

Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission
Strategic Planning Committee
All-Virtual Meeting
April 17, 2025 at 1:00pm

Committee Members Present

Mr. Edward Blevins, Chair
Ms. Gretchen Clark

Delegate Terry Kilgore
Secretary Matt Lohr

Secretary Juan Pablo Segura
Mr. William Pace

Committee Members Absent

Delegate Daniel Marshall
Mr. Dale Moore

Senator Todd Pillion
Mr. Walter Shelton

Other Commissioners Present

Senator Lashrecse Aird
Ms. Amanda Cox

Delegate James W. Morefield
Deputy Secretary Jason Powell

Staff

Executive Director James Campos
Deputy Director Stephen Versen
Mr. Warren Bryson
Mr. Jordan Butler

Ms. Sarah Capps
Ms. Adrian Chapman
Ms. Stephanie Kim
Ms. Suzette Patterson

Mr. Jerry Silva
Ms. Roz Stein
Ms. Emily Van Pelt
Ms. Sara Williams

Counsel for the Commission

Ms. Elizabeth Myers

Guests

Dr. John Accordino
Dr. Sheryl Bailey

Dr. Scott Tate
Ms. Elli Travis

Commissioner Blevins called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m.

Deputy Director Versen conducted roll call and determined a quorum was present.

Commissioner Segura moved to approve the minutes from January 7, 2025; Commissioner Kilgore seconded; all voted to approve the motion.

Blevins asked for public comment; there was none.

Versen outlined the Strategic Planning Process. Dr. Tate introduced the team from Virginia Tech and VCU and gave an overview of the approach. He outlined three themes addressing opportunities for TRRC's continued strength and leadership that arose from the data: 1) Organizational Effectiveness and Collaboration; 2) Strategic Focus and Regional Impact; and 3) Financial Stewardship. These will guide the development of the strategic plan. Tate outlined the first, the Commission's organizational effectiveness and collaboration.

Ms. Travis detailed the data collection efforts and findings around the second theme, strategic focus and regional impact of the Commission's work. This included information about the priorities of stakeholders, economic barriers within the regions, and the distribution of Commission-funded projects. She also noted the limited availability of impact data from Commission-funded projects.

Dr. Bailey covered the third theme, the Commission's financial stewardship, reviewing five financial scenarios that can help the Commission determine how to move forward. Bailey recognized Ms. Kim for her good work creating the financial models used to consider the Commission's future.

Commissioner Morefield addressed the need for other revenue sources and introduced the topic of equity investments and the Commission's relationship with the Foundation for the Advancement of Southern and Southwest Virginia. Kim acknowledged that the Foundation will be independent of the Commission and may be working in partnership with, as well as seeking funds from, the Commission. Given that the Foundation will have the ability to own revenue-generating assets, could it contribute some of that revenue to the Commission? It will be crucial to consult with counsel to determine the legality of any such approach.

Tate synthesized the information by addressing the role that the Foundation might play in forwarding the Commission's future goals; the usefulness of defining a narrow and specific set of goals designed to invest the Commission's resources for strategic impact; and the role of TRRC in providing continued leadership that helps strengthen Southern and Southwest Virginia.

Tate invited commissioners and staff to discuss further. Morefield brought up the need to provide assistance regarding infrastructure, especially given the topography of Southwest Virginia.

Versen asked which partners, other than VEDP, could the Commission engage with to invest in projects. Organizations like Appalachian Regional Commission, the federal EDA, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Community Development Block Grant are strong candidates for these efforts.

Commissioner Cox asked whether the feedback indicated that any focus areas are not working or whether any areas stood out as needing a tailored approach to meet needs. Tate shared that they received feedback about the TROF program not working well. Dr. Accordino confirmed that some program areas would benefit from increased engagement with stakeholders, especially where the Commission offers support that is similar to that offered by other organizations. For example, with workforce development, there are places where increased engagement could result in streamlining assistance by identifying program gaps that the Commission could fill. Tate noted feedback that the Commission might be able to track its impact better by focusing investments in a few key strategic areas and goals for economic development.

Blevins inquired how the strategic plan will incorporate data and reporting into the Commission's work moving forward. Travis recommended that the Commission and staff set policies and stipulations about reporting to be included in RFPs and final agreements. She also recommends working with grantees on building "evaluation capacity" to help them understand the requirements and benefits of reporting project data. Travis does not expect this will be a very big lift, but rather a culture shift for the agency and its grantees.

In closing, Versen asked the Committee whether the strategic planning process, by focusing on the three themes outlined above, is headed in the right direction. Blevins believes that it is.

The Virginia Tech team will provide a technical document to this Committee and will present draft recommendations at the May 8 meeting. The outcome of that meeting will determine whether they will present a draft to the full Commission at the Spring meeting of the full Commission in Bristol.

Blevins closed by thanking everyone who has been working on the strategic plan and adjourned the meeting at 2:37 p.m.