

**Minutes**  
**Rural Virginia Action Committee Meeting**  
**Board of Directors of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership**  
**March 16, 2022**  
**3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

**Welcome and Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 3:18 p.m. by Chair Rick Harrell, who noted that a quorum was present.

Members present: Chair Rick Harrell, Carrie Chenery, Stephen Edwards, Deborah Flippo, Secretary Caren Merrick, Dan Pleasant, *ex officio*

Members absent: Nancy Agee

Other Board Members: Secretary Stephen Cummings, Ned Masee, Marianne Radcliff, and Xavier Richardson

VEDP staff present: Lindsay Barker, Star Cranston, Nicole David, David Devan, Jason El Koubi, Stephanie Florie, Jennifer Garrett, Stephen Hartka, Sandi McNinch, Lori Melancon, and Christy Morton

Guests present: None

**Public Comment Period**

Chair Harrell asked if there were any members of the public who wished to make a comment. There were none.

**Approval of Minutes for June 16, 2021 and October 20, 2021 Meetings**

Chair Harrell asked for approval of the minutes from the June 16, 2021, and October 20, 2021 Committee meetings. A motion was made by Ms. Flippo and seconded by Secretary Merrick, and both meetings' minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

**Rural Trends Over the Last 20 Years and Economic Recovery Forecast**

Chair Harrell introduced Mr. El Koubi, who shared goals for the presentation, which included providing a status of the recovery in rural Virginia and ideas on how it can be accelerated.

Mr. El Koubi introduced Stephen Hartka to speak about historical trends in rural Virginia, which set the stage for the remainder of the presentation. Mr. Hartka began his presentation by

providing data on employment levels over the past 20 years and how rural Virginia has struggled to keep up with the growth in urban areas since the great recession. He explained that Virginia's rural employment levels had fared better than rural regions across the U.S.

Mr. Hartka highlighted that population growth has stalled in rural Virginia but is continuing to rise in the urban areas. He shared a bright spot: rural population growth in rural Virginia has outpaced rural population growth nationally.

Mr. Hartka spoke about the composition of rural Virginia's workforce, which has become increasingly diversified over the last two decades. He highlighted manufacturing, healthcare, and social assistance as a few of the growing sectors. He explained that while diversification is good, the shifts in employment from traded sector to a non-traded sector are something to watch. He said this is why VEDP puts so much emphasis on growing the manufacturing base of rural Virginia.

Mr. Hartka shared data on the long-term trends in Virginia's economic development project activity, which has largely been concentrated in the urban localities.

Mr. Hartka shared that rural Virginia represents 17% of Virginia's total employment, 15% of Virginia's Gross Domestic Product, and 24% of Virginia's population. There was additional discussion by Committee members on what is considered a "rural" area. Mr. Hartka noted that VEDP uses the census bureau's definition of "rural."

Mr. El Koubi delivered the second part of the presentation, which focused on the status of the Covid-19 recovery in Virginia, noting that there is quite a bit of variation in how the different regions are recovering. He said that VEDP is keeping an eye on the forecasts, but it looks like Virginia will fully recover by Q4 CY2022. Mr. El Koubi explained that Virginia needs to have success in manufacturing to have success in securing projects for rural Virginia. He said that for many of Virginia's regions, manufacturing has been responsible for the majority of jobs over the past several years.

Mr. El Koubi and the Committee expressed concern regarding labor force participation, which Mr. El Koubi explained is down three percentage points from pre-pandemic levels.

Chair Harrell thanked Mr. Hartka and Mr. El Koubi for their informative presentations.

**Closed Meeting:**

Upon the following motion made by Ms. Flippo, seconded by Ms. Chenery, and unanimously approved by the Committee, the Committee moved into a closed meeting.

I MOVE THAT THE RURAL VIRGINIA ACTION COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP AUTHORITY CONVENE A CLOSED MEETING PURSUANT TO VIRGINIA CODE §2.2-3711(A)(50) TO ENGAGE IN A DISCUSSION OR CONSIDERATION OF THOSE PORTIONS OF VEDP's

STRATEGIC PLAN, MARKETING PLAN OR OPERATIONAL PLAN, THAT MAY RELATE TO TARGET COMPANIES, SPECIFIC ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES AND STAFF FOR MARKETING ACTIVITIES, AND SPECIFIC MARKETING ACTIVITIES THAT WOULD REVEAL TO THE COMMONWEALTH'S COMPETITORS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS THE STRATEGIES INTENDED TO BE DEPLOYED BY THE COMMONWEALTH, THEREBY ADVERSELY AFFECTING THE FINANCIAL INTEREST OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

Mr. El Koubi asked that VEDP staff be allowed to stay for the closed meeting for all matters and Chair Harrell agreed.

**Back in Open Meeting, Certification of Closed Meeting – Followed by a Roll Call vote:**

WHEREAS, THE RURAL VIRGINIA ACTION COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP AUTHORITY HAS CONVENED A CLOSED MEETING ON THIS DATE PURSUANT TO AN AFFIRMATIVE RECORDED VOTE AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE VIRGINIA FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT; AND WHEREAS, THE ACT REQUIRES A CERTIFICATION BY THIS COMMITTEE THAT SUCH CLOSED MEETING WAS CONDUCTED IN CONFORMITY WITH THE ACT; NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, THAT THE COMMITTEE CERTIFIES THAT, TO THE BEST OF EACH MEMBER'S KNOWLEDGE, (I) ONLY PUBLIC BUSINESS MATTERS LAWFULLY EXEMPTED FROM OPEN MEETING REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE ACT WERE DISCUSSED IN THE CLOSED MEETING TO WHICH THIS CERTIFICATION RESOLUTION APPLIES, AND (II) ONLY SUCH PUBLIC BUSINESS MATTERS AS WERE IDENTIFIED IN THE MOTION BY WHICH THE CLOSED MEETING WAS CONVENED WERE HEARD, DISCUSSED, OR CONSIDERED IN THE CLOSED MEETING BY THE COMMITTEE.

Upon the vote:	Mr. Harrell	Aye
	Ms. Chenery	Aye
	Mr. Edwards	Aye
	Ms. Flippo	Aye
	Secretary Merrick	Aye

**Open Discussion and Anticipated Topics for Next Meeting**

The Committee agreed to continue the closed meeting discussion on opportunities for Rural Virginia at its next meeting, which will take place on June 22.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Harrell adjourned the meeting at 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole David". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nicole David  
Acting Recording Secretary