

1 VIRGINIA TOBACCO REGION REVITALIZATION COMMISSION  
2 2023 SPRING FULL COMMISSION TWO-DAY MEETING  
3 SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER  
4 ABINGDON, VA  
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11 SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA COMMITTEE  
12 MAY 18, 2023  
13 10:45 A.M.  
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19 MARSHA SELF, CERT  
20 Appalachian Court Reporting  
21 P.O. Box 833  
22 Abingdon, Virginia 24212  
23 ID 54-1495140  
24 (276) 676-2244  
25

1 **Appearances:**

2 Honorable Delegate James "Will" Morefield, Chair  
3 Julie Hensley, Vice Chair  
4 Edward Blevins  
5 Amanda Cox  
6 Honorable Delegate Terry Kilgore  
7 Honorable Deputy Secretary Beth Green  
8 Jay Jennings (remotely)  
9 Honorable Delegate Danny Marshall  
10 Honorable Deputy Secretary Beth Green  
11 Honorable William Pace  
12 Sandy Ratliff  
13 Honorable Delegate William "Will" Wampler  
14 Sarah Wilson

15 **Absent:**

16 Honorable Senator John Edwards

17 **Staff:**

18 Honorable James Campos, Acting Executive Director  
19 and Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Trade  
20 Andrew Sorrell, Deputy Director  
21 Stephanie Kim, Finance Director  
22 Vicki Humphreys, Grants Director  
23 Sarah Capps, Southern Regional Director  
24 Sara Williams, Southwest Regional Director  
25 Jordan Butler, Public Relations Director & TROF Program Manager  
Emily Van Pelt, Grants Assistant  
Joyce Knight, Meeting Coordinator  
Hannah Franke-Fuller, Special Assistant

1 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Good morning. We'll call the Southwest  
2 Virginia Committee to order. We'll have a roll call.

3 MR. CAMPOS: Thank you, Chairman. Acting Executive  
4 Director James Campos. Roll Call.

5 (IN ATTENDANCE.)

6 Delegate Will Morefield. Julie Hensley. Edward Blevins.  
7 Gretchen Clark. Amanda Cox. Delegate Terry Kilgore. Deputy  
8 Secretary Beth Green. Honorable William Pace. Sandy Ratliff.  
9 Delegate William Wampler. Sarah Wilson.

10 MR. CAMPOS: Chair, we have a quorum.

11 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. Thank you. Now, we will  
12 approve the minutes from January the 4<sup>th</sup>. Do I have a motion?

13 DELEGATE KILGORE: I so move, Mr. Chairman. Delegate Terry  
14 Kilgore.

15 UNKNOWN: Second.

16 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: We have a motion and a second to  
17 approve the minutes from January 4<sup>th</sup>. All in favor say aye.

18 (ALL AFFIRM.)

19 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All opposed?

20 (NO RESPONSE.)

21 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. Now, on to public comment. Do  
22 we have anyone from the public who would like to make a comment?

23 (NO RESPONSE.)

24 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. There is no public comment.

25 Sarah Wilson -- Williams. Sorry. Not Wilson.

1 MS. WILLIAMS: Okay. Good morning. We have two projects  
2 that were tabled at the January meeting. And so, we are here to  
3 revisit those today.

4 The first is 4110. That was Blue Ridge Public Television  
5 for PBS Appalachia Virginia. This is to consider an additional  
6 \$130,000 award to the grant that was made in January. You may  
7 remember that the January recommendation reflected a \$130,000  
8 reduction. The original request amount was \$530,000. During  
9 our review we identified a position that we felt was not  
10 appropriate to be supported with the Commission funds and so we  
11 recommended a \$400,000 award.

12 Just prior to the Southwest meeting they sent us some  
13 information and requested that an additional \$130,000 support  
14 two positions, a senior producer and a digital marketing  
15 position. Staff really did not have time to vet that and as you  
16 probably remember that eventually was tabled. So, in a recent  
17 update they sent us, and they now would like to use that  
18 \$130,000 to support three positions. That's still a senior  
19 producer, another corporate support position as well as a  
20 digital marketing position.

21 So, we took a little bit of extra time to review that. We  
22 wanted to make sure we understood why it had changed from two  
23 positions to three and that we really understood how these  
24 positions fit within the overall staffing plan and  
25 organizational structure of the station. And once we reviewed

1 it, we were comfortable with that. We thought it was an  
2 appropriate use of Commission funds. The additional positions  
3 will allow the station to immediately produce quality content.  
4 The corporate support and additional marketing positions are  
5 essential to pursuing multiple revenue streams that will help  
6 the station become self-sustaining, which is really the goal.

7 So, the staff recommends an award of \$130,000 to be added  
8 to the January award.

9 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. Thank you. We do not have a  
10 long agenda so, if everyone agrees, I recommend that we go ahead  
11 and vote on this item. First, do we have any questions from the  
12 Committee members?

13 (NO RESPONSE.)

14 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: We do have a representative from PBS  
15 here today as well if you have any questions.

16 DELEGATE KILGORE: I would recommend that we adopt staff  
17 recommendation.

18 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Second.

19 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. We have a motion to adopt the  
20 recommendation and a second. All in favor say aye.

21 (ALL AFFIRM.)

22 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All opposed?

23 (NO RESPONSE.)

24 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. Sarah, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

25 MS. WILLIAMS: The next project that was tabled in January

1 was 4117. That was the Mendota Community Association for  
2 Revitalization of Former Mendota School Building. They  
3 requested \$38,485.

4 This was to pursue some additional planning work to  
5 renovate the former school building that's been used as a  
6 community center for several years. You may remember that we  
7 tabled it because we felt that the scope of that work was a  
8 little unclear and there were some issues with matching funds.

9 So, since that award, I reached out to Washington County --  
10 the County does own that building -- to try to help figure out  
11 how to guide this project forward a little bit more. And  
12 through those discussions and some other discussions with  
13 Virginia DEQ we learned that Washington County is pursuing some  
14 funding through DEQ, for an environmental study, which seems to  
15 be a very reasonable path forward for that project.

16 But more importantly at this point since this report was  
17 published, we learned that the Washington County Board of  
18 Supervisors recently voted to end their lease with the Community  
19 Association so with that update it basically, you know, this  
20 project really isn't viable at this point. Although we may hear  
21 from the County in the future should they wish to pursue some  
22 additional work. So, staff recommends no award.

23 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. Any questions?

24 (NO RESPONSE.)

25 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All right. No questions. We'll

1 entertain a motion.

2 MR. PACE: Mr. Chair, I have a motion.

3 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: We have a motion.

4 MR. PACE: Move to postpone indefinitely Project 4117.  
5 Postpone indefinitely.

6 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. We have a motion to postpone it  
7 indefinitely. Do we have a second? Do we have a second?

8 (NO RESPONSE.)

9 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. That motion fails.

10 DELEGATE KILGORE: Second. Second.

11 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: We do have a second?

12 DELEGATE KILGORE: To postpone it?

13 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Yes, postpone it.

14 DELEGATE KILGORE: Yes. Second.

15 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. We have a motion and a second.  
16 All in favor say aye.

17 (ALL AFFIRM.)

18 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All opposed?

19 (NO RESPONSE.)

20 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay.

21 Okay, Sarah, I believe now we'll move on to Extensions and  
22 Modifications.

23 MS. WILLIAMS: Yes. We have two grants to present to you  
24 that are requesting extensions.

25 The first is the grant 3377 for Carroll, Grayson, Galax

1 Regional Industrial Facility Authority, and The Wired Road  
2 Connector Project. This was approved for \$300,000 in March of  
3 2018 and the full balance remains available.

4 The grant was approved for the construction of a wireless  
5 internet system in Carroll and Grayson counties. It connects to  
6 other broadband projects that are under development in those  
7 counties. Since the approval they have encountered delays, as  
8 many of our broadband projects have, with supply chain issues  
9 for materials as well as labor shortage. The grantee though has  
10 assured staff that the project will be completed during this  
11 extension period. So, staff recommends a final extension until  
12 May 31, 2024.

13 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. Thank you.

14 Do we have any questions?

15 (NO RESPONSE.)

16 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All right. I'll entertain a motion.

17 UNKNOWN: So, moved.

18 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All right. Do we have a second?

19 DELEGATE KILGORE: Second.

20 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: We have a motion and a second to --

21 MS. COX: I have an abstention. I probably should abstain  
22 from that project for the middle mile.

23 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. We have a motion and a second,  
24 one abstention to adopt the staff recommendations. All in favor  
25 say aye.



1 (ALL AFFIRM.)

2 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All opposed?

3 (NO RESPONSE.)

4 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay.

5 MS. WILLIAMS: So, the next project is an extension of --

6 DELEGATE MARSHALL: And one abstention.

7 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: And one abstention. Apologize. One  
8 abstention.

9 MS. WILLIAMS: The next project also contains a request for  
10 a change in scope so there's a little more to explain on that  
11 one. It's 3530. It's Grayson County for Connect Grayson. They  
12 were approved for \$325,000 in June of 2019. Again, the full  
13 balance is available.

14 So, they requested a 5<sup>th</sup> year extension and a change in  
15 scope. This project was approved in 2019 and it was still a  
16 little bit under development at the time it was approved. This  
17 is the last mile component of Appalachian Power's Middle Mile  
18 Project. And at the time it was approved, and it was still  
19 subject to, I think, the Executive Director's approval of the  
20 final budget and outcomes. I don't know if we ever received  
21 those although it is an active grant.

22 So, what Grayson has learned since then is that the  
23 original internet provider, Giga beam, who is also completing  
24 work in another part of the County, that the technology that  
25 they are using is likely not appropriate for Western Grayson.

1 And that's the section of the County that our funds will cover.

2 So, they are requesting a change in scope to do a couple of  
3 things. They would like to bring in a second vendor and they're  
4 looking for someone who would do 5G technology. The Giga beam  
5 was not a party to the agreement as they were not a partner at  
6 the time that that project was approved so there really does not  
7 seem to be a reason, they cannot bring in the second vendor.  
8 What they have realized is that a 5G type of technology is more  
9 suitable. And we do have some representatives from Grayson here  
10 that can explain a little bit more about the reasons for that  
11 than the details I could probably give you.

12 In addition to that they have requested permission to  
13 transfer Commission purchased assets to the project vendor. And  
14 right now, it's a little premature to do that. The Executive  
15 Director has the authority to approve asset transfers. That  
16 usually happens at the end of the project once we know that the  
17 deliverables and outcomes have all been achieved. And so, right  
18 now it's a little premature because we do not know who the  
19 vendor is or a firm list of what those assets are. So, that is  
20 something that we can revisit administratively when it's  
21 appropriate.

22 They also requested an 18-month extension. Our policy  
23 allows for only a one-year extension at a time. So, it's likely  
24 you will see this grant before us in another year although my  
25 conversations with them this morning reveal they think it is

1 likely they may be able to complete it within the year.

2 So, staff has recommended the approval of the revised  
3 project scope to include the addition of a second last mile  
4 vendor. The grant's end date will be extended to May 31, 2024.

5 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. Thank you. Do we have any  
6 questions?

7 MS. COX: Mr. Chairman.

8 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Yes, ma'am.

9 MS. COX: Mr. Revels, I'd like to ask you a couple of  
10 questions.

11 MR. REVELS: Yes.

12 MS. COX: Is this specific to the Whitetop area?

13 MR. REVELS: Yes.

14 MS. COX: The area that's been tough to serve?

15 MR. REVELS: Yes, it is. The current plan or the former  
16 plan was to use 35-foot towers and transponders to try to serve  
17 wirelessly people in the Whitetop community.

18 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Sir, I apologize. Could you please  
19 state your name?

20 MR. REVELS: I'm Tom Revels, Grayson County and I'm the  
21 Project Manager for the County on that project. I apologize.

22 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Thank you.

23 MS. COX: Could you spell your last name?

24 MR. REVELS: Revels, R-E-V-E-L-S. And so, what we've  
25 encountered in the central part of the County with these towers

1 is that foliage and topography is limiting the number of people  
2 that can be satisfactorily served by the smaller, lower towers.  
3 And so, they're looking at some of the new technology which has  
4 been demonstrated to us. The 5G wireless systems have taller  
5 towers and the broad-spectrum band of a 5G transponder shoots  
6 through foliage and like a radio wave can mold itself around a  
7 ridge. And so, in the most Western part of the County if we're  
8 going to have any success in getting wireless services in place  
9 it's going to take something different than what we initially  
10 thought would be appropriate. So, this is based on lessons  
11 learned already in other areas of the County.

12 MS. COX: Mr. Chairman, one more question.

13 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Yes, ma'am.

14 MS. COX: Are you guys' pursuing VATI funds or the BEAD  
15 funds that hopefully would be coming down the pipe to the DHCD  
16 in the future to help you implement that?

17 MR. REVELS: No.

18 MS. COX: Okay.

19 MR. REVELS: Not in that part of the county.

20 MS. COX: Okay. Thank you.

21 delegate MARSHALL: A question.

22 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Yes, sir.

23 DELEGATE MARSHALL: So, sir, I assume you're talking about  
24 putting up towers, this 5G. So, what kind of radius could that  
25 serve?

1 MR. REVELS: Well, first, I'm not totally the expert on  
2 this although I've listened to people who are. Depending on the  
3 elevation of the tower they can achieve broadband speeds, which  
4 match the federal definition up to about nine miles. Nine miles  
5 in radius. And they've already done some -- several vendors  
6 have done some preliminary work and the total project would call  
7 for three towers. One on the -- if you know anything about  
8 Whitetop, one in Whitetop. One on Fees Ridge, which is about  
9 halfway between Whitetop and Rugby. And then one in the Rugby  
10 area.

11 And with those three towers and this technology they can  
12 project to serve about 97 percent of the households that are in  
13 that region. Even with our four plan and smaller towers, even  
14 the engineering projections at that time were down around 60  
15 percent.

16 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Sir, is it weather related? I mean,  
17 like the storm we had a couple nights ago, does that affect the  
18 service?

19 MR. REVELS: Well, the good thing about the tall towers and  
20 the 5G is far less susceptible to weather issues. I will admit  
21 to you that, you know, A&P has done a remarkable job of putting  
22 fiber across our County and we're very thankful for that. But  
23 the last mile fiber we're having great difficulty because a  
24 hundred-foot tree does not respect a 40-foot electric utility  
25 right-of-way. And even before we could get it hung and

1 serviceable, we're beginning to see a drop because trees are  
2 falling and if you know anything about Western Grayson County.  
3 I live there. To the best of their ability, I still lose power  
4 one to two times a month. Now, they are Johnny on the spot to  
5 fix it but as I've learned from the technicians when the fiber  
6 cable breaks it's not like an electric line. It takes a lot  
7 more time and a lot more money and a lot more effort to put it  
8 back together.

9 And so, we believe that instead of using micro towers you  
10 do have to tie them into fiber lines because all the fiber in  
11 Western Grayson runs 58. We believe it will be far more durable  
12 in our environment because as you know we do have terrible  
13 windstorms in the wintertime and a lot of wet ground and trees  
14 that fall.

15 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Okay. Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. Any further questions?

17 (NO RESPONSE.)

18 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. I'll entertain a motion to  
19 accept the staff recommendation.

20 MR. PACE: So, moved, Mr. Chairman.

21 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay.

22 MS. WILLIAMS: Second.

23 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: We have a motion to approve the staff  
24 recommendations and a second. All in favor say aye.

25 (ALL AFFIRM.)

1 MS. COX: Mr. Chairman, one, abstention.

2 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Yes. Okay. All opposed?

3 (NO RESPONSE.)

4 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All right. With one abstention.

5 MR. REVELS: Mr. Chairman, thank you. We appreciate your  
6 support.

7 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All right. Thank you. Okay. Next  
8 on to other business. Andy?

9 MR. SORRELL: I don't have any other business, per se.  
10 Sarah, did you want to mention the current status of the meat  
11 processing grant round? That's getting ready to close soon, I  
12 believe.

13 MS. WILLIAMS: Sure. As you are probably aware the  
14 Southwest Committee is currently accepting applications for a  
15 very specialized funding round focused only on increasing meat  
16 processing capacity in the region. I want to tell you there has  
17 been a lot of interest in that program. Unfortunately, we've  
18 had several of the projects that have realized they are not  
19 going to be ready to submit on June 1. Although we do  
20 anticipate having a couple of applications.

21 I think what's been most beneficial about this special  
22 round is that a lot of the people we're talking to now were not  
23 previously aware that the Commission could support these types  
24 of projects. And so, we've really had a chance to talk to a lot  
25 of people we would not normally hear from, and I would not be

1 surprised if some don't apply in the future.

2 The application requirements are strenuous with, you know,  
3 construction estimates, business plans. And I think a lot of  
4 these are just still working to try to get everything pulled  
5 together. But I do anticipate some applications and I look  
6 forward to presenting them in September.

7 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. Thank you. Any further  
8 questions?

9 (NO RESPONSE.)

10 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: All right. Now, we'll go back to  
11 public comment. Does anyone from the public want to make a  
12 comment?

13 (NO RESPONSE.)

14 CHAIRMAN MOREFIELD: Okay. No public comment. We have no  
15 further questions. Meeting adjourned. Thank you.

16 (MEETING ADJOURNED.)

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1 CHAIRMAN BLEVINS: I want to welcome everyone and call to order  
2 the meeting of the Strategic Planning Commission. At this time  
3 I'll ask for the call of the roll, please.

4 MR. CAMPOS: Acting Executive Director James Campos.

5 (IN ATTENDANCE.)

6 Edward Blevins. Delegate Kathy Bryon. Delegate Leslie  
7 Adams. Gretchen Clark. Julie Hensley. Deputy Secretary Beth  
8 Green. T. Jordan Miles. Delegate William Wampler.

9 MR. CAMPOS: Chair, we have a quorum.

10 CHAIRMAN BLEVINS: Okay. Thank you. The minutes have been  
11 published on the website. At this time we'll ask for a motion  
12 to approve.

13 MR. MILES: So, moved, Mr. Chairman.

14 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Second.

15 CHAIRMAN BLEVINS: I have a motion. All in favor say aye.

16 (ALL AFFIRM.)

17 CHAIRMAN BLEVINS: Opposed?

18 (NONE.)

19 CHAIRMAN BLEVINS: Okay. Is there any public comment for  
20 this particular planning committee?

21 (NO RESPONSE.)

22 CHAIRMAN BLEVINS: Okay. Hearing none we'll defer to Andy

1 for an update on our upcoming Strategic Plan.

2 MR. SORRELL: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just  
3 wanted to give you a brief update on where we stood with the  
4 Strategic Plan since we last talked about it in January. We  
5 don't have a revised draft for you to review it or anything like  
6 that today. But as you recall, we had a discussion at our  
7 January meeting. And, of course, that was James' first meeting.  
8 And since that time we've really been working with James to get  
9 him up to speed in the role, understanding the Commission's  
10 existing plan where a draft has been.  
11

12 And then also how we can incorporate some of the ideas, as  
13 we'll talk about in Full Commission with our budget related to  
14 energy and other things. I think that the Governor's Economic  
15 Development Plan is also something that's working its way --  
16 it's now wrapping itself up to be completed. And so we'll be  
17 able to really show and tie our plan into what the Governor's  
18 pillars are for Economic Development. When I reviewed that with  
19 James I'd say five of the six aligned very closely with what the  
20 Commission does for Economic Development and Workforce  
21 Development and things of that nature. And so that's just sort  
22 of a longer way of saying that I expect that by our fall meeting  
23 in Southern Virginia we'll have a draft, hopefully, that --  
24  
25

1 well, it won't be me, but it'll be somebody. Somebody will  
2 provide you with a -- James will be providing you with a draft  
3 of the Strategic Plan that will pretty closely align with the  
4 Administration as well as the funding goals that James brings to  
5 the table and with interest in the Energy Program. But also a  
6 refocus on some of the projects as well with an innovation  
7 funding.  
8

9 James, you might want to address some of those ideas, if  
10 you'd like.

11 MR. CAMPOS: Sure. Thank you, Andrew. Yeah, some of the  
12 things that we're going to be presenting and bringing forward, I  
13 think, we have discussed with several of you already. But  
14 we're looking forward to presenting these initiatives. We think  
15 it's going to be a means in which we can further make the  
16 Commission more viable in the years to come and also to provide  
17 opportunities of growth and opportunities. So we really do look  
18 forward to addressing those and talking with other Commission  
19 members and kind of gathering their thoughts from now until the  
20 fall.  
21  
22

23 I think it was mentioned by Delegate Marshall that I'm  
24 going to be doing a speaking tour going around and meeting  
25 different folks, meeting them and going to their communities and

1 briefing some of them about the Commission. But getting there  
2 and making the Commission a bit more retail in that sense. And  
3 really getting to know and understand so we can better fine tune  
4 the Strategic Plan going forward. So I'm looking forward to  
5 that and thought I would just drop those few words.

6  
7 MR. SORRELL: Thank you, James. Mr. Chairman, I think that  
8 too by having a Strategic Plan ready for adoption this fall  
9 we'll be able to incorporate the feedback that James receives  
10 from these roundtable discussions from our partners that utilize  
11 the Plan. And want to be able to provide solid feedback to us  
12 if our Plan is not meeting the needs of our footprint then why  
13 do we have a plan? So it's important that that Plan closely  
14 aligns with not only programs and what we do but also what our  
15 partners are looking for us to do.

16  
17 And so it'll also by having it ready to go this fall it'll  
18 be for two years, of course, also will align with the Governor's  
19 plan for his Economic Development Plan as well. And so that was  
20 really just a more general update. As we have talked in the  
21 past, you know, Delegate Marshall had some interest in ensuring  
22 that we had a Regional Committee that was similar to how we had  
23 a Special Projects Committee in the past. But I think there's  
24 ways that we can address some of those more regional projects  
25

1 when they do arrive. They don't arrive all the time, but when  
2 they do, that needs to happen. There needs to be a place for  
3 them that we address in the Strategic Plan.

4 MR. CAMPOS: James Campos. I would be remiss by correcting  
5 myself. I mentioned a speaking tour. It's really going to be  
6 more of a listening tour. So I wanted to make that correction.  
7 And also, as Andrew mentioned, some of the new initiatives we're  
8 doing. One is an Agricultural Innovation Fund. Another one is  
9 an Energy Fund. And we'll go into that more in depth. But  
10 those are the two things that we're really looking forward along  
11 with the creation of a foundation.  
12

13 MR. SORRELL: Yes. A foundation will be something that  
14 will provide some flexibility to the Commission and something  
15 that will be brought towards to the Commission for a greater  
16 discussion at a later time. Probably, this fall. And, of  
17 course, that will be addressed in the Strategic Plan. That's  
18 all I have.  
19

20 CHAIRMAN BLEVINS: Okay. Thank you both. I couldn't agree  
21 more with the approach that we're taking on developing this  
22 Strategic Plan. I think it will be very beneficial to the  
23 Commission and to the people in the footprint. So, I think  
24 we're taking -- we're taking the right approach.  
25

1 Is there any other business at this time?

2 MR. SORRELL: No, sir.

3 CHAIRMAN BLEVINS: Hearing no other business, is there any  
4 public comment?

5 (NO RESPONSE.)

6 CHAIRMAN BLEVINS: Okay. Hearing none, we'll call the  
7 meeting adjourned.

8 MR. SORRELL: Okay. And the Full Commission meeting starts  
9 back at 12:15. So enjoy your lunch.

10 (MEETING ADJOURNED.)

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3 SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER  
4 ABINGDON, VA  
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12 FULL COMMISSION  
13 MAY 18, 2023  
14 12:15 P.M.  
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21 MARSHA SELF, CERT  
22 Appalachian Court Reporting  
23 P.O. Box 833  
24 Abingdon, Virginia 24212  
25 ID 54-1495140  
(276) 676-2244

1 **Appearances :**

2 Honorable Senator Frank Ruff, Chair  
Honorable Will Morefield, Vice Chair  
3 Honorable Delegate Leslie Adams  
Edward Blevins  
4 Honorable Delegate Kathy Byron  
Gretchen Clark  
5 Amanda Cox  
Honorable Deputy Secretary Charles Kennington  
6 Joel Cunningham, Jr.  
Coley Drinkwater  
7 Watt Foster, Jr.  
Honorable Deputy Secretary Beth Green  
8 June Hensley  
9 Jay Jennings (remotely)  
Honorable Delegate Terry Kilgore  
10 Honorable Delegate Danny Marshall  
T. Jordan Miles, III  
11 Honorable William Pace  
Sandy Ratliff  
12 Walter "Buddy" Shelton, Jr.  
Honorable Delegate William "Will" Wampler  
13 Sarah Wilson

14  
15 **Absent**

16 Honorable Senator John Edwards  
Richard Hite  
17 Honorable Senator Louise Lucas  
Honorable Joseph Morrissey  
18 Gary Walker

19 **Staff :**

20 Honorable James Campos, Acting Executive Director  
and Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Trade  
21 Andrew Sorrell, Deputy Director  
Stephanie Kim, Finance Director  
22 Vicki Humphreys, Grants Director  
Sarah Capps, Southern Regional Director  
23 Sara Williams, Southwest Regional Director  
Jordan Butler, Public Relations Director & TROF Program Manager  
24 Emily Van Pelt, Grants Assistant  
Joyce Knight, Meeting Coordinator  
25 Hannah Franke-Fuller, Special Assistant

1 CHAIRMAN RUFF: James, would you call the roll, please?

2 MR. CAMPOS: Yes, Chairman. James Campos, Acting Executive  
3 Director.

4 (IN ATTENDANCE.)

5 Senator Frank Ruff. Delegate Will Morefield. Honorable  
6 Leslie Adams. Edward Blevins. Delegate Kathy Byron. Gretchen  
7 Clark. Amanda Fox. Cox. (Laughs.) As I was saying. Deputy  
8 Secretary Charles Kennington. Joel Cunningham. Coley  
9 Drinkwater. Watt Foster. Julie Hensley. Jay Jennings.  
10 Delegate Terry Kilgore. Deputy Secretary Green. Delegate Danny  
11 Marshall. Secretary Caren Merrick. T. Jordan Miles. Honorable  
12 William Pace. Sandy Ratliff. Walter "Buddy" Shelton. Delegate  
13 Will Wampler. Sarah Wilson.

16 MR. CAMPOS: Chair, we have a quorum.

17 CHAIRMAN RUFF: James, if you'd try Hite again and see if  
18 he will acknowledge he's there.

19 MR. CAMPOS: Mr. Hite, are you there, sir? One more time.  
20 Mr. Hite, are you there, sir? And then Joel Cunningham just  
21 walked in.

23 MR. CUNNINGHAM: I'm here. Here.

24 MR. MOREFIELD: All right. Mr. Chairman, I have a motion.  
25 Chairman Ruff, I move approval that Commissioners Merrick, Hite,

1 Walker, and Jennings, requested to participate remotely in this  
2 meeting in conformance with the Commission's adopted electronic  
3 policy. And the voices of the remotely participating members  
4 can be heard by all persons at the primary meeting location.

5 DELEGATE KILGORE: Second.

6 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. All in favor  
7 say, aye.

8 (ALL AFFIRM.)

9 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Okay. All right. Very good. All right,  
10 you all have read, I'm sure, word-for-word all the minutes from  
11 January the 5<sup>th</sup> and March 21<sup>st</sup>.  
12

13 MR. SORRELL: I'll say that March 21<sup>st</sup> ones aren't  
14 completed, so it'll just the January 5<sup>th</sup> ones.  
15

16 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Are there any additions or changes to those  
17 meetings? If not, will somebody make a motion?

18 DELEGATE KILGORE: So moved to be approved.

19 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded that they be  
20 approved. All in favor say, aye.  
21

22 (ALL AFFIRM.)

23 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Welcome back, public. You all were too  
24 quiet earlier, so we can give you one more shot at this for  
25 saying something. All right. Gearing up. Let's move forward.

1 Adam Watkins is here with the Economic Development for  
2 Southwest and Southside Virginia and with the VEDP. And, Adam,  
3 we're going to turn it over to you and give us some great  
4 wisdom.

5 MR. WATKINS: Sounds great. Thank you very much. It's  
6 really a pleasure to be here. So thank you for inviting me to  
7 come speak on this report that VEDP developed over the last  
8 year. I want to thank Delegate Kilgore for developing the bill  
9 that ended up tasking us with conducting this report. I'll kind  
10 of go through the slides but I'll introduce myself first. My  
11 name is Adam Watkins. I'm the Assistant Vice President at the  
12 Virginia Economic Development Partnership on the Economic  
13 Competitiveness Team. What my team really does is really look  
14 at what areas is Virginia competitive. We're trying to attract  
15 and grow our businesses in the state. And over the last year in  
16 a lot of different forms we've really taken a deep look at rural  
17 Virginia. In particular, in the Southwest and Southside,  
18 especially. My team also developed a study for the inland  
19 ports, which the results came out kind of in favor of exploring  
20 further developing an inland port in Mount Rogers region as  
21 well. But this study -- if you'd go to the next slide. Thank  
22 you.  
23  
24  
25

1           So, the study asked us to look at barriers and  
2 opportunities for economic development and infrastructure  
3 development in Southwest and Southside Virginia. So it was a  
4 kind of broad idea of what are the different challenges because  
5 there are many topic areas that we could have taken this in to  
6 really understand economic development in ways that Southwest  
7 and Southside Virginia can really leverage some of the great  
8 things that are going on and really take a deeper look at some  
9 of the challenges and think through new ways to tackle them.

10  
11           We took Southwest and Southside Virginia and focused on GO  
12 Virginia Regions One and Three, so predominately it covers the  
13 tobacco region. And that was kind of our area of focus. But  
14 something that we want to make clear in this study is that a lot  
15 of the findings really are more broadly applicable to rural  
16 Virginia. A lot of the challenges that we see in Southwest and  
17 Southside, we did a lot of data analysis comparing both this  
18 region of the study, rural Virginia, and then comparing it to  
19 what we're seeing in trans and metro. In urban Virginia there's  
20 a lot of parallels between Southwest and Southside Virginia and  
21 then the rest of the rural areas. So I just want to make that  
22 clear. There's a lot of broad applicability of these findings.

23  
24           Something else I wanted to say is that this isn't really  
25

1 just VEDP or that is coming up with these ideas or coming up  
2 with these priorities. One thing my team did and our External  
3 Affairs Team is we really engaged folks in Southwest and  
4 Southside Virginia. We came out to all of the regions. We  
5 engaged with the delegation as well. We met with local economic  
6 developers, regional folks, the higher eds, many other partners  
7 in these reasons to really understand that -- and this is the  
8 report is really a reflection of the challenges that they've  
9 seen and the priorities that they see for economic developments  
10 over the next 10 to 20 years. What we ended up doing with that  
11 information is take a deep dive into the data and really justify  
12 and say, Okay, this is the challenge that communities are  
13 expressing. This is verifiable. It's true. We are seeing a  
14 housing shortage. We are seeing challenges with capacity  
15 building and that's impacting our ability in communities to win  
16 projects, right.

19 So, that's something that we try to do with this report is  
20 supplement all kinds of priorities and ideas that are coming out  
21 of the communities and the great work here and really leverage  
22 some data as well to wrap our heads around. Okay, this is why  
23 things are moving slowly or in some directions. But or this is  
24 why this is a priority and this is how we can tackle those  
25

1 issues.

2       So if you go to the next slide.

3       The report really hits on five key areas for this region.  
4 And, again, these are very broadly applicable to rural Virginia  
5 as a whole. But the first thing we wanted to highlight is  
6 Capacity Building. And something that we noted is there's a lot  
7 fewer local economic developers and regional economic developers  
8 in this region than we see in other parts of the state. This is  
9 true for rural Virginia, but will we see the stark difference  
10 when we get to kind of more of the metro areas where there's  
11 always like two, three, or more economic developers per county  
12 or per city. And there are communities in Southwest and  
13 Southside that don't have a dedicated economic developer. That  
14 hat is being worn by the county commissioner or kind of the city  
15 manager. That they have a lot of other responsibilities as  
16 well. So capacity is a huge challenge. And the communities  
17 that we do see really strong dedicated people we see a lot of  
18 progress and a lot of great things are moving and happening.

19  
20  
21  
22       The other area, the next area, is Workforce is a major one.  
23 And this kind of broadly encompasses, not only developing skills  
24 and attracting talent, but some of the other adjacent areas, so  
25 housing capacity. So where does that talent go if they want to



1 move here, right. Do you have workforce housing for any new  
2 projects that might be coming down the pipeline. Also,  
3 childcare and elderly care. Are there kind of wrap around  
4 services and support services so that people don't have to make  
5 the choice to sacrifice between going to a really good paying  
6 job that they might have to travel a little bit farther to and  
7 then figure out how to coordinate childcare and care for other  
8 family members, right. So, workforce, it's a broader category  
9 but there are a lot of different challenges in there that we  
10 wanted to touch on.

11  
12 The next one is -- oh, let's go back another. The first  
13 line. Go farther up.

14  
15 So Sites and Buildings. If you don't have a site for a  
16 project to land or for a company to expand then they won't be  
17 able to move here, right. So that's a challenge that we feel  
18 really acutely at VEDP and we really prioritized developing and  
19 expanding our business sites funding. I know the Tobacco  
20 Commission has done a lot to develop sites and buildings. And  
21 so this is something that we think we should continue to  
22 prioritize.

23  
24 The fourth one is Infrastructure. So expanding access to  
25 our roadways. Really developing and strengthening kind of our

1 highway network and roadway network. And we also highlighted  
2 that complimentary study on the inland port as well.

3 And, finally, Incentives and Costs of Doing Business. This  
4 region is unique in Virginia because it's right on the border of  
5 Tennessee and North Carolina, right. And we are constantly  
6 competing with them for products. And this is very easy for a  
7 business to say, based on this cost calculation, I will move one  
8 county over and be in North Carolina versus Virginia. And they  
9 have other states are outcompeting us with incentives and taxes  
10 and speed of permitting. So we want to highlight those areas  
11 and there are ways that we don't necessarily need to always  
12 overhaul our tax system. Although that is a potential option.  
13 But there are other incentives that they are using that we could  
14 leverage as well to be more cost competitive. And the same with  
15 permitting as well.

18 So if you go on to the next slide.

19 I just want to highlight something in the study that we  
20 did, we looked at in terms of the capacity, and we looked at  
21 counties and cities that have different numbers of economic  
22 developers. So on the far left of that is your rural  
23 communities, broadly. And we grouped them all together in this  
24 particular one because the trends weren't really different  
25

1 between Southwest and Southside in the general rural areas.

2       There's kind of a mix of folks that have -- or mix of  
3 counties and cities that have no economic developers or just  
4 one, two, and three. But what we really see is once you go from  
5 having no economic developer to even one economic developer you  
6 almost double your chances of getting a project within a two-  
7 year span. And by the time you have a pretty fully staffed  
8 organization, economic development organization, at the local  
9 level your chances of winning a project in a rural area is just  
10 as good as we're seeing it in metro areas. So I wanted to  
11 highlight that. The people that are on the ground that are  
12 doing this work it's really important for them to have the  
13 capacity.  
14

15  
16       And it's not just having staff, too. It's having that  
17 training and that expertise. The kind of funds to be able to do  
18 a strategic plan or to redevelop your marketing, right. There's  
19 a lot of things that go into it that makes a really strong kind  
20 of local economic development organization and regional as well.  
21

22       If you'll go to the next slide.

23       The other area that we noted is capacity as an issue is  
24 getting federal grants. Federal grants is not money that we  
25 have to allocate in our state budget. It's money that's already

1 allocated by the federal government that we can compete for and  
2 we can win. But the people that have to apply for those,  
3 develop the grants, track and monitor those, are usually our  
4 locals, our PDCs, and folks like that, that really, again, are  
5 constrained with capacity.  
6

7 And so if we can really bolster capacity or do things at  
8 the state level to really prioritize and support efforts to  
9 capture federal funding that can really make a difference and  
10 add more resources into our communities. And this is something  
11 that VEDP is starting to prioritize.  
12

13 My team is really diving into understanding, hey, what are  
14 all the federal funding machines that are most important to our  
15 communities. We are developing a kind of list and resources to  
16 help guide communities on how to apply for these and how to  
17 prioritize those. So that's something that we're already taking  
18 from this study and doing ourselves.  
19

20 The next slide.

21 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Adam, before you go to the next slide.

22 MR. WATKINS: Yes.

23 CHAIRMAN RUFF: My eyes aren't that good. Can you tell us  
24 what the colors are?

25 MR. WATKINS: Yes. So we broke it down by different

1 federal organizations. So, Appalachian Regional Commission is  
2 the dark blue at the bottom, the U.S. Department of Agriculture,  
3 the Economic Development Agency, and the Health and Human  
4 Services, Department of Transportation, Federal Communications  
5 Commission, that primarily does the broadband pieces, right.  
6 There's another -- a few others in there as well. And so what  
7 this is showing it's a per capita win of these grants. So  
8 Virginia, compared to Tennessee, is about \$400 per capita that  
9 we've seen over the past several years that have been awarded to  
10 rural Tennessee versus \$300 per capita in rural Virginia. So  
11 it's a pretty big difference. If we're thinking about  
12 population and size of our rural areas it makes a huge  
13 difference in the end.

14  
15  
16 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you.

17 MR. WATKINS: Yeah. So, Workforce, we tackled it and we  
18 broke it down into two chunks, so really it's kind of developing  
19 the skills of the people that are here. This was an area where  
20 we don't really want to do a lot of new things. We really want  
21 to enforce a lot of the great work that's being done, right. So  
22 GO TEC is a program that is really taking off and we wanted to  
23 highlight that. And that should expand, right.

24  
25 We should prioritize getting our K-12 students involved in

1 the industries here and realizing that accessing those  
2 opportunities, right. That we have great internship programs  
3 that are being developed at the state level that we should  
4 continue to double down on and expand. G3 is another program to  
5 get folks getting credentials, right. So anything that the  
6 state can do to really kind of promote these programs to support  
7 their growth.  
8

9 Another thing we wanted to highlight is stuff that the  
10 Tobacco Commission and others are doing is really funding our  
11 higher education centers, our community colleges for responsive  
12 workforce needs, right. We have -- and this is true across the  
13 state, but very much so in rural Virginia is we're seeing a  
14 shortage of workers, right. And what the companies really want  
15 is responsive training programs to fill kind of 10 spots or 30  
16 spots as they grow their business and adapt to new technology,  
17 right.  
18

19 So being very nimble with our funding and very responsive  
20 to funding needs is something that's important. VEDP already  
21 does this. We have that program but it's only for companies  
22 kind of new and coming in. It's not for companies that are not  
23 looking to take in tax incentives and a deal. So that's the gap  
24 that the Tobacco Commission and other organizations can fill.  
25

1 And then on the town attraction side, right, and growing that  
2 town base, right. Because there's a lot of people in the region  
3 that needs to be unlocked as well. So housing is probably the  
4 number one priority there as making sure that we have affordable  
5 and workforce housing for people close to the areas where they  
6 work. Something that has been a challenge is that developers  
7 aren't coming here.  
8

9       One thing we note is that housing values are lower and that  
10 is part of the reason that's driving that, right. If you're a  
11 developer you're going to be more inclined to build in Richmond  
12 where you can get more bang for your buck in the end than here.  
13 And so it's just a marketing deficiency that there have been  
14 some really good ideas about how to solve them for and fix that.  
15 A couple communities -- I know Wise is doing this. I know  
16 Danville and Pittsylvania are thinking about doing this and  
17 really developing and kind of doing what we do for site  
18 development for industry, but for housing. So kind of doing  
19 that free development infrastructure, laying, leveling the site,  
20 bringing in water and utilities for when that developer needs to  
21 come and they can build quickly, right. So that's one issue to  
22 solve for. And having additional funding for that that should  
23 be a huge priority. The same for childcare and healthcare.  
24  
25

1 It's the same issue where there's a marketing deficiency.

2       If you're going to build childcare and healthcare centers  
3 you're going to probably, as a capitalist, you're going to do it  
4 in a metro area where you can make more money where there's a  
5 center of gravity of more people. So we need to work with them  
6 and help funds and make a case for people to come to rural areas  
7 and expand that, right.

9       So there, for example, the difference that we saw is  
10 there's about 40 percent of seats available for pre-K to -- or,  
11 yeah, children from zero to 5, right. So about 40 percent of  
12 the population to be served in Southwest and Southside, and 60  
13 percent of the population to be served in metro areas, right.  
14 It's a huge difference. It's still not great for metro areas,  
15 but the challenge is more acute here.

17       And then the same is community amenities. I think that the  
18 region is doing a great job of developing and selling it's  
19 community amenities. But really continuing to leverage  
20 opportunity zones, enterprise zones, and other tools to really  
21 attract investments and developing public and private  
22 partnerships to help enhancing our communities is important to  
23 continue to do.

25       Go to the next slide.



1 I won't touch on this too much because I think site  
2 development is very familiar to folks. But it's a huge priority  
3 and what we want to note is that like there are a couple of  
4 great sites in this area, but there few of them, right. We want  
5 to continue to grow the products that we have available. But  
6 it's not just always just the mega sites. As well we want to --  
7 and this is one that VEDP doesn't have the funding to do -- but  
8 really invest in some of those smaller sites, 20 acres, 25  
9 acres, right, that businesses will expand on.

11 And then invest in shell buildings as well. Something that  
12 we heard from conversations is that there's a lot of investment  
13 in shell buildings in the '80s and '90s. They kind of sat  
14 vacant for a while but then once the economy picked up in the  
15 past five years all those buildings have been swallowed up. And  
16 we don't really have a funding source to replenish that, right.  
17 And if you're a business you're thinking speed to market.  
18 Having a building ready for you is huge.

20 Go to the next slide.

21 This is piloting Infrastructure now. So site development  
22 is one piece of that. And then infrastructure we're thinking  
23 about kind of our roads, our rail networks, our airport  
24 networks, all those different things. This is an area where the  
25

1 capacity issue comes in again, right. We are not winning as  
2 many federal grants for -- Department of Transportation grants  
3 for our infrastructure as we need. This is something that takes  
4 a lot of work to apply to. It takes a lot of effort to get  
5 folks on board and to work with consultants and experts to  
6 develop the plans for that. But it takes time and it takes  
7 people. So I wanted to bring that back and showcase this issue  
8 with an infrastructural lens as well.

9  
10 The next slide.

11 So the reason why infrastructure is a priority and why -- I  
12 think, Delegate Kilgore, you specifically mentioned it in the  
13 bill itself -- is it's the number three reason companies site  
14 provided and want to locate at a place. They want to be really  
15 connected to road to rail infrastructure. They want to be close  
16 to suppliers. They want to have access to the export markets if  
17 they need those things. So it's a very important location  
18 factor for a company.

19  
20 And so we did a quick analysis to understand how much is  
21 this actually affecting decisions, right. And places that are  
22 closer -- the counties that have kind of a major four-lane  
23 highway are two times as likely to get a project -- these are  
24 rural counties. Two times as more likely to get a project than  
25

1 counties that are not -- that don't have access to a four-lane  
2 highway, all right. So we're seeing that, actually, in the data  
3 and how the companies are making decisions. And that's another  
4 reason why we wanted to bring back the point of, like, hey, if  
5 we have folks prioritizing this and developing this in  
6 communities it will help kind of unlock more funds for that as  
7 well.  
8

9       The last piece to highlight here is the reason why we're  
10 recommending the inland port and hope kind of complimenting the  
11 other report that came out is that if you're, basically, in  
12 Martinsville on farther kind of towards the end of the state, if  
13 you're a trucker you're probably going to go to North Carolina  
14 or South Carolina to ship your goods out of the country because  
15 it's 10 to 40 minutes, depending on where you're at, closer for  
16 you or faster for you to drive there, right. Time is money. So  
17 having it in the port or further developing our infrastructure  
18 networks in the southern part of the state towards to connect  
19 those regions to the port should be a major priority as well.  
20  
21

22       Go to the next slide.

23       This is more about the cost of doing business side.  
24 Something that I want is to note here, there's a lot of ways to  
25 reduce costs, right. But companies are mostly looking at their

1 bottom line. It's not necessarily whether it's taxes or tax  
2 cuts. There is some nuance to it, but like if they are saving  
3 money by locating in Virginia over North Carolina then they will  
4 locate in Virginia. And something that we see in that all of  
5 our other neighboring states do that we don't is really targeted  
6 tax credits for rural areas. And sometimes it's also targeted  
7 at specific industries like manufacturing that are real  
8 priorities.

9  
10 So I wanted to highlight kind of all the states and what  
11 they're doing to do this. And this is something that Virginia  
12 doesn't have is, essentially, a job tax credit. So if you  
13 employ a certain number of people you'll get a tax credit  
14 based on a certain percentage of that of their wage for the  
15 companies. It's a huge windfall for them. Not a significant  
16 cost relative to the budget of the state. This is something  
17 that VEDP has prioritized and been kind of promoting with the  
18 General Assembly for a few years now. But they tier it. And  
19 this is what's important is that Georgia, for example, their tax  
20 credit it's, basically, like three times as much. If a company  
21 chooses to locate in a rural area versus kind of a major metro  
22 area they'll have a three times higher tax credit for doing so.

23  
24  
25 So, these are the things that we can do to really direct

1 investment into rural areas to really kind of fix that kind of  
2 market issue that they've made a company consider rural Virginia  
3 Southwest, Southside over kind of an area that is more in the  
4 metro areas. Because there's so many people and talent here  
5 that can be unlocked. And getting them to recognize that the  
6 opportunity is there and just nudging them in that direction is  
7 something that the state should be doing. That's kind of the  
8 overview.

10       The next few slides are just kind of a summary of those  
11 recommendations. The recommendations are we targeted them  
12 towards the General Assembly to think through. But a lot of  
13 these issues are ones that other organizations and VEDP, like I  
14 said earlier, we are trying to prioritize as well. And this is  
15 an effort that not only needs to be done at the city level, it's  
16 already being done in a lot of places at the regional and local  
17 levels in Southwest and Southside Virginia. And we want to  
18 continue that momentum, continue building on those opportunities  
19 and think through and be a good partner at VEDP with our  
20 communities in Southwest and Southside to really push our  
21 economic development opportunities forward.

24       So, I'll take any questions. Happy to. So this was a  
25 summary of the presentation. Obviously, we went to it broadly

1 and looked at a lot of areas. If folks want to dive deeper into  
2 any of those you can read the report. You can also reach out to  
3 me or Jason on who we are, our CEO at VEDP, or any other of us  
4 to kind of understand more and give more information. We'd be  
5 happy to present and kind of do any other detail work with you  
6 all and the communities that you serve. So, thank you very  
7 much.  
8

9 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Adam, before you answer any questions. Are  
10 these slides available to the Tobacco Commission?

11 MR. BUTLER: Yes. Yeah, absolutely. And we'll email them  
12 to any -- I also brought paper copies, but not enough. So if  
13 folks want paper copies I can share that. But they also can be  
14 made available as well to share.  
15

16 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Andy, can I count on you to send out to  
17 every member that presentation?

18 MR. SORRELL: Yes, sir.

19 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Okay.

20 MR. WATKINS: Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Daniel, you had some questions?

22 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Yeah. Sir, last year in the General  
23 Assembly, we passed House Bill 1842. It's a bill about the  
24 Virginia Business Ready Sites Acquisition Fund and Program. It  
25

1 creates Virginia Business Ready Sites Acquisition Fund and  
2 Program for the purpose of acquiring sites, for the purpose of  
3 creating and maintaining a portfolio of project-ready sites to  
4 promote economic development in the Commonwealth. So this is a  
5 state-wide bill. But I'm just home cooking here in my  
6 Commission. So I might be putting you on the spot.

8 MR. WATKINS: That's all right.

9 DELEGATE MARSHALL: So how does this affect the Tobacco  
10 Commission? Because what I understand about this bill that we  
11 passed is that the state is going to use funds, state funds, to  
12 go out and find ready sites and acquire those. And then so  
13 let's just take that part first. Then we're go to step two and  
14 step three.

16 MR. WATKINS: Yeah. And that's where I think the primary  
17 target, depending on the amount of funds, there's only so many  
18 sites we can acquire. And they're trying to optimize and think  
19 through, okay, what is the sites that will yield kind of the  
20 biggest opportunity in kind of the medium term. Probably, like  
21 good sites sometimes are ready to go. Others need a lot of  
22 work. And so that's where the kind of thinking behind that will  
23 be. And I don't know -- from talks I've heard is we would  
24 acquire more than probably one or two sites depending on the  
25

1 funding size.

2           But the other piece of that is we are looking across  
3 statewide, right? So while we might not acquire a site,  
4 particularly, in this tobacco commission region, right. It  
5 might be rural Virginia, but it might not be in the tobacco  
6 commission region. We are still looking statewide in assessing  
7 the quality of sites that we don't know about, right. That  
8 communities might not know about but have potential that there  
9 might be a set of parcels that are just kind of need to be  
10 pieced together from different owners that would be really high  
11 potential.  
12

13  
14           And with that research, we want to go out and work with  
15 partners to say, hey, these are really good sites. We would  
16 want to invest in those. We have not acquired those, but we  
17 want to still partner with you with this new knowledge. And  
18 that would be kind of with the Tobacco Commission in leveraging  
19 funds that you all have and that you're willing to commit to  
20 developing these sites. So we are assessing and saying like  
21 this is a potentially good site for projects in the long run.  
22

23           DELEGATE MARSHALL: A follow-up question then. Who  
24 actually will own the site? Will the State of Virginia own the  
25 site or will the locality own the site? And then part of that



1 is -- let's take that first. Who will actually control the  
2 site?

3 MR. WATKINS: Yeah. That might be putting me a bit more on  
4 the spot than I'm able to answer. But my assumption is I think  
5 that's still being -- because the funds haven't been committed  
6 and I think part of that will -- the language, correct me if I'm  
7 wrong, is we'll kind of determine how that site will be owned.  
8 Whether it'll be -- I don't believe it's going to completely be  
9 owned by VEDP, but it might be kind of in a collaborative  
10 fashion, being like reviewed by -- I think there's been  
11 discussions about having folks from the General Assembly on to  
12 be part of that.  
13  
14

15 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Yeah. MEI.

16 MR. WATKINS: Yeah, MEI Commission. So that's kind of what  
17 I heard, but I don't know if that's kind of been finalized yet,  
18 correct? So you're closer to it than I am right now at this  
19 point.  
20

21 DELEGATE MARSHALL: All right. And so I assume that the  
22 tax base will stay locally?

23 MR. BUTLER: I think that is the goal, right. Like, the  
24 tax base will stay locally. The site itself will eventually be  
25 sold to the company, right, that ends up occupying it or

1 multiple companies that end up occupying that site, right. And  
2 so we expect, especially, with partnerships with the localities  
3 as they develop, right. It's not going to be all state funds  
4 that do it. The locality will -- we want to have them task it  
5 in the gate, right, as well. And so we hope that that will be a  
6 good windfall for the locality when the project comes and when  
7 that's won.

9 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Thank you.

10 MR. WATKINS: Yeah, absolutely.

11 MR. PACE: I have a question.

12 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Any other questions except not about  
13 Virginia Beach.

14 MR. PACE: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to go  
15 back to Page 3 of the slide.

16 MR. WATKINS: Sure.

17 MR. PACE: There's something I really noted there. Right  
18 there, "Rural localities at least two fulltime economic  
19 development staff." I remember at one presentation when Jason  
20 presented VEDP had a map of every locality of every county seat  
21 and how many staff were on their Economic Development Team,  
22 right. And there's some in the tobacco footprint that have  
23 none.

1 I think off the top of my head though, and that locality  
2 I'm thinking of has an interstate highway system that goes  
3 through it. So I guess my question is, is VEDP doing anything  
4 to try and reach out to these localities and tell them that it's  
5 probably a good idea to have an economic development team, not  
6 like a regional one like Southwest Virginia Alliance, but a  
7 local one based on this.

9 MR. WATKINS: I mean, our regionals do play a big part in  
10 trying to supplement. And we have regional organizations across  
11 the state, right. But I think that is something that we do need  
12 to communicate. And something that we've been talking about and  
13 would like to partner on and do a better job at communicating  
14 this with kind of local Board of Supervisors and other officials  
15 because that is a weakness. And I think there is a big  
16 disconnect in a lot of communities between the elected officials  
17 that decide where the funds go and how they're prioritized and  
18 what they actually need to do to be successful economic  
19 development.

22 But we work with all of our localities regardless of  
23 whether or not they're a dedicated economic developer or not.  
24 We have a point of contact. In that case it's probably the  
25 county administrator. And sometimes they have the assistant

1 staff that are more focused on it. But, yeah, we figure it's a  
2 huge priority and something that we would like to do better at.  
3 And we hired Abigail Wescott as the director of public relations  
4 recently, so we've created a whole dedicated position to that.  
5 And she actually comes from the Southwest. She has experience  
6 in the region, so she's been a great partner and agrees with all  
7 these priorities and recognizes the need to do that. So we're  
8 looking forward to -- our team is looking forward to working  
9 with her to try to think through how we better communicate with  
10 our local elected officials on that front.

12 MR. PACE: Thank you.

13  
14 CHAIRMAN RUFF: To follow up on that. And ask are you --  
15 are you saying that she will have a responsibility to actually  
16 train people in localities? Because I think that is the issue.

17 MR. WATKINS: Yeah.

18 CHAIRMAN RUFF: If the locality does not have it in their  
19 budget then they may put somebody in that position who has no  
20 skills at that particular job. And so how do you get from zero  
21 to one, two, to three?

22  
23 MR. WATKINS: And so, she was on board a few months ago.  
24 And this, again, is a new position so we're still trying to  
25 define the role. But I think that's -- I don't know if

1 dedicated training will be part of that. But I think we would  
2 like to see that in the long run depending on how we can devote  
3 resources to that. That again, why we recommended -- it was  
4 Recommendation A. It's the top one is that funds for that for  
5 training for folks in any way that we want to do it, right. It  
6 can live with the VEDP. It can live with the Tobacco  
7 Commission. It can live with the Virginia Rural Center, right.  
8 It can be in a lot of areas. But this is something that we need  
9 -- an issue that we need to tackle. And Abigail is interested  
10 in doing that. We haven't kind of come together and figured out  
11 exactly what such an effort from the VEDP side will look like.  
12 But that is something that we want to start exploring and  
13 prioritizing, yes.

16 CHAIRMAN RUFF: I would encourage you to work with James  
17 towards that goal.

18 MR. BUTLER: Yeah.

19 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Mr. Chairman.

21 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Will.

22 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Thank you. Adam, and staff, can we go  
23 down to the next slide, Page 4?

24 I was looking at this. My question to you would be, you  
25 know, VEDP was able to gather this data and put it together.

1 But do we take any step further and figure out or identify why  
2 Virginia in comparison to some of our competitive states is at a  
3 lower ratio of economic development funds? Do we drill down at  
4 all and figure out why that is?

5 MR. WATKINS: Are you talking about EDA, specifically, or  
6 all these in general?

7 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Not necessarily. I mean, I understand  
8 VEDP may draw down the EDA funds for some of those others that  
9 are out there. But I was just asking, you know, what was the  
10 factor that resulted in us having less economic development  
11 funds, you know, that that chart indicates?

12 MR. WATKINS: And this is something that we're still  
13 exploring. It's not something that's always like readily  
14 available when we do the research. And something that we want  
15 to continue doing is diving into other states, maybe and talking  
16 to folks. What we noted, especially, about Tennessee and North  
17 Carolina and this is why we kind of landed on capacity building  
18 is the hypothesis for that. And capacity at the local and  
19 regional level.

20 First of all, people did touch on that. They're like, yes,  
21 we want to apply for grants but we don't always have the ability  
22 to do so or the ability to even manage them if we win the grant,

1 right. So that's one piece of that is it was expressed as a  
2 priority challenge from the communities here. What we've seen  
3 in North Carolina and Tennessee, the reason why we think that  
4 they are doing better is that they are prioritizing. They have  
5 programs set up to fund training and marketing. And, I think,  
6 it's North Carolina, they also have their economic development  
7 agency has a dedicated position to focus on federal funding. So  
8 that to us is kind of the rationale and likely reason for why  
9 that is. So that's why our team, in particular, has dedicated a  
10 couple of people to start exploring this issue further. Really  
11 we're starting and trying to make sure we understand the  
12 universal grants that are most important and get that  
13 information out to people. But we want to continue diving into  
14 this analysis and understand a bit more of like why aren't we  
15 getting there? Why aren't we unlocking this funding? How do we  
16 motivate our partners in the states and focus on these things?

17  
18  
19 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, can I make a  
20 comment?

21  
22 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Yes.

23 DELEGATE WAMPLER: You know, this is one of those areas  
24 where we look at a chart, we can see it, and it doesn't look  
25 that drastic. But if you take Tennessee where, a hundred

1 million down from what they're receiving every year for, you  
2 know, economic development and I don't think it takes, an  
3 extensive study by the Commission or by VEDP and figure out that  
4 if you don't put resources behind these grants being developed  
5 and grant writing and, specifically, seeking out the  
6 opportunities that have come from the federal government we're  
7 never going to get there.

9       So, it's the conditions looking at a strategic plan going  
10 forward. If we can put together conditioned resources to focus  
11 in the tobacco footprint on the maximization of these grant  
12 sources.

14       We have ARC and EDA through the Office of Surface Mining.  
15 We have a tremendous amount of money for any coal communities in  
16 assistance of coal communities. And so, I think, you know, as  
17 we're looking forward we have commissioned staff that reviews  
18 grants and helps us make, educated decisions on the grant  
19 proposals that come before us. But maybe we're missing an  
20 opportunity by putting together a team of professionals within  
21 the Commission that can help build these projects.

23       So, a county with one economic developer comes and says, I  
24 think we've got some action happening, but we need to maximize  
25 this project. Right now the -- I guess the fact of the



1 situation is, well, go figure it out and I hope you can get some  
2 federal funds. Where maybe we should make it, okay, we've got  
3 an idea identified or a prospect identified. How can the  
4 Commission put resources on top of the local resources that are  
5 already available to build out the project?  
6

7 And I think, you know, while we have a portfolio of great  
8 projects in the Tobacco Commission we can see a much greater  
9 return and a much more thoughtful project, you know, development  
10 process if we put some resources to it. So maybe we can think  
11 about that coming forward because there's a lot of money out  
12 there to go get. Particularly, in the Infrastructure Act we  
13 just passed a year-and-a-half ago. So that's my two cents.  
14 Thank you.  
15

16 MS. GREEN: I just have a quick question. Do you have a  
17 breakdown of USDA grants that have been applied for and with  
18 what programs?  
19

20 MR. WATKINS: We can probably get that for you. We don't  
21 have it readily available. But, yeah, we can get that.  
22

23 MS. GREEN: I was curious about that. You know, with  
24 community facilities we could help tons, you know, of these  
25 counties. And also with single family housing. All of those  
different reconnects, broadbands.

1 MR. WATKINS: Yeah. They're one of -- I would say one of  
2 the bigger pieces of this, this puzzle.

3 MS. GREEN: Right. They could do a lot for them.

4 MR. WATKINS: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. We could follow up  
5 with -- I can talk to my team and we can follow up with that  
6 information.

7 MS. GREEN: Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN RUFF: While you're on that slide just to put it  
9 in perspective. If you look at North Carolina, what is their  
10 total investment -- what is the state investment in economic  
11 development?  
12

13 MR. BUTLER: That I don't know off the top of my head. I  
14 know that they're -- they find at least their EDO kind of  
15 roughly on par as us. But there's obviously the funds there --  
16 they have like dedicated funding for rural development. And I  
17 know it's in the tune of, I think, five million. As well they  
18 fund also their version of the rural center to the tune of about  
19 five million as well. It's a mix of like public and private  
20 funds. But I know that, in fact, their budget is about five  
21 million. So they're putting dedicated funds and resources into  
22 rural North Carolina in ways that we currently are not.  
23

24 I mean, there's VEDP programs and there is the Tobacco  
25

1 Commission and there are others that benefit rural Virginia.  
2 But North Carolina is definitely innovating in ways that we  
3 should look to as an opportunity to say, okay, how can we do  
4 this or how can we do this even better?

5 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you.

6 MS. RATLIFF: Question. To go back to what Will was  
7 talking about. Is one of the issues that the PDCs do not have a  
8 staff or resources to go after more of these funds or B, there's  
9 not a collaboration with DHCD, PDCs. And if we were to do  
10 something working with the Tobacco Commission, we ought to  
11 collaborate with all of them just to see that we're all singing  
12 from the same hymn book.

13 MR. WATKINS: Yeah. We did hear that, like, obviously the  
14 PDCS are supposed to be the kind of main player in developing  
15 these funds. But there are capacity issues with them as well.  
16 That was a theme that we heard. But I agree with that  
17 collaboration piece.

18 And I think the reason for this report, it's not to say,  
19 "Hey, these are some new ideas and things that we need to be  
20 doing." The hope that we get out of this is that everyone kind  
21 of takes the things that we know as important to Southwest and  
22 Southside, Virginia and starts rowing our boats in the same  
23 direction. And continue these conversations around  
24 collaboration, right. We've shared this information with DHE,  
25 with NOVA. This is something that we hope to continue and these

1 talking points is to continue to put focus on them. And I think  
2 that collaboration, not duplicating efforts, is right. Figuring  
3 out, okay, what are our strengths and how do we, like, how can  
4 GO Virginia support our PDCs better and vice versa. And how can  
5 the Tobacco Commission work with them. How can they communicate  
6 better with our localities and leverage each other's resources.  
7 I think those conversations are incredibly important to have.  
8 Especially, when staff are more constrained.

9 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Dan.

10 DELEGATE MARSHALL: All right. So, in Danville-  
11 Pittsylvania County we have something called a EVRIFA, a  
12 Regional Industrial Facility Center. And what that means is  
13 say, we have about four or five industrial parks that some of  
14 them are in Danville, some of them are in Pittsylvania County.  
15 If a company locates in one of those sites in Danville, they pay  
16 the Danville tax rate, but 50 percent of that money goes to  
17 Pittsylvania County and vice versa. So, when you talk about  
18 collaborative, you know, you got to have skin in the game.

19 MR. WATKINS: Yes.

20 DELEGATE MARSHALL: It's got to go both ways. And so, if  
21 you're just asking people to do it, you know, philanthropically  
22 I don't think they'll do that. I think they are going to have  
23 to make sure that in our case that the -- no matter if it's  
24 located in Pittsylvania County or Danville, both localities win.

25 MR. WATKINS: Yeah. And EVRIFAs are something we highlight

1 throughout the report. And the incredible thing that is  
2 happening in the Southwest and Southside is we've seen a lot of  
3 success and a lot of project wins that come out of sites that  
4 are developed from the EVRIFAs, right. Because companies don't  
5 know boundaries, right. They don't recruit from just one  
6 county. They don't really -- they don't think about the space  
7 in terms of those borders, right. Like, so the region is the  
8 one that needs to come together, and the region is the one that  
9 ultimately benefits, right. So, I think the EVRIFA is something  
10 we kind of try to work with localities often is developing these  
11 EVRIFAs to leverage resources.

12 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Stephanie, you look like you want to --

13 MS. KIM: Yeah. I wanted to say that included in the FY24  
14 proposed budget this exactly -- this issue that James had  
15 mentioned also of providing the consultation to be able to work  
16 with the federal government. And not just USDA but Department  
17 of Energy and other federal agencies. And then working with the  
18 state agencies. Specifically, to the Tobacco Region that we can  
19 leverage the funds from federal, state and local, and help  
20 advise localities on obtaining this funding.

21 So, we are planning to do that in FY24 with some funding to  
22 do some of the planning work and identify sources of funding.  
23 So, that is exactly -- you're correct. We have identified that  
24 as an issue.

25 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you.

1 MS. RATLIFF: Mr. Chairman, just one more question.

2 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Yes.

3 MS. RATLIFF: And this goes to our local Southwest Virginia  
4 delegation. You know, our 14 jurisdictions that's part of the  
5 Hard Rock deal are going to be getting, what, \$700,000 extra a  
6 year in their coffers. Can funds for communities be encouraged  
7 to use some of those? I know they can't be used for direct  
8 economic development, but could that help fund a position to  
9 help with economic development and to go after grant money?

10 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Mr. Chair?

11 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Will, you want to respond to that?

12 DELEGATE WAMPLER: I do. Trying not to toot my own horn  
13 but the Delegation did put together a package of a budget in the  
14 last adopted budget in Richmond that provided \$400,000 over the  
15 biennial to PDCs 1 and 2, so that's most of the Southwest  
16 Virginia, LENOWISCO, Cumberland Plateau, and I think Mount  
17 Rogers Planning District Commission may have been in there as  
18 well. That was money for staff resources at the PDCs to draw  
19 down Federal Infrastructure Act funds.

20 I raised it without saying that just a minute ago because  
21 that's great. If we have those resources that the PDCs that are  
22 laser focused on drawing down those funds and developing those  
23 projects with federal revenues, great. But I think the bigger  
24 opportunity for Tobacco, and we're all sitting here at the  
25 Commission meeting, is to adopt a similar model for the Tobacco

1 Commission where we can be enhancing the projects. Not just  
2 passing, you know, yay or nay judgment on them of saying, Great  
3 idea.

4       You know, our resources here, we can show that the federal  
5 government has a new application window for additional funding  
6 at this given time and help applicants more than just give them  
7 a thumbs up and thumbs down. I know they do that to a great  
8 extent already but if we can, you know, formalize it and put  
9 some more resources I think we'll see some good returns. Thank  
10 you.

11       CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you. Will.

12       DELEGATE MOREFIELD: And I apologize for the second time.  
13 I won't be very long. Earlier there was a slide that identified  
14 or was pointing out identifying certain tax incentives for rural  
15 areas to compete with other states. So, a few years ago we  
16 adopted legislation to attract new companies to distressed  
17 areas. Specifically, double the stress, which is the majority  
18 or all of Southwest and Southern, Virginia.

19       If you go on VEDP's website and you look at the list of  
20 incentives, it's specifically referring to the legislation I was  
21 talking about. You have it listed as New Company Incentive  
22 Program. And this is just the summary. So, remember for a  
23 prospective business where an executive is scrolling, sitting in  
24 the airport looking at a list of these they're probably going to  
25 read two or three sentences before they click on it so, it's got

1 to catch their attention.

2 So, if you look at this New Company Incentive Program you  
3 have listed it says, "Offers an exemption from corporate income  
4 tax, and up to \$2,000 per new job, for companies with no  
5 employment or property in the state prior to January 1, 2018,  
6 and that meet statutory investment and employment requirements."

7 So, if I'm reading that I see that as up to \$2,000 per new  
8 job. Well, what the bill does is if they meet certain  
9 investment criteria it exempts the company from paying corporate  
10 income tax. So, we've got Deputy Secretary Kennington here, he  
11 knows this probably better than I do, but I think in Virginia  
12 maybe two hundred and some C Corps only pay corporate income  
13 tax.

14 DEPUTY SECRETARY KENNINGTON: That's probably correct.

15 DELEGATE MOREFIELD: No. It's the state.

16 DEPUTY SECRETARY KENNINGTON: Yeah. Some --

17 DELEGATE MOREFIELD: Well, no. I know. But, I mean, for  
18 as far as state income tax only about 200 and some C Corps pay  
19 state income tax. But a tremendous amount of LLCs and S Corps  
20 pay the bulk of the business income tax.

21 And so, what the bill does is it includes S Corps and LLCs.  
22 It not only exempts them from paying income tax, but it also  
23 provides a provision that would allow them to deduct their gross  
24 sales from their income tax.

25 You know, anyone that's in business, if you can deduct your



1 gross sales that's tremendous. No other state in the country is  
2 doing that. So, something that I would like to see is on the  
3 list of, you know, your summaries and your incentives, if  
4 there's something in that program that's extremely attractive to  
5 a prospective business, I think we need to show it.

6 MR. WATKINS: To highlight that, yeah. No, I kind of took  
7 that note down and I'll probably reach out to make sure to  
8 clarify exactly what we're missing. I know our Incentives  
9 Department knows those things very, very well and I can let them  
10 know that this was a thing that you noted was missing that might  
11 be attractive for companies that are looking. Especially, the S  
12 Corps and the others that you mentioned, so thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Any other questions?

14 (NO RESPONSE.)

15 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Since you will all be receiving a copy of  
16 this presentation if after you carefully review it and you have  
17 any questions for Adam, I'm sure his e-mail address will be on  
18 there.

19 MR. WATKINS: Yes, yes. Absolutely.

20 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you very much, Adam.

21 MR. WATKINS: Thank you so much.

22 CHAIRMAN RUFF: I'm going to change the order a little bit  
23 and skip the Executive Committee and go to the Education  
24 Committee. Delegate Byron, that's you.

25 DELEGATE BYRON: Mr. Chairman, the Education Committee met

1 yesterday. I feel like it was 10 days ago, but it was just  
2 yesterday. And we looked at a lot of financial aid applications  
3 for workforce training in the region at our community colleges  
4 and we have several motions from what the Committee's  
5 recommendations are.

6 I move that the Commission accept the Education Committee's  
7 recommendation to approve \$2,197,020 for the last-dollar  
8 Workforce Financial Aid grants for Tobacco Region residents in  
9 the 2023-24 school year as described on pages 9-23 of the  
10 Commission book and subject to the conditions listed on pages 10  
11 and 11 of the Commission books.

12 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All right. Properly moved. Is there a  
13 second?

14 MR. MILES: Second, Mr. Chairman.

15 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Is there any further discussion on that  
16 motion?

17 (NO RESPONSE.)

18 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Hearing none. All in favor say aye.

19 (ALL AFFIRM.)

20 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All opposed?

21 (NO RESPONSE.)

22 DELEGATE BYRON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We had  
23 additional work that dealt with Extensions and Modifications.

24 One was the Central Virginia Community College Educational  
25 Foundation New Radiography Overhead X-Ray System Project 3629.

1 I move that the Commission accepts the Education Committee  
2 recommendation for Project 3629 to approve an extension to May  
3 31, 2025.

4 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Second.

5 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded it. Any  
6 further discussion?

7 (NO RESPOSNE.)

8 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Hearing none. All in favor say aye.

9 (ALL AFFIRM.)

10 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All opposed?

11 (NO RESPONSE.)

12 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Continue.

13 DELEGATE BYRON: Okay. And then we had the Radford  
14 University Foundation Counselor Education Program in Southwest,  
15 Virginia, Project 3514.

16 I move the Commission accept the Education Committee  
17 recommendation for Project 3514 to approve a one-year extension  
18 through June 20,2024.

19 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Second.

20 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. Any further  
21 discussion?

22 (NO RESPONSE.)

23 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Hearing none. All in favor say aye.

24 (ALL AFFIRM.)

25 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Opposed?

1 (NO RESPONSE.)

2 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Okay.

3 MS. BYRON: That completes our report.

4 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you.

5 INCENTIVES AND LOANS

6 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Danny, do you want to go ahead with  
7 Incentives and Loans?

8 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Yes. Incentives and Loans met this  
9 morning also. So, the first one is 3506 for the Smyth County  
10 Economic Development Authority and I move that the Commission  
11 accept the Incentives and Loans Committee's recommendation that  
12 the performance agreement for Project 3506 be modified to permit  
13 the acceptance of reported costs of Machinery & Tools and  
14 Tangible Personal Property towards the Company's taxable asset  
15 obligation as verified in writing by the local Commissioner of  
16 Revenue and that a performance extension be approved through  
17 December 31, 2023.

18 DELEGATE KILGORE: Second:

19 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. Any further  
20 discussion?

21 (NO RESPONSE.)

22 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All in favor say aye.

23 (ALL AFFIRM.)

24 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All opposed?

25 (NO RESPONSE.)

1 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Okay.

2 DELEGATE MARSHALL: All right. The second one is the Smyth  
3 County Economic Development Authority and Project 3451. I move  
4 that the Commission accepts the Incentives and Loans Committee  
5 recommendation of approval of a 5<sup>th</sup> year performance extension  
6 through June 30, 2023, for Project 3451.

7 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Second.

8 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. Any further  
9 discussion?

10 (NO RESPONSE.)

11 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All in favor say aye.

12 (ALL AFFIRM.)

13 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All opposed.

14 (NO RESPONSE.)

15 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Okay.

16 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Next, is for Russell County, and I move  
17 that the Commission accept Incentives and Loan Committee  
18 recommendations that the performance agreements for Project 3507  
19 be modified to permit the acceptance of reported costs of  
20 Machinery & Tools and Tangible Personal Property towards the  
21 Company's taxable asset obligation as verified in writing by the  
22 local Commissioner of Revenue.

23 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Second.

24 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. Any further  
25 discussion?

1 (NO RESPONSE.)

2 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All in favor say aye.

3 (ALL AFFIRM.)

4 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Opposed?

5 (NO RESPONSE.)

6 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Okay.

7 DELEATE MARSHALL: All right. So, number four is Tazewell  
8 County Industrial Development Authority. I move that the  
9 Commission accept the Incentives and Loan Committee  
10 recommendations that Project 3101 permit the inclusion of real  
11 estate purchase on September 23, 2015, in the amount of  
12 \$1,476,700 be counted toward the taxable capital investment  
13 obligation for the project.

14 MR. MILES: Second, Mr. Chairman.

15 DELEGATE MARSHALL: Sorry, I got an and.

16 MR. MILES: Excuse me.

17 DELEGATE MARSHALL: And that the --

18 MR. SORRELL: My handwriting can sometimes be bad.

19 And that the under portion of this project related to the  
20 employment performance which was \$8,333.35 be repaid as a  
21 condition of this project.

22 MR. MILES: Second, Mr. Chairman.

23 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. Any further  
24 discussion?

25 (NO RESPONSE.)

1 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All in favor say aye.

2 (ALL AFFIRM.)

3 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All opposed.

4 (NO RESPONSE.)

5 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Okay.

6 DELEGATE MARSHALL: And so, number five is the Joint  
7 Industrial Development Authority of Wythe County. I move that  
8 the Commission accept the Incentives and Loan Committee  
9 recommendations of Project 3892 be modified as it follows:  
10 award approval would be extended to July 20, 2023; revised  
11 performance agreement prepared including award amended to post-  
12 performance disbursement; and with a revised award date of May  
13 18, 2023, permitting a revised performance period for three  
14 years from this date -- May 18, 2026.

15 DELEGATE KILGORE: Second.

16 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. Any further  
17 discussion?

18 (NO RESPONSE.)

19 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All in favor say aye.

20 (ALL AFFIRM.)

21 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Opposed?

22 (NO RESPONSE.)

23 DELEGATE MARSHALL: So, that concludes my report, sir.

24 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All right. Ed, are you ready?

25 MR. BLEVINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

MR. BLEVINS: The Strategic Planning Committee met this morning. There were no actions required. We did have some discussion on the development of our Strategic Plan for presentation in the fall meeting.

CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you for your report. Buddy, are you ready?

MR. SHELTON: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

SOUTHERN VIRGINIA COMMITTEE

MR. SHELTON: The Southern Virginia Committee met this morning with a brief meeting. Our only order of business was an extension request from Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative in Pittsylvania County for their Backbone Fiber Project 3533. And therefore, I moved that the Commission accept the Southern Virginia Committee recommendation for approval of an extension for Project 3533 to June 30, 2024.

DELEGATE ADAMS: Second.

CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. Any further discussion?

(NO REPOSE.)

CHAIRMAN RUFF: Hearing none. All in favor say aye.

(ALL AFFIRM.)

CHAIRMAN RUFF: Opposed?

(ONE OPPOSED.)



1 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Okay. Thank you.

2 MR. SHELTON: That concludes our business, Mr. Chairman.

3 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Will, Southwest Virginia.

4 DELEGATE MOREFIELD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, we  
5 have Blue Ridge Public Television 4110. I'll entertain a motion  
6 to accept the Committee's recommendation.

7 DELEGATE WAMPLER: So, moved.

8 DELEGATE KILGORE: Second.

9 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Any further discussion?

10 (NO RESPONSE.)

11 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Hearing none. All in favor say aye.

12 (ALL AFFIRM.)

13 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All opposed.

14 (ONE OPPOSED.)

15 DELEGATE MOREFIELD: Okay. Next, we have Mendota Community  
16 Association, 4117. The Committee recommended postponing it  
17 indefinitely.

18 CHAIRMAN RUFF: We don't need a motion there. Okay. Any  
19 other business?

20 (NONE.)

21 EXTENSIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

22 DELEGATE MOREFIELD: Okay. Next, on to Extensions and  
23 Modifications.

24 Carroll, Grayson, Galax Regional Industrial Facility  
25 Project 3377. I'll entertain a motion to accept the Committee's

1 recommendation.

2 MR. MILES: So, moved.

3 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. All in favor  
4 say aye.

5 (ALL AFFIRM.)

6 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All opposed.

7 MS. COX: Abstention.

8 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Is there --

9 MS. COX: Abstention, yes.

10 CHAIRMAN RUFF: One abstention on that, okay.

11 DELEGATE MOREFIELD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Grayson County, Project 3530. I'll entertain a motion to  
13 accept the Committee's --

14 CHAIRMAN RUFF: I think that was a motion. Is there a  
15 second?

16 DELEGATE WAMPLER: Second.

17 CHAIRMAN RUFF: You kind of wandered off there. Any  
18 further discussion?

19 (NO RESPONSE.)

20 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Hearing none. All in favor say aye.

21 (ALL AFFIRM.)

22 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All opposed.

23 MS. COX: One abstention.

24 CHAIRMAN RUFF: One abstention. Okay. All right. We will  
25 return to the Executive Committee and Delegate Morefield will

1 make the report, please.

2 DELEGATE MOREFIELD: Mr. Chairman, I move to approve FY2023  
3 budget totaling \$27,936,400 as shown on page 65 of the  
4 Commission Book.

5 MS. KIM: FY2024.

6 DELEGATE MOREFIELD: I'm sorry.

7 MR. MILES: Second, Mr. Chairman.

8 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Properly moved and seconded. Anyone have  
9 any conversations? Stephanie, do you want to make a  
10 presentation? You don't want to make a presentation?

11 MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Chair, just as a point of order, I think  
12 this is the first time that we have ever had to debate our  
13 corpus in 20 plus years.

14 MS. KIM: Right. We are recommending no corpus invasion  
15 and to use available balances in the loans and incentive -- I  
16 think it's loan fund, to fund next year's budget and as well as  
17 interest.

18 CHAIRMAN RUFF: I assume that everybody has looked through  
19 their book and they have no questions. Is that correct?

20 (ALL AFFIRM.)

21 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All right. Are you ready to vote? All in  
22 favor?

23 (ALL AFFIRM.)

24 CHAIRMAN RUFF: All opposed?

25 (NO RESPONSE.)

1 CHAIRMAN RUFF: Okay. That is dealt with. All right.  
2 Andy is going to bring us up to date on some TROF and loans.

3 MR. SORRELL: Who seconded the motion for the budget?

4 MR. MILES: Me.

5 MR. SORRELL: Thank you. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
6 Well, I guess this might be my last TROF report for you, but I  
7 can tell you that right now we have four active TROFs that have  
8 been approved this fiscal year and I expect it to stay that  
9 amount by the end of June, probably.

10 As you can see, that's going to be on page 68 of -- excuse  
11 me, 69 of your packets. This is why we need to look and review  
12 and revise the TROF policy to make sure it's fitting right for  
13 our communities that we're serving.

14 If you look back at prior years, you know, we were  
15 approving 11 or 20 or 15 TROFs per fiscal year, you know, the  
16 last several years, which they related to the pandemic as well.  
17 We are significantly down. So, we need to just check it and  
18 make sure that this is the right -- that our policy is still  
19 accurately reflecting the goals of our communities and what  
20 they're looking to attract.

21 As you can see, we have those four that should all be sort  
22 of familiar to you or names that you've heard before and, of  
23 course, the ones from 2022. Blue Star was one we acted upon  
24 earlier as well.

25 I'll note that we still have, back on page 68, we have our

1 Community Business Lending Program that in speaking with  
2 Commission leadership we have paused. But we still have, you  
3 know, a few projects that we're submitting prior to that pause  
4 including the one I believe the Commission approved at our last  
5 meeting that they're still working on the term sheet in that  
6 project. That was the project in Scott County.

7       And then on page 70, you'll note the number of TROF loans.  
8 These are the loans that folks have been -- that are zero  
9 interest. That they would pay based upon the same performance  
10 parameters that they have for a TROF grant. Also, as you can  
11 see, the last one of these was approved back in July of 2021.  
12 So not many people are taking us up on these loans and, you  
13 know, that is, again, something that we want to continue to  
14 offer if not many folks are taking us up on it. So, a policy  
15 discussion that I think is important on that one as well.

16       And then finally on page 72 you'll see the active TROF  
17 awards that have concluded performance and that's about 25, 28  
18 active TROFs. And that's basically Jordan and I are the ones  
19 that manage those performances. You know, reviewing, making  
20 sure that the repayment agreements are developed for payments  
21 that need to occur, making sure that their performance is being  
22 managed for capital investment, for jobs. And so, we do -- I  
23 think staff are doing a great job making sure that if there's  
24 something that is unearned that Commission gets those funds back  
25 and reapply them to other projects moving forward.

1           And so, that's sort of the rundown of our TROF and  
2 Incentives and Loan Program at this point.

3           CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you. Under other business, did you  
4 have anything, or did James want to have anything?

5           MR. SORRELL: The only other business that I would say is I  
6 just wanted to make a very quick note and say it's been a  
7 pleasure serving the Tobacco Commission.

8           CHAIRMAN RUFF: No. Any other business?

9           MR. SORRELL: I just wanted to say that. But no other  
10 business, sir.

11          CHAIRMAN RUFF: We would very much like to thank and  
12 appreciate you for your service on the staff as Acting Director,  
13 as acting or Interim Director, as Deputy Director or whatever  
14 title you happen to be particular of. We appreciate the hard  
15 work you've put in and we wish you well in the future. Now, if  
16 you want to say anything you can.

17          (APPLAUSE.)

18          MR. CAMPOS: Chairman, I would be remiss if I didn't say  
19 anything. James Campos. So, I want to also -- and I thanked  
20 Andy, or Andrew as I call him, several times in the past few  
21 days. But I just wanted to make it for the record on the  
22 amazing job that Andrew has done in allowing me to walk into  
23 this position and help me stay clear of certain issues that were  
24 important to stay away from. But also allowing me to learn and  
25 do other activities that are assigned to me in this

1 Administration.

2       And I know that we all appreciate it -- the staff at  
3 Tobacco appreciates it. But especially myself appreciate the  
4 hard work, dedication, and true professionalism that Andrew has  
5 shown me in the past four months but for sure will continue  
6 right next door to us. So, Andrew, a great heartfelt gratitude  
7 toward you. You always have a home in Tobacco, and we will  
8 surely be calling you on many occasions. So, thank you, Andrew.

9       (APPLAUSE.)

10       MR. SORRELL: I will only say thank you and that was a very  
11 humbling experience. Thank you very much. It's been a pleasure  
12 working at the Commission for the last five years. I've  
13 absolutely loved it.

14       CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you. You all get one more chance to  
15 get up and say something.

16       MS. NEWMAN: I'm Julie Newman. I'm the General Manager of  
17 the new PBS Appalachia Station. And I'm just here to say thank  
18 you to the Commission for supporting our project and thank you  
19 to the staff for your hard work in evaluating it.

20       A very quick update for you. We are set to launch June  
21 10<sup>th</sup>. If you go to our website at [pbsavirginia.org](http://pbsavirginia.org) you can find  
22 a countdown there. And we've got agreements with all the major  
23 cable companies serving Southwest Virginia to carry us. And we  
24 also have a signal -- a free linear signal over the air -- I  
25 mean, on the web and on our app.

1           And I'll give you one last piece of good news before I sit  
2 down. Our producers, who are from Southwest Virginia, who we  
3 hired thanks to you for helping our funding to retain and keep  
4 it in Southwest Virginia. It has been nominated for an Emmy  
5 award and tonight we will find out of the 11 that we submitted  
6 how many were nominated. So, very, very talented people.

7           (APPLAUSE.)

8           CHAIRMAN RUFF: Thank you. I'm glad you gave us something  
9 positive to end with. If there's no further business, then you  
10 all have a safe trip home.

11           (MEETING ADJOURNED.)

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CERTIFICATE

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
COUNTY OF WASHINGTON

I, Marsha Self, Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia, at large, do hereby certify that the foregoing transcript of the Day 2 of the VIRGINIA TOBACCO REGION REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE held on May 17-18, 2023, was taken before me at the time and place in the foregoing caption specified, and that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript of the same to the best of my ability.

I further certify that I am not a relative, counsel, or attorney for either party or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Given under my hand this the 25th day of July 2023.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Marsha Self, CERT

My Commission Expires: February 28, 2027.  
State Notary Registered Number: 174126