fortunately, staff have received a large number of resumes this time. With recent layoffs at the federal level, staff hopes to attract a qualified applicant from that talent pool. Staff will provide an update on our progress at the next meeting. This time, staff have received more resumes than ever before since posting the opening over the past two to three years. Staff are optimistic about finding someone to fill this role, as the office could greatly benefit from the help.

b) Executive Director's Report

Alec provided updates and requested a budget discussion in advance. Each year, the executive committee holds a budget workshop on the second Thursday in April at 1:00 PM, which consists of the chair, the mayor, and chief administrative officers from localities. They make recommendations for the full Commission's review of the 2026 budget in May.

Despite recent administrative changes, Alec reports stable funding and revenue streams. As chairman of the Virginia Association of MPOs, he monitors regional funding stability. Additionally, staff received a \$50,000 sub-award from the Thriving Communities program.

Regional organizations, such as the Region 2000 Services Authority and the Central Virginia Radio Communications Board, primarily rely on local funding and are minimally affected by federal changes. Connecting VA is a rebranded computer assistance program funded by the DRPT. CVTPO, a federally funded organization, plans transportation in central Virginia. The CVTPO receives over half a million dollars annually. To qualify for federal funding, projects must be included in the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP).

The Planning District Commission receives funding from various federal agencies, including USDOT, EDA, and HUD for Community Development Block Grants, and no disruptions are anticipated. Alec mentioned the hazard mitigation plan update with FEMA to address flooding challenges. The CVPDC is on track with projects for this fiscal year, which will be presented in the budget at the next meeting.

Alec highlighted the connection between Main Street and the Amtrak station, noting the redevelopment opportunity for the A&P store, which has historic value and is currently for sale. This project is one of only two Virginia nominations for USDOT's Thriving Communities program and one of 58 nationwide.

The CVPDC is planning a housing summit with the LRBA, focusing on "Housing for All," which aims to provide resources for affordable housing providers. Although the region faces housing challenges, they are not as severe as those in Charlottesville. Streamlining development along the 12th Street Corridor is crucial, with proper zoning and incentives needed.

Speakers at the summit will include representatives from the Richmond Federal Reserve discussing the economic value of housing, a researcher from the Mercatus Center on housing policy, and Jonathan Knopf from Housing Forward Virginia, who will present findings from the CVPDC's recent housing needs assessment.

Alec debriefed the Commission on the results of SMART SCALE's Round 6, noting what regions and types of projects were most successful. He offered that localities must coordinate on larger projects, and the MPO can facilitate this. Notably, VDOT's Lynchburg District consistently gets the lowest-scoring funded projects. Central Virginia needs to advocate for its District Grant Program funding to the General Assembly to protect the resources of the Lynchburg construction district.

Alec attends Commonwealth Transportation Board meetings to stay informed. While MPOs have the legal right to participate in the SMART SCALE process, OIPI has not provided them access. The VAMPO Executive Committee is drafting a letter to the Secretary of Transportation requesting inclusion in future program developments.

Alec also mentioned the Building Opportunities on Main Street initiative by the Tobacco Commission, which is open to applications. He will contact Altavista, Brookneal, and Bedford to solicit interest in the program, which proposes to support the reuse of storefront properties.

Additionally, Alec reported that the Radio Board is working on securing long-term leases for equipment and has had positive communications regarding with a tower owner, which alleviated the need for a special meeting in January.

Upcoming events include a rescheduled regional gathering in Altavista and plans for a meeting of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee there. The Spark Center in Altavista is a key resource for promoting entrepreneurship in smaller communities.

7. Other Business and Regional Roundtable

Michael Campbell shared his thoughts on the MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) issue, highlighting concerns about funds sent back to Richmond from the Tri-Cities MPO area. After three years of advocacy, they are beginning to establish a Transportation Authority, like the CVTA (Central Virginia Transportation Authority). Michael believes it would be valuable to localize transportation funds to regain control from the state government.

Through initiatives like the CVTA, localities can receive a portion of sales and gas tax revenues for their transportation projects. He emphasizes that local authorities should have the power to set scoring criteria for these funds, and while legislative approval is needed, there have already been successful pursuits of this initiative in other regions.

Frank noted that there is a growing reliance on grant funding for local projects, putting localities with a Transportation Authority in a better financial position. However, there are challenges related to a separate quasi-governmental authority that imposes additional taxes and fees. He wondered how other areas had addressed this issue.

Michael noted that people handle fees differently and highlighted several methods to achieve the desired outcome, such as Fredericksburg's approach with personal property tax. He mentioned that CVTA funds redirect money from the state and suggested alternatives, such as raising the sales tax instead of just increasing the fuel tax. John Sharp pointed out local opposition to tax increases, while Frank expressed concerns and emphasized the need for accurate regional fuel tax capture.

Michael stressed the importance of leveraging SMART SCALE and considering the cost-benefit ratio. He acknowledged that the Town of Appomattox benefited from studies and grants, which may not be available everywhere. Frank requested an updated report and a white paper on the concept, hoping for new insights, and Alec offered to help.

Michael encouraged the board to explore the idea, even if it leads nowhere, and noted that VDOT could be beneficial for grant funding. Dwayne added that the governor has recently started releasing bills, with some expected to be vetoed.

John Sharp mentioned he was recently interviewed about the General Assembly's discussions on zoning for commercial solar installations in rural areas. Local control over zoning is crucial, especially with significant investments influencing upcoming elections.

Bedford County is considering allocating \$100,000 this year to defend against potential legal challenges and urges other localities to do the same. This funding would cover attorney fees if legal action were needed.

Bedford County believes the state government misjudges local zoning issues, with its Comprehensive Plan protecting agriculture and tourism at Smith Mountain Lake. John invites discussions with county boards, emphasizing that even a small commitment from your locality would send a strong message against these initiatives. John requests your support in this effort.

12. Adjournment

The motion to adjourn was entertained by the Vice-Chair. Dwayne Tuggle made a motion to adjourn, and Richard Connor seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 PM.

X _____
Signature attest

Date