

**NEW RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL COMMISSION**  
**Minutes of the Commission Meeting**  
**held on**  
**February 27, 2025**  
**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. L. Law, Giles County, Treasurer; Ms. A. Covey, New River Community College, Vice-Chair; Ms. S. Anderson, Town of Blacksburg; Ms. A. Chambers, Town of Rich Creek; Mr. L. Clevinger, Town of Pulaski; Mr. B. Dawson, Town of Pulaski; Ms. T. Hockett, Town of Christiansburg; Mr. D. Horton, City of Radford; Mr. B. Jaunarena, Pulaski County; Dr. A. Joyner, Radford University; Ms. L. DeVito Kuchenbuch, Floyd County; Mr. R. McCoy, Giles County; Mr. J. Reeves, Pulaski County; Mr. W. Seagle, Town of Dublin; Mx. E. Shawish, Town of Blacksburg and Mr. B. Wheeler, Montgomery County

**ABSENT:** Ms. A. Davis, Town of Pearisburg; Mr. A. Graftsky, Montgomery County; Mr. W. Griffin, Town of Floyd; Mr. R. Lawson, Town of Pembroke; Mr. J. Martin, City of Radford; Mr. M. Maslaney, Floyd County; Ms. L. Morris, Virginia Tech; Mr. P. Martin, Giles County; Mr. K. Smith, Virginia Tech Foundation and Mr. T. Spangler, Town of Narrows

Staff Attendees: Kelley Akers, Jessica Barrett, Kevin Byrd, Aphi Fancon, Zach Kanka, Kelly Patton, Julie Phillips, Emily Warren, and Jennifer Wilsie

Other Attendees: Emily Gibson

**II. CONSENT AGENDA**

**A. Approval of Minutes for January**

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. Dr. Joyner seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried.

**B. Approval of Treasurer's Reports for December and January**

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

Motion: Ms. DeVito Kuchenbuch moved for approval of the Treasurer's Reports. Mr. Horton seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried.

**III. COMMONWEALTH INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS**

**A. Projects (Signed-off by the staff)**

None

B. Regular Project Review  
None

IV. PUBLIC ADDRESS  
None

V. CHAIR'S REPORT  
None

VI. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Byrd provided a summary report in the Regional Commission agenda packet. The NRV Recovery Ecosystem is working toward the FY26 grant proposal to the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority. On 2/21 the project technical teams will present their projects for the regional application to the local governments for review and consideration. The proposal is due to OAA by April 1<sup>st</sup>.

The NRVRC is providing grant writing support for a federal BEAD application in Giles County being submitted by PemTel. The Montgomery/Bland County VATI projects are navigating challenging winter weather in their construction phase. It has required extensive coordination with AEP given several areas experienced power interruptions. Regular construction should be back underway soon. All Points Broadband in Pulaski County is finalizing make-ready with AEP and Verizon-owned poles. More work remains on securing a large enough area of make-ready being complete that enables construction crews to begin work.

The Virginia AM2 Tech Hub is providing staff support for a GO Virginia grant that will enable the expansion of GO TECH (Great Opportunities in Technology and Engineering Careers) in the New River Valley. The GO TECH program is focused on middle school students gaining exposure to careers and applied skill development that leads to workforce interest and readiness. This project is a direct outcome of the Tech Hub strategy development grant.

The next Regional Economic Strategy committee meeting is scheduled for 2/28 at 10:00am. The committee will review the updated SWOT analysis and begin working on adjustments to the Resilience section.

Congratulations to the Town of Floyd for securing a Community Development Block Grant for planning at the recently acquired Donkenny property that is intended to be a mixed-use redevelopment project in town.

Congratulations to the Floyd County Scattered Site Housing project for receiving a second round of Community Development Block Grant funds. Jennifer Wilsie has supported the implementation of round one and grant writing for round two in partnership with the community.

The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) will hold a groundbreaking event for the New River Valley project in Cambria on March 20<sup>th</sup> at 1:00pm. Invitations will go to board members and all local, state, and federal elected officials. The Station Authority met on 2/27 and held a kick-off meeting with the architecture/engineering team on the building design. The Station

Authority engineers have been working closely with the VPRA engineering team on project overlap aspects such as utility connections.

Water Supply Planning kick-off meetings were held for New River 1 (Montgomery, Pulaski, Giles, City of Radford) and New River 2 (Floyd County, plus adjoining non-NRV counties). The NRVRC will be providing staff support in the delivery of the updated Water Supply Plans.

Friends of Southwest Virginia is still working through the best use of the Outdoor Recreation Impact funding they received through ARC following Hurricane Helene. The initial concept to secure drone footage of the New River debris and develop community-specific debris removal strategies was being re-worked since the VA Dept. of Emergency Management has some information and funds for debris removal in proximity to critical infrastructure and boat launches. The ARC funds will likely have a more broad scope that helps assess recreation impacts sustained by local governments. More information is forthcoming.

The Regional Commission will hold an Open House on 3/6 4:00-6:00 at the new office location for board members to come and visit the space before construction gets underway.

The architecture/engineering team provided 65% design drawings in January. Minor modifications were sent back, so hopefully the bid-ready documents will be available shortly.

The Regional Commission submitted a grant application to the Appalachian Regional Commission for a new program, entitled Grants to Grow, through their READY program. The proposal would help address several items as the agency has experienced considerable growth recently. The proposal contained furniture/IT equipment for the three meeting rooms at the new office; finance software conversion; staff and board leadership training; and the development of an agency strategic plan. The proposal was for \$375,000 from ARC and \$168,750 in matching funds from NRVRC based on the office construction project. Grant announcements are not anticipated for several months.

Two new staff members, Kelley Akers, Graphic Designer/Community Engagement Specialist, and Zach Kanka, GIS Planner, were introduced.

## **VII. REVIEW OF MUTUAL CONCERNS AND COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS**

Mr. Jaunarena reported that Pulaski County passed a zoning change that will allow a 20-acre area behind the Pulaski County Innovation Center to be developed into housing.

Mr. Horton shared the Polar Plunge to benefit SWVA Special Olympics will be held March 1<sup>st</sup> in Bisset Park.

Ms. DeVito Kuchenbuch reported that the second phase of Floyd County Scattered Site Housing project was approved. Floyd County recently completed their reassessment, and the land division ordinance is going through the public review process.

## VIII. OLD BUSINESS

None

## IX. NEW BUSINESS

### A. Partnership for Progress Program Overview

Emily Gibson, Director of Local Government & Community Relations at Virginia Tech, provided an overview on the Partnership for Progress initiative. Partnership for Progress is a shared effort the towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, Montgomery County, the New River Valley Regional Commission, and Virginia Tech. This collaborative effort aims to create a visionary, actionable roadmap for the future. It will focus on the shared challenges and opportunities in the region with the goal of using what is learned to increase collaboration between the partners and enhance quality of life. The work is both proactive and organic in nature. There are no pre-determined outcomes, only a shared desire for exploring opportunities moving forward.

### B. Housing Education Campaign and Housing Program Update

Ms. Wilsie explained the Regional Commission participates in multiple affordable housing initiatives across the region and gave an overview of current programs.

She explained after the release of the Regional + Local Housing Study in 2021, the final report recommended seven regional strategies, several of which the Regional Commission has been able to advance over the last four years. The Regional Housing Trust Fund has been the most public-facing component of this work, which has already awarded \$1.8M in project awards and has raised \$380,000 in local funds. As a complement to the creation of the Regional Housing Trust Fund, a housing education campaign was identified as a high priority goal. At the end of 2024, the Regional Commission completed a pilot series of four short, informative housing videos, meant to clarify some commonly misunderstood or lesser-known facts about affordable housing. Virginia Housing provided funding for these videos, which were all written, filmed, and edited in-house by Regional Commission staff.

Ms. Wilsie shared the four videos and received feedback from Commissioners.

### C. FY24 Audit Report

Mr. Byrd provided an overview of the FY 24 Audit Report. The report did not include any findings or deficiencies. He thanked the finance team for their hard work throughout the year, which helps to ensure a smooth and successful audit process.

Motion: Mr. Horton moved to accept the FY24 Audit Report. Ms. Hockett seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Johnson called to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 pm.

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H. Johnson, Chair  
New River Valley Regional Commission