

Strategic Planning Committee
All Virtual Meeting
September 5, 2024
9:30am

Commissioners Present

Mr. Edward Blevins, Chair	Delegate Daniel Marshall
The Honorable Frank Ruff, Vice Chair	Mr. William Pace
Delegate Terry Kilgore	Mr. Walter Shelton
Secretary Matt Lohr	

Commissioners Absent

Ms. Gretchen Clark	Mr. Dale Moore
Secretary Caren Merrick	Senator Todd Pillion

Staff

Executive Director James Campos	Ms. Stephanie Kim
Mr. Stephen Versen	Mr. Jerry Silva
Ms. Adrian Chapman	Ms. Roz Stein
Ms. Hannah Franke-Fuller	Ms. Emily Van Pelt
Ms. Vicki Humphreys	Ms. Sara Williams

Counsel for the Commission

Ms. Elizabeth Myers

Blevins called the meeting to order at 9:34a.m.

Campos conducted roll call.

Pace moved to approve the minutes from the Strategic Planning Committee meeting of October 11, 2024; Marshall seconded; all voted to approve in a roll call vote.

Blevins asked for public comment; there was none.

Campos offered opening remarks about strategic planning since joining TRRC, affirming that it is imperative to move forward with this process at this juncture.

Versen read the all-virtual meeting preamble into the record.

Versen read the section of the Code of Virginia, added in 2015, that calls for the TRRC to institute a strategic planning process:

§ 3.2-3103. Powers and duties of the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission, Item C.
The Commission shall at least biennially develop a strategic plan containing specific priorities, measurable goals, and quantifiable outcomes. In developing the Strategic Plan,

the Commission shall solicit input from local and regional economic developers, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, the Virginia Tourism Authority, the Virginia Resources Authority, and the Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia. The Strategic Plan shall state how each Fund award is consistent with the Commission's achievement of measurable goals and outcomes and its advancement of the specific priorities of the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan shall also state how awards from the Fund are projected to affect key economic indicators of employment, income, educational attainment, amount of Virginia-grown agricultural and forestal products used by the project, and return on investment.

Kilgore comments that this legislation was put in place to keep the Commission intact and to serve its mission.

Ruff notes that there have been many changes over the years that have made it difficult to enact a plan that spans more than two years. Ruff noted that it is a lot of money to spend on something the Commission has been doing for free, but also noted that the Commission has had limited impact without a clear direction, adding that he is in support of bringing in an outside party to help with the process of improving our impact as well as the perception of TRRC from the communities we serve.

Blevins commented that he agrees with Ruff and shares his concerns about the cost. He wants to be sure we get value from this process, and he believes we can. He thinks we need to bring in an outside group to really assess what the Commission has accomplished and what it hasn't accomplished with the monies that have been spent over the years.

Versen provided background, stating that the last strategic plan, from October 2023, included new and renewed initiatives, such as energy and agribusiness, and the discussion of creating a foundation. The Executive Committee appropriated \$100K to this committee for developing a more in-depth planning process that addresses a longer period of time than the two years covered by previous plans. The strategic planning document is instrumental to the work of the Commission—it drives all of the internal decisions, asking the question, “What should we be funding?” The new process will add: “How should we be funding?” by focusing on the following five question areas:

1. How do we go about spending down the corpus over time, and how quickly should that be done?
2. Workforce development
3. Industrial site development
4. Update the Commission's funding priorities
5. How should we structure our resources, including staff, to have the most impact?

Versen has been working with Virginia Tech's Center of Economic and Community Engagement, which has submitted a proposal that addresses these five priorities.

Blevins calls for questions.

Campos add texture by reiterating that it is imperative to keep the Commission alive for many generations to come.

Blevins states that he has reviewed the proposal and notes the impact of previous funding priorities. He is nearing the end of his second term serving as a citizen commissioner and the priorities have really changed. For example, early in his first term as a citizen commissioner, the focus was almost completely on broadband. He is very optimistic about defining the Commission's purpose through this process.

Versen notes that this Commission has the ability to carry out a plan because it is a more nimble body than other state agencies. He adds that the team from Virginia Tech will be at the Martinsville meeting of this committee to address questions.

Marshall adds that he has been a commissioner since 2006, when there was high unemployment and less money to spend. He wants to ask: "Where can we put our money to bring the most benefit to the regions?"

Lohr asks whether the Commission has worked with this office of Tech before.

Kim notes that the Commission hired a different consultant many years ago.

Versen states that he has a lot of confidence in the team at Tech, and it is helpful that they are familiar with the footprint. He also spoke with a contact at the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service and confirmed that the cost of the proposed Tech contract is reasonable.

Humphreys comments from the staff perspective, stating that the grants team uses the strategic plan in everything it does to make funding decisions to carry out the mission of the Commission.

Pace moved to approve moving forward with the Virginia Tech proposal; Ruff seconded; all commissioners present voted to approve via a roll call vote.

In other business, Versen announced that staff will host a stakeholder meeting in Abingdon on October 16, 2024; the hope is to schedule a similar meeting in Southern Virginia later this year.

Blevins adjourned the meeting at 10:17 a.m.