

NEW RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL COMMISSION
Minutes of the Commission Meeting
held on
November 19, 2020
6:00 p.m.— Hybrid Meeting via Zoom/In-person

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Johnson, Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order and explained Mr. Maslaney was on his way to the meeting, but was delayed.

PRESENT (in-person): Mr. M. **Maslaney**, Floyd County, Chair; **Mr. H. Johnson**, Vice-Chair, Town of Christiansburg; Ms. L. **DeVito Kuchenbuch**, Floyd County; Mr. S. **Fijalkowski**, Montgomery County; Mr. T. **Garrett**, Town of Narrows; Mr. M. **Harvey**, Montgomery County; and Mr. J. **Martin**, City of Radford.

PRESENT (zoom): **Mr. L. Law**, Giles County, Treasurer; Ms. S. **Anderson**, Town of Blacksburg; Mr. C. **Bopp**, Pulaski County; Mr. D. **Breslau**, Town of Blacksburg; Mr. L. **Clevinger**, Town of Pulaski; Mr. J. **Coleman**, Floyd County; Ms. A. **Covey**, New River Community College; Mr. D. **Horton**, City of Radford; Dr. A. **Joyner**, Radford University; Mr. William Kantsios, Town of Rich Creek; Mr. C. **Kiwus**, Virginia Tech; Ms. C. **Potter**, Virginia Tech; Ms. M. **Sachs**, Town of Christiansburg and.

ABSENT: Mr. J **Ballard**, Town of Pearisburg; Mr. T. **Clontz**, Town of Pulaski; Mr. R. **Lawson**, Town of Pembroke; Mr. R. **McCoy**, Giles County; Mr. M. **Patton**, Town of Floyd; and Dr. D. **Warren**, Pulaski County.

Staff Attendees: Kevin Byrd, James Jones, Summer Bork, Aphi Fancon, Ashley Briggs, Melanie Morris and Holly Lesko

Other Attendees: Jim Drader, Johana Hicks, Chris Waltz

II. ELECTRONIC MEETING PARTICIPATION – Commission Action

Mr. Johnson called for approval of the electronic meeting participation policy. Section 2.2-3708.2 of the Virginia State Code, 1950, as amended, Section 3. Any public body may meet by electronic communication means without a quorum of the public body physically assembled at one location when the Governor has declared a state of emergency in accordance with § 44-146.17,

Motion: Mr. Harvey moved for the approval of the policy. Ms. Sachs seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

III. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes for September

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. Ms. Sachs seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Treasurer's Report for September

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

Motion: Mr. Fijalkowski moved for the approval of the Treasurer's Reports. Mr. Martin seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

IV. COMMONWEALTH INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

A. Projects (Signed-off by the staff)

Forest wide oak and woodland restoration project.

B. Regular Project Review

None

C. Environmental Project Review

None

V. PUBLIC ADDRESS

None

VI. CHAIR'S REPORT

Mr. Maslaney shared Commission member transitions effective in January. Chris Kiwus from Virginia Tech will be replaced by Liza Morris and Tom Garrett with the Town of Narrows will be replaced by Sarah Thwaites. He thanked Mr. Kiwus and Mr. Garrett for their years of service to the Commission.

Mr. Maslaney reported the I-81 advisory committee met on October 23rd. The new committee Chair is Delegate Gooditis and the Vice-chair is Senator Edwards. A review of projects underway indicated of the 56 scheduled for the corridor, 40 are underway and none are anticipated to be delayed attributed to COVID. In April, all vehicular traffic was down 60% whereas now it is only down 10%. For trucks, they were down 30% and as of October, they were up 5%. During a multi-modal presentation it was shared that Amtrak ridership was up 7% the past two years. The Roanoke to Lynchburg line is the highest performing segment in Virginia in terms of revenue over expenditures. The I-81 Committee will hold a brief meeting on December 11th to discuss their meeting schedule for the coming year.

Lastly, he reported Mr. Byrd was invited by the Federal Reserve Bank to write a chapter in a forthcoming book on rural economic development. His chapter will focus on local government collaborations fostered by the Regional Commission.

VII. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Byrd provided a summary report in the Commission agenda packet. Summer Bork was recently hired for the EDA Economic Recovery Program. The I-81 corridor committee met on October 23rd and Mr. Maslaney covered highlights from that meeting in the Chair's Report. The NRV Passenger Rail initiative is planning a brief update meeting on November 30th at 2:00pm via Zoom. Jennifer Mitchell with the VA Dept of Rail and Public Transit is scheduled to attend. Mr. Byrd prepared draft legislation to establish an authority to own and operate the NRV

passenger rail station. This was submitted to Delegate Hurst's office and was assigned to a legislative services staff person in Richmond to prepare the bill language. Once a draft bill is available it will be distributed.

The Regional Commission will host the annual annual Commonwealth Transportation Board member meeting day on December 11th. Elijah Sharp is coordinating the local government meetings with Dr. Ray Smoot. All local governments are encouraged to take advantage of the meeting opportunity to discuss projects before going through an application process.

The Business Continuity Team (BCT) is observing an increase in use of their services and has been able to provide 100% cost of cleaning services at two businesses along with use of the public relations resource as well. The team continues to market their services and receives many business referrals from community leaders and chambers of commerce. The BCT recently held a meeting with the school superintendents across the region to inform them of services they can provide.

Commission staff has been supporting the Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) over the past year to launch an updated regional tourism website with technical assistance from Radford University. The group plans to launch the new site on November 30th.

Staff is wrapping up a procurement process to select an online public engagement platform that will help people connect and become involved with several projects underway or scheduled for this fiscal year.

The NRV Public Health Task Force asked the Regional Commission to support the coordination of food distribution events in the region. Two events are currently scheduled and will take place December 4th in Giles County and December 18th in Christiansburg. More events are likely to be scheduled in the New Year.

VIII. REVIEW OF MUTUAL CONCERNS AND COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Ms. Sachs relayed appreciation to the staff for a clean audit report for FY20.

Mr. Breslau recommended local governments advocate for a change in the Appalachian Power service contract to allow power purchase agreements and net metering. Both would allow governments in the Appalachian Power service area to exercise the tools enabled by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

None

X. NEW BUSINESS

A. Tourism Industry Update

Lisa Bleakley, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Regional Tourism Office, provided a presentation on tourism industry trends, an overview of recovery efforts in response to the pandemic and a peek into the future of the local tourism industry within the regional economic ecosystem. She overviewed the role of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and their focus on promoting communities as attractive travel destinations. For Montgomery County in 2019, transient occupancy tax generated \$298 of tax relief to every household in the county, meaning tourism provided revenue residents did not need to contribute through real estate and/or personal property taxes. During COVID

visitor numbers were down considerably, but small weddings and youth sports helped provide some revenue for transient occupancy taxes. Ms. Bleakley concluded her presentation with an overview of the collaborative projects the DMOs in the NRV completed in the past few years, many with support from the Regional Commission.

B. NRV Business Continuity Team Update (BCT)

Ashley Briggs, Public Health Director; Melanie Morris, Program Manager and Holly Lesko, Public Health Schools Liaison provided an update on their work delivering Business Continuity Team services. They have been busy answering COVID-19 questions, supporting businesses in developing their continuity plans, fielding business calls referred from the Health Department, offering reimbursement to businesses for cleaning, legal and public relations expenses, providing N95 fit testing, and responding to school mitigation and case response protocols.

Ms. Briggs overviewed the distribution of businesses served in the region by the BCT which illustrated all sectors are being served and more services are being delivered to the larger sectors of the regional economy. Over 4,000 manufacturing jobs have received benefit so far along with 1,800 governmental positions, 1,300 health care, 300 in agriculture and forestry with many more going down the list.

C. FY 20 Audit Report

Mr. Byrd provided an overview of the FY 20 Audit Report. The report did not include any findings or deficiencies, which is a reflection of the great contributions by everyone on staff, particularly those handling finances on a daily basis including Jessica Barrett-CPA, Finance Director; Julie Phillips, Office Manager and Janet McNew, Finance Technician.

Motion: Mr. Kantsios moved to accept the FY20 Audit Report. Ms. DeVito Kuchenbuch seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

D. December Commission Meeting Date

Mr. Byrd explained the December meeting is historically cancelled due to conflicts with the holidays.

Mr. Maslaney called for approval of canceling the December meeting.

Motion: Mr. Harvey moved to cancel the December meeting. Ms. Sachs seconded the motion.

Action: Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Maslaney called to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 pm.

M. Maslaney, Chair
New River Valley Regional Commission