

NEW RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL COMMISSION
Minutes of the Commission Meeting
held on
February 26, 2026
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; Ms. S. Anderson, Town of Blacksburg, Vice-Chair; Mr. L. Law, Giles County, Treasurer; Mr. C.B. Andrews, Town of Pembroke; Dr. R. Brandon, New River Community College; Mr. L. Clevinger, Town of Pulaski; Mr. B. Dawson, Town of Pulaski; Mr. A. Graftsky, Montgomery County; Ms. T. Hockett, Town of Christiansburg; Dr. A. Joyner, Radford University; Ms. L. DeVito Kuchenbuch, Floyd County; Mr. D. Horton, City of Radford; Mr. M. Mann, Town of Rich Creek; Mr. J. Reeves, Pulaski County; Mr. W. Seagle, Town of Dublin; Mx. E. Shawish, Town of Blacksburg; Mr. K. Smith, Virginia Tech Foundation; Mr. T. Spangler, Town of Narrows; and Mr. R. McCoy, Giles County

ABSENT: Vacant, Pulaski County; Ms. A. Davis, Town of Pearisburg; Mr. W. Griffin, Town of Floyd; Mr. J. Martin, City of Radford; Mr. P. Martin, Giles County; Mr. M. Maslaney, Floyd County; Ms. L. Morris, Virginia Tech; and Mr. B. Wheeler, Montgomery County.

Staff Attendees: Kevin Byrd, Patrick Ford, Julie Phillips, and Erika Slagel-Perry.

Other Attendees: Emily Gibson, Virginia Tech

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: Ms. DeVito Kuchenbuch moved for the approval of the minutes. Dr. Brandon seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried; one abstention, Mr. Graftsky.

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: Mr. Law moved for approval of the Treasurer's Reports. Dr. Joyner seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried.

III. COMMONWEALTH INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

A. Projects (Signed-off by the staff)

None

B. Regular Project Review

1. Virginia Tech Improved Campus Accessibility – Southeast Quadrant
2. New residence halls northwest corner of the campus near Virginia Tech Inn and Alumni Center

IV. PUBLIC ADDRESS

None

V. CHAIR'S REPORT

Mr. Johnson welcomed new members, C.B. Andrews, representing the Town of Pembroke, and Richard Gibson, representing the Virginia Tech Foundation. He reported this will be the last meeting for Mx. Shawish and presented them with a plaque in appreciation of service.

VI. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Byrd provided a summary report in the Regional Commission agenda packet. The AM2 Tech Hub statewide competitive GO Virginia grant recently received support from the GO Virginia Region 2 Board. The project advances to the state board for review. A pitch meeting was held on February 23rd before a committee of the state board. A decision from the state board is anticipated in March. The AM2 Tech Hub is continuing to work on a multi-million dollar application to the US Economic Development Administration and it is due on March 3rd.

The next Regional Economic Strategy meeting will take place on February 27th and will be an opportunity to share 2025 data with the committee. This information will be shared at the Regional Commission meeting in March for discussion with the board.

The Regional Commission is providing environmental review technical assistance to eight broadband projects funded through the federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program. Three of the eight projects are in the New River Valley. The other five are being performed based on an agreement between the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions and the VA Dept. of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) since DHCD asked PDCs to assist with this step of the BEAD program and not all PDCs have staff that perform environmental reviews.

Congratulations to Dr. Tamarah Holmes on being selected as the next Director of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. Dr. Holmes most recently served as the Director of Broadband for Virginia as well as the Appalachian Regional Commission Program Manager for Virginia. She was the 2025 Friend of the Valley Award recipient and has a long history of working closely with PDCs in Virginia.

The NRV Passenger Rail Station Authority met on February 26th and focused on the construction budget for the project. The engineering and architecture team shared an update on utility connections to the building.

Requests for letters of support and local match needed to update to the Regional + Local Housing Study were distributed this week. Match requests are for \$5,000 so the Regional Commission can access grant funds from Virginia Housing. These were distributed to the four counties, the city, and three largest towns. Higher education partnership is also anticipated.

The NRV Livability Information Exchange is scheduled for March 25th in the morning at the German Club in Blacksburg. Registration is well over 100 at this point, so please be sure to sign-up if you plan to attend.

Onward NRV and the Regional Commission will be co-hosting an elected officials training opportunity on March 18th at the Highlander Hotel in Radford to learn more about data centers. This will precede Onward NRV's Quarterly Investor meeting scheduled for 3/19 at the University Club of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg that will be a half-day learning event also focused on data centers.

Following all the great work on the AM2 Tech Hub and subsequent applications to GO Virginia and US EDA, Emma Carroll will be leaving her position as Regional Innovation Officer on March 20th. She will be moving to the Richmond area with her husband to be closer to family. Emma did terrific work in her year and a half with the agency.

The National Association of Development Organizations Washington Policy Conference will be taking place the second week of March and Mr. Byrd will be moderating a panel discussion on partnering with foundations. This will be an opportunity to lift up the work in the region on a national landscape since one of the three panelists will be Jessica Wirgau from the Community Foundation of the New River Valley.

VII. REVIEW OF MUTUAL CONCERNS AND COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Mr. Dawson reported the Great Wilderness Brewing company will hold a ribbon cutting on 2/27 in the Town of Pulaski.

Mr. Horton reported that the Polar Plunge to support Special Olympics had over 400 participants. The event raised \$80,000 for Special Olympics in the greater New River Valley and Roanoke Valley regions.

Ms. Anderson reported Mr. Byrd facilitated a retreat for the Blacksburg Town Council and encouraged others to have him facilitate for their localities.

Ms. Hockett reported the Town of Christiansburg passed a rezoning for a 90-house development.

Dr. Joyner reported that Radford University completed a destination survey indicating that 92% of graduates either were employed or enrolled in graduate school within six months of graduation. The fall to spring retention rate continues to improve. Radford University recently hosted their second annual housing summit and housing fair. Millennial Fabrics, a member of the Co-Works @ The Hub, graduated into a commercial space on West Main Street in Radford.

Ms. Gibson reported President Sands delivered remarks at the State of the University at Virginia Tech this month. The university recently released its latest Economic Impact Report which identified \$3.4B of economic activity associated with Virginia Tech in the New River Valley.

Dr. Brandon reported that New River Community College has been recognized as an Aspen Top 200 Community College in the country which is largely based on student outcomes. New River

Community College and Radford University have hired a shared advisor position that will help students at both campuses.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

None

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. DEQ Office of Pollution Response & Emergency Preparedness

Ms. Lowman provided a presentation on the work conducted in support of water quality protection. The presentation covered response coordination to pollution incidents, how citizens are notified, and ways partners coordinate their response roles. The presentation also highlighted Tropical Storm Helene and chemical release notifications. DEQ Office of Pollution Response & Emergency Preparedness played a key role in response to the storm and specific circumstances such as recovering the totes that were swept away from the Radford Army Ammunition Plant.

Following Tropical Storm Helene, Ms. Lohman submitted a grant application to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for recovery funding strategies. She promptly engaged the Regional Commission in the scope of the application and, as a result, the region will be receiving substantial resources to assist with continued recovery efforts. One of the more significant aspects of this program is \$4M dedicated to debris removal for the New River. The Regional Commission will lead in coordinating this activity with local governments in the coming months.

B. Disaster Recovery Programs Administered by the Regional Commission

Mr. Ford explained the Virginia Disaster Assistance Fund program is continuing to work with property owners and local officials to advance applications through the state's requirements to help those who were affected by Tropical Storm Helene, or the 2025 February Winter Storms. Progress has been made possible through cooperation of local emergency management personnel, building officials, and affected property owners to navigate a complex and evolving program. Staff at the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) have been providing guidance on each application. As unique situations have arisen, DHCD staff have provided information and support to aid these applicants in finding solutions.

The program is in two parts. Part 1 is for damages to properties. While most of these have been homes, some owners of commercial space have submitted applications. Both are eligible to apply. Part 2 is for damage and mitigation efforts for bridges, slopes, and culverts. DHCD has not begun review of these applications, and at present the Regional Commission has not received many applications in comparison to Part 1.

More aid is coming through the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Resilient Virginia Revolving Loan Fund (DCR RVERF). This program will be partnered with VDAF Part 2 to close gaps in funding for bridge, slope, and culvert repair. This program is also open to municipal governments.

Mr. Johnson called to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 pm.

H. Johnson, Chair
New River Valley Regional Commission