

Minutes
Rural Virginia Action Committee Meeting
Board of Directors of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership
August 5, 2020
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.
[Zoom Meeting]

Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 12:01 p.m. by Chair Rick Harrell, who noted that a quorum was present.

Members present: Carrie Chenery, Deborah Flippo, Chair Rick Harrell, Secretary Aubrey Layne, Ned Masee, *ex officio*, and Dan Pleasant

Members absent: Secretary Brian Ball

Other Board Members: Dan Clemente, and Marianne Radcliff

VEDP staff present: Lindsay Barker, Vince Barnett, Christine Bell, Sean Brazier, Jamie Canup, David Devan, Jason El Koubi, Emily Fay, Stephanie Florie, Jennifer Garrett, Sandi McNinch, Lori Melancon, Stephen Moret, Christy Morton, Cole Pearce, Carrie Vuori, and Adam Watkins

Guests present: Traci Blido, David Denny, Jill Loope, Liz Povar, and Deputy Secretary Cassidy Rasnick

Opening Remarks

Chair Harrell made the below statement and welcomed everyone to the second electronic (Zoom) meeting of VEDP's Rural Virginia Action Committee.

As you well know, the Governor declared a state of emergency in March due to the potential spread of COVID-19. The nature of the emergency makes it unsafe for this Committee to assemble in a single location. Because an in-person meeting is unsafe and we wish to discharge our lawful purposes, duties and responsibilities, we are permitted by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, as amended by the State Budget, to meet by electronic means without a quorum of our members being physically assembled at one location. A Zoom platform was used.

Public Comment Period

Chair Harrell solicited public comments. There were none.

Approval of Minutes for June 17, 2020 Meeting

Chair Harrell asked for approval of the minutes from the June 17, 2020, meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Carrie Chenery and seconded by Ms. Deborah Flippo and the minutes were approved as presented by roll call vote:

Secretary Ball	Absent for vote
Ms. Chenery	Aye
Ms. Flippo	Aye
Mr. Harrell	Aye
Secretary Layne	Aye
Mr. Pleasant	Aye

Vibrant Virginia – John Provo

Chair Harrell welcomed and introduced our speaker, Dr. John Provo Director of Virginia Tech's Office of Economic Development.

Dr. Provo provides leadership for the university in the design and implementation of its economic engagement mission. He has more than 15 years of experience in higher education and government.

Dr. Provo spoke about a statewide initiative called Vibrant Virginia. Vibrant Virginia is committed to fostering collaboration between universities and communities, and pursuing goals around building connections across rural and urban Virginia. Virginia Tech is managing the effort but has a great team of partners including the University of Virginia, Virginia State University, University of Virginia's College at Wise, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension service. Working together to identify best practices, build new high impact teams, and make higher education a better partner on key rural issues around innovation, talent, health leadership and community development.

Dr. Provo hopes this committee can help him with some ideas on two questions. First, how does this effort align with what you and your partners may be doing to strengthen the economy across rural Virginia, and second, how can we shape this effort in terms of programmatic connections and how we see the direction of public policy moving to strengthen economies across rural Virginia?

Dr. Provo shared that the story began in 2018. Virginia Tech and the team of partners first got together because of some very specific budget language.

In 2018-2019, they were hoping to find a way to assess what they had and hadn't done and to focus on being a better partner. There is a report that summarizes a lot of research that has been done over the last 10 years and have been put into the following five categories.

- Innovation and job creation (Virginia Tech)
- Education and talent (Virginia State)
- Civic innovation and leadership development (UVA-Wise)
- Agriculture and place-based entrepreneurship (Virginia Cooperative Extension)
- Healthcare, early childhood, and community well-being (UVA)

The range of partners included people inside and outside of higher education, community and private sector, to talk about these five topics and how they can pursue them together.

Dr. Provo shared that a survey was launched which was really an inventory of higher education activities across rural Virginia. They found about 400 specific initiatives, from large centrally

managed activities to very grass roots one-on-one work that their faculty and students are doing with communities.

Dr. Provo added that there was a Virtual Forum Series, where approximately 300 people participated, including Dr. Moret. The Forum Series is available online at <https://econdev.vt.edu/VibrantVirginia/VVConferenceSeries.html>. Future sessions will be discussing regional funding partnerships, national models and best practices.

Ms. Flippo shared that she requested for Dr. Provo to give this presentation to the committee. With so many groups focused on rural Virginia, alignment is an issue. Ms. Flippo would like to ensure that there is an opportunity for everyone to collaborate on this important topic.

Ms. Chenery mentioned the Virginia Rural Center's Leadership initiative and recommended linking them with Vibrant Virginia.

Dr. Provo liked that idea and mentioned that the Rural Center has a history in Blacksburg. He said this is an area where all higher education institutions have some leadership development experience. Dr. Provo said he thought it was something to have a conversation about.

Opportunities for Engaging Rural Leadership – Christy Morton

Ms. Morton talked about how over the last year, Chairman Harrell has been focusing more on smaller, rural communities in Virginia that might not have a professional economic development staff, and how VEDP can better engage with them.

Ms. Morton shared a few things that we have been doing. Current information that we share with Chief Administrative Officers (CAO's) and Local Economic Developers, our magazine, the *Virginia Economic Review (VER)*, the Quarterly Partner Report, the Local and Regional Competitiveness Initiative (LRCI), and impactED sessions in partnership with the Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA). The impact ED sessions have been held virtually due to COVID-19 and have been very well attended, averaging around 150-200 participants. These sessions have been a great way to cover timely topics and to reach a large amount of partners.

Ms. Morton mentioned some new initiatives that we are working on which include: An Economic Development (ED) 101 Video, ED 101 presentation geared towards CAO's, and a virtual VEDP Orientation. She also shared that we have a Partner Relations Team (PRT) with over 600 contacts that our senior leadership team reaches out to on a regular basis. We are also providing talking points and resources for them to use when reaching out.

Ms. Chenery commended VEDP staff for taking on all of this and being so proactive with these outreach initiatives. She also suggested that board members share the issues of *VER* within their own networks. This is something simple to do and it keeps VEDP top of mind.

Chair Harrell mentioned talking about the *VER* months ago and how outstanding it is. He said he is more amazed with each issue. He asked if the *VER* was being sent to the Boards of Supervisors. Ms. Morton responded that it is going out to all elected officials, County Administrators, City Managers, and economic development directors. Ms. Morton added that we are sending individual copies to every Board of Supervisor/City Council member. Mr. Moret added that every time an issue goes out, we receive emails from across Virginia and across the country with compliments and appreciation.

Mr. Clemente stated that it's good to look back and see where this all started. With many of the rural regions not having broadband, it puts them at a disadvantage for recruitment. Governor Northam is committed to rural broadband. Mr. Clemente said that VEDP's role is to help convene leaders to address these challenges. He emphasized that was the impetus for creating the rural committee.

Update on Local/Regional Competitiveness Initiative (LRCI) – Adam Watkins and Emily Fay

Mr. Watkins shared that he and his colleague, Emily Fay have been working on this initiative for VEDP. The goal of this initiative is to support economic developers across the state to help expand their capacity for economic development initiatives, to advocate for resources, and to articulate the important work they do benefiting their communities.

Mr. Watkins said VEDP will do this by releasing a report that will serve as a toolkit. This toolkit will include data points about the community and peer communities to every locality that took the self-assessment in January. It will also explain best practices of economic development within the context of Virginia. Finally, the VEDP team will conduct virtual roadshows where they can engage with regional and local partners on the content and insights from their effort. The final report will be released within the next month or so.

Mr. Watkins explained that VEDP created peer groups to provide a benchmarking resource for economic development organization's (EDO's) and a framework for analyzing data. The LRCI is a resource for EDO's to benchmark their work. Peer and regional comparisons are provided in the score report to illustrate the programs and performance of other similar economic development organizations. VEDP will analyze the data for gaps and areas for improvement, so they can better advocate for initiatives and resources to close those gaps. Mr. Watkins mentioned that the LRCI is not a public ranking, and that all individual data will remain confidential.

Chair Harrell said he wanted the Economic Competitiveness team to present their findings at the next meeting of the committee.

Mr. Clemente suggested to the committee that they not wait until the next Board meeting in October, but to have a special meeting of this committee to hear what the Economic Competitiveness team has put together. Chair Harrell asked Dr. Moret if that would be okay and Dr. Moret confirmed it would be.¹

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Harrell adjourned the meeting at 1:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Bell
Acting Recording Secretary

¹ After discussion of the timeline of the LRCI with the Economic Competitiveness division, the final report would not be made available until late October and a presentation would align with the already scheduled October committee meeting.