

# WEST PIEDMONT PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION

## MINUTES

of the

### **March 28, 2024 Meeting**

held at the Commission Office  
1100 Madison Street, Martinsville, VA

#### **PRESENT**

Jim Adams, Chairman, Henry County  
Pam Cobler, Henry County  
Wes George, Henry County (V)  
Jerry Adams, Patrick County  
Kathy Lawson, Treasurer, Martinsville  
Aaron Rawls, Martinsville  
Joe Martin, Martinsville  
Nick Mitchell, Franklin County  
David Rotenizer, Franklin County  
Tim Tatum, Franklin County  
Lucas Tuning, Rocky Mount  
Ralph Casey, Rocky Mount  
Dr. Gary Miller, Danville (V)

#### **ABSENT**

Brandon Simmons, Patrick County  
Doug Perry, Patrick County  
Lee Vogler, Vice Chairman, Danville  
Ken Bowman, Pittsylvania County  
Vic Ingram, Pittsylvania County  
Tyler Lee, Rocky Mount

#### **STAFF**

Kristie Eberly, WPPDC, Executive Director  
Sean Campbell, WPPDC Housing Director

#### **GUEST**

Hamilton Lombard, Weldon Cooper Center

(V) = Virtual Attendance

In accordance with the ***West Piedmont PDC Remote Electronic Participation and All-Virtual Meeting Policy***, members attended virtually for the following reasons:

Wes George, Henry County-personal matter  
Dr. Gary Miller, Danville-personal matter

#### **1. Call to Order and Welcome**

The Chairman established a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

#### **2. Regional Forum Opportunity – Comments from Public**

There were no comments.

#### **3. Consent Agenda**

- a. ***Confirmation of Minutes of the February 22, 2024 Meeting.***
- b. ***Treasurer’s Report – January 31, 2024***

Mr. David Rotenizer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Jerry Adams to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Upon vote, the motion carried unanimously.

**4. Weldon Cooper Center-Hamilton Lombard**

The Executive Director stated that at the last two Board of Commissioners meetings there were comments about the accuracy of the data from the Weldon Cooper Center that the WPPDC has been using. Mr. Rawls had reached out to Weldon Cooper Center to see if someone would be interested in coming to explain the data gathering to the commission. Mr. Hamilton Lombard with the Weldon Cooper Center was in attendance. Mr. Lombard explained that the population growth has mostly been in the urban areas. For the region there was a turnaround about 2020 when people started in-migrating to the region. Even with this growth, every locality in the WPPDC region has decreased in population except for Franklin County and the reason for this is there are more deaths than births. The age distribution shows the region has a larger population being 70 years or older than 30 years old which leads to more deaths than births. This is not uncommon in rural areas of Virginia. From an economic and demographic perspective, trends have changed since 2020 with the increase in remote work options. Rural areas have a good quality of life and more affordable housing and are attractive to remote workers. Domestic manufacturing is also rebounding and areas with a strong manufacturing presence are attracting younger people.

Mr. Tuning questioned how much the casino has influenced the Danville area with Mr. Lombard explaining that will have to be determined over time as at this point, there is no significant change in housing or school enrollment. Mrs. Lawson asked how the number of births was determined. Mr. Lombard explained that it was determined by where the parents live. Mr. Rotenizer asked where the people in-migrating were coming from. Mr. Lombard explained that is hard to track but people are relocating from suburban areas for reasons such as retirement, the lower cost of living or returning because they grew up in the area. Dr. Miller stated that he saw statistics from Weldon Cooper Center that nearly 300 deaths in Danville were from Covid and had Covid not happened, the Danville area would have grown. Dr. Miller also stated that younger people are moving to the Danville area for work. Mr. Rawls asked how they account for the "hidden population" of immigrants. Mr. Lombard explained that the hidden population was accounted for by contacting local churches, utility connections and school data.

**5. Regional Housing Study-Sean Campbell, Housing Director**

Mr. Campbell stated the Regional Housing Study has been completed. There are two versions, one being a consumer version, for residents and elected officials, which is a brief summary, and the other version is a 170 page Technical Report. This was a partnership with Virginia Tech Center for Housing Research who worked on the data analysis and Housing Forward Virginia who did the strategy sections. This project was started in February 2022 with staff training followed by listening sessions with local governments. Every locality in the WPPDC region was involved including the small towns. Stakeholders, such as Social Services, realtors, schoolteachers, local non-profit organizations, builders and developers, were contacted as well for input. Mr. Campbell stated that once the data was developed and sorted, a strategy section was developed for each locality in the region. There was also a regional strategy developed for WPPDC use. The Regional Land Bank was one of these strategies where localities could turn over abandoned or vacant properties which would then be used for affordable housing. Mr. Ralph Casey mentioned that housing prices are steadily increasing due to the Smith Mountain Lake area and the Town of Rocky Mount does not really have affordable housing. Mr. Rotenizer questioned how mobile homes factor into the program. Mr. Campbell stated that mobile homes are considered housing and four localities are interested in rehabilitating mobile homes. Mr. Rawls asked how vacant houses were accounted for. Mr. Campbell responded that if they are livable, then they are considered housing. Mr. Jim Adams asked if travel trailers and campgrounds are also classified as housing. Mr. Campbell stated that travel trailers are considered transient housing.

The Executive Director added that Virginia Housing has awarded the WPPDC a grant for a Land Bank study. Mr. Campbell added that the study is being completely paid for through the grant. Phase 1 will consist of developing land use priorities for land bank properties, collecting data for potential land bank properties, defining key land bank functions and basic governing and decision making structure. Phase 2 will be setting up the structure of the Land Bank based on Phase 1 outcomes.

**6. Consideration of Resolution of Approval for Scope of Work for the Rural Transportation Planning Assistance Program for FY2025**

The Executive Director stated that this is an annual grant for transportation work done outside of the MPO. Staff has worked with VDOT on the application and the Scope of Work. The FY25 Scope of Work is consistent with the FY24 Scope of Work with the exception of the Development of the Commuter Assistance Programs Strategic Plan to further the Ride Solutions Program. This will need to be presented to the Transportation Technical Advisory Committee in April before it can be submitted. Staff recommends approval of application.

Mrs. Kathy Lawson made a motion, seconded by Mr. Jerry Adams, to approve the Resolution of Approval for Scope of Work for the Rural Transportation Planning Assistance Program FY2025. Upon vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

**7. Authorize Executive Committee to adopt the 2024 Regional Priorities for the Virginia Community Development Block Grant Program**

The Executive Director stated that DHCD has not requested the Regional Priorities for the coming year. It is anticipated that they will be requested by May 15<sup>th</sup> since applications are scheduled to open early June. Normally a list of application priorities is requested from our localities to be returned to the WPPDC. Staff is requesting that the Board authorize the Executive Committee to approve the Regional Priorities at their April meeting.

Mr. Wes George made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ralph Casey, to approve for the Executive Committee to adopt the 2024 Regional Priorities for the Virginia Community Development Block Grant Program. Upon vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

**8. Executive Director's Report**

The Executive Director explained that no changes have been made to the Housing Program since the February meeting.

**Regional Broadband** has over 361 miles of route fiber installed in Pittsylvania and Charlotte Counties with construction started in Bedford County. Connections to homes in Pittsylvania and Charlotte counties have now started. The VATI 2023 project and the WPPDC East VATI project are under construction and will be built concurrently with VATI 2022. The Patrick County ARC Area Development application has been approved and this will be used as match for VATI funding.

**Regional Tourism Initiatives**-The staff continues to develop the next component of the Regional Tourism Initiative, Outdoor Recreation and will be working with Friends of Southwest Virginia on a study.

**Conferences and Trainings**- Amanda Gray attended the Virginia Agritourism Conference in Harrisonburg in February. Amanda and Rebekah Morgan attended the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia's Intermediate/Advanced Grantsmanship Workshop held in Martinsville in March.

**Events**-West Piedmont PDC had a booth display at the Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce Fast Track. The booth won 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the Non-Profit division.

ARC Inspire Community Response Program- The project is moving forward on schedule and a new application submitted in March.

Bi-State Brownfields RLF-Program has closed on first loan in NC of \$850,000. Pre-application for Patrick County project has been submitted.

Land Bank- Application was submitted for planning funds.

Bassett Library expansion- Application for ARC was submitted.

**Transportation-Danville MPO**-Safe Streets and Roads for ALL (SS4A) has had the first working group meeting.

**New Staff**- The Executive Director announced Chasta White has joined the WPPDC staff as a Housing Programs Specialist. Mrs. White comes from City of Danville and will be working on housing projects, such as Pine Hall and the WPPDC Housing Production program with Mr. Campbell and Mr. Mercado. The Executive Director also noted that West Piedmont still has one position to fill for a Community Development Specialist and hopes to have that position filled soon.

**9. Appointment of Nominating for Fiscal Year 2025**

The Chairman noted that in the past the Executive Committee has served as the Nominating Committee. The Chairman asked if there were any objections. There were no objections.

**10. Other Business**

There is no other business.

**11. Comments from Commissioners**

There were no other comments from the Commissioners.

**12. Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

  
Kristina Eberly  
Executive Director