

Minutes
Rural Virginia Action Committee Meeting
Board of Directors of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership
January 29, 2020
11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Board Room
VEDP Main Office in Richmond, Virginia

Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 11:34 a.m. by Chair Rick Harrell, who noted that a quorum was present. He reviewed the agenda and the handouts made available to the members.

Members present: Chair Rick Harrell, Secretary Brian Ball, Carrie Chenery, Deborah Flippo, and Ned Masee, *ex officio*

Members absent: Secretary Aubrey Layne, and Dan Pleasant

VEDP staff present: Peyton Annoni, Lindsay Barker, Christine Bell, Nicole David, Jason El Koubi, Stephanie Florie, Katherine Goodwin, Sandi McNinch, Stephen Moret, and Christy Morton

Guests present: Deputy Secretary Cassidy Rasnick, Bill Hayter, and Heather Engel

Public Comment Period

Chair Harrell asked for public comments. There were none.

Approval of Minutes for July 31, 2019 Meeting

At 12:35 p.m., with a quorum, Chair Harrell asked for approval of the minutes from the July 31, 2019, meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Carrie Chenery and seconded by Ms. Deborah Flippo and the minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

Presentation – Positioning Rural Virginia to Buck National Trends

Dr. Stephen Moret spoke about positioning rural Virginia to buck the national trends. He said that over two-thirds of U.S. rural localities are losing population. Across the nation, a strong majority of localities have no new projects announced in a given year. VEDP-assisted project activity is more evenly distributed across regions (including rural regions) when viewed on a per capita basis.

Dr. Moret explained the reasoning for a regional focus in economic development. He said that in contrast to individual localities, the vast majority of Virginia's regions already experience one or more project wins each year. Further, based on employment forecasts, virtually all Virginia regions could be positioned for net growth with no more than a few hundred additional jobs on average each year. When every region wins, workers in every locality benefit from regional job opportunities within a reasonable commuting distance. VEDP's regional approach is reinforced by local efforts and state policy and has been adopted as one of our top five transformational goals.

Dr. Moret shared that in 2017, VEDP created a Rural Think Tank committee. The committee was comprised of 13 individuals who represented regional groups, utilities, DHCD, etc. The committee's charge was to develop and prioritize a list of initiatives Virginia should implement to increase prosperity in rural Virginia. The following recommendations were made: Rural marketing initiative, ubiquitous broadband, expanded site inventory, a customized workforce program, partnerships to fund projects, tax/incentive changes, community competitiveness, and civic leadership. It was determined that VEDP is not the right leader for civic leadership. Dr. Moret said that the Virginia Rural Center, which is led by Ms. Kristie Helmick Proctor, would be the best choice in regards to civic leadership. Ms. Morton mentioned that the Virginia Rural Center had applied for an ARC grant for an additional staff person and they are currently developing funding streams to support this new program.

Dr. Moret talked about the vision and goals for the rural and small metro tech centers initiative. The rural and small metro tech center concept involves coordinated state and local investment: existing assets that are attractive to tech companies, state and local investments in the community to secure anchor company job commitments, and community revitalization. Dr. Moret further explained that we are using a phased approach to launch and implement the program. Phase 1 began in the summer of 2019 and focused on Onshore Delivery Centers. The three communities participating in Phase 1 are Wise, Radford, and Harrisonburg. Phase 2 will begin in the spring of 2020 and will focus on Software as a Service. The three communities participating in Phase 2 are Charlottesville, Roanoke, and Blacksburg. Future phases will focus on different subsectors in the tech space. Dr. Moret announced that Laura Rodriguez is joining the Business Investment team as the Director of Technology and Services, beginning February 3.

Dr. Moret explained that VEDP is incorporating rural marketing into our social media strategy with posts highlighting regional assets, key companies, project announcements, available properties, executive quotes, company case studies, and more through Twitter, the *Virginia Economic Review*, Consultant Familiarization (FAM) tours, and Media FAM tours.

Chair Harrell commented that various Board of Supervisor members have mentioned not getting projects and Chair Harrell asked who those local leaders should talk to at VEDP. He also asked if it would be possible for VEDP to mail copies of the *Virginia Economic Review* to every Board of Supervisors member in the state. Ms. Christy Morton agreed that would be beneficial and said that VEDP would look into it.

Anticipated Topics for Next Meeting

Ms. Chenery suggested two topics for the next meeting. The first related to educating and working with partner organizations to spread the message of what VEDP does to increase VEDP's reach and impact across Virginia. Second, was to have another briefing by Ms. Kristie Proctor of the Virginia Rural Center, to see what the Committee can do to assist the Rural Center.

Ms. Morton also mentioned that she would contact Mr. John Provo with Virginia Tech to see if he could present at our meeting in April since we would be in Roanoke, based on a request from a previous meeting.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Harrell adjourned the meeting at 12:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Bell
Acting Recording Secretary

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