



New River Trail State Park, Wythe County

RURAL VIRGINIA ACTION COMMITTEE

September 16, 2026

VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP AUTHORITY RURAL VIRGINIA ACTION COMMITTEE MEETING

September 16, 2026 | 12:30 PM TO 1:15 PM

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, CLAIBORNE ROBERTSON ROOM
200 N. ARTHUR ASHE BLVD, RICHMOND, VA 23220

Committee Members

Vacant, Chair
Rick Harrell
Connie Loughhead

Ex-Officio Member

John Hewa

12:30 – 12:32 PM	Welcome/Call to Order – Connie Loughhead, Acting Chair
12:32 – 12:33 PM	Public Comment Period – Connie Loughhead
12:33 – 12:35 PM	Approval of Minutes for March 18 and June 3, 2026 Meeting ■ Action Item - Vote to Accept
12:35 – 1:05 PM	Partner Presentation: Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission ■ David Manley, Executive Director of the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission
1:05 – 1:15 PM	Open Discussion and Anticipated Topics
1:15 PM	Adjournment

Minutes
Rural Virginia Action Committee Meeting
Board of Directors of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership
March 18, 2026
1:30 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.

One James Center, 9th Floor – Board Room
Richmond, Virginia

Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:46 p.m. by Chair Nick Rush. A quorum was present.

Committee Members In-Person: Mimi Coles, Rick Harrell, Bill Hayter, Connie Loughhead, Nick Rush

Committee Members Absent: None

Other Board members present: John Hewa, Todd House, Pace Lochte, Emily O'Quinn, Will Sessoms, Secretary Mark Sickles, Steven Stone

Public Comment Period

Chair Rush solicited public comments. There were none.

Approval of Minutes for December 10, 2025

Chair Rush requested approval of the December 10, 2025, meeting minutes. Upon motion by Ms. Loughhead, seconded by Ms. Coles, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Guest Speaker, Sean McMurray, Wellspring Foundation

Sean McMurray, Executive Director of the Wellspring Foundation, provided an overview of the organization, an independent, nonprofit private foundation established in 2021 to promote health and economic well-being in Washington, Grayson, Russell, and Smyth counties. He outlined the Foundation's funding priorities, informed by a community health needs assessment and strategic plan, which focus on health, children and families, workforce development, education, economic development, and workforce housing.

Mr. McMurray described Wellspring's grantmaking process and highlighted key community investments, including workforce development initiatives, regional child development hubs, and quality-of-life projects. He emphasized the Foundation's workforce housing strategy through Appalachian Highlands Housing Partners, including a community land trust model that preserves long-term affordability for workforce households earning 80-120 percent of area median income. He further highlighted RidgeBuilt, a precision-built modular home manufacturing facility designed to reduce housing costs, accelerate production, and create jobs in Russell County, as well as HOMEWorks, a construction-trades education and training program that partners with local schools to prepare workers for careers in advanced construction and housing production.

A copy of Mr. McMurray's presentation is available in the meeting materials.

Adjournment

The next meeting of the Rural Virginia Action Committee will be held on June 3, 2026. There being no further business, Chair Rush adjourned the meeting at 2:34 p.m.

DRAFT

Minutes
Rural Virginia Action Committee Meeting
Board of Directors of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership
June 3, 2026
12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

One James Center, 9th Floor – Board Room
Richmond, Virginia

Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 12:31 p.m. by Vice Chair Connie Loughhead.

Committee Members In-Person: Rick Harrell, Connie Loughhead

Committee Members Absent: Mimi Coles, Bill Hayter, Nick Rush

Other Board members present: John Hewa, Pace Lochte, Emily O'Quinn, Steven Stone

Public Comment Period

Vice Chair Loughhead solicited public comments. There were none.

Public Comment Period

Approval of Minutes was not considered due to lack of quorum.

Regional Workforce Dynamics in Southwest Virginia

Jessi Fritz, Senior Business Manager for Regional Talent Solutions & Business Outreach (RTSBO), introduced herself by highlighting her strong ties to Southwest Virginia, noting that she has lived or worked throughout the region and brings 13 years of workforce experience within her territory. She explained that RTSBO and the Virginia Jobs Investment Program (VJIP) provide strategic value across the Commonwealth through coordinated, state-level business retention efforts, workforce expertise, and strong partnerships that enhance overall impact and credibility.

She reported continued economic momentum in Southwest Virginia, including facility expansions, capital investments in new equipment, planned hiring, and sustained demand in key sectors such as mining supply chains, data centers, and transformers, along with increased export activity. Despite this progress, she noted ongoing challenges, including persistent talent shortages in skilled trades and technical roles, an aging workforce, workforce reliability concerns, and cost pressures driven by wage variability and competition from neighboring states. Housing, transportation, and childcare issues were also identified as barriers to workforce stability.

Ms. Fritz further explained that broader economic uncertainty is contributing to more cautious business decisions, including hiring pauses, delayed investments, and tighter cash-flow management. In response, businesses are strengthening workforce partnerships, prioritizing

employee retention and internal advancement, and investing in process improvements and digital tools. She concluded by noting that RTSBO supports these efforts through incentives and lifecycle support, access to growth and market resources, and workforce pipeline development in collaboration with Virginia Works, GO Virginia, higher education institutions, and other talent programs.

Recruiting Challenges for New Businesses Using Virginia Talent Accelerator

Steve Youll, Vice President, Virginia Talent Accelerator Program, highlighted the Program's strong impact in Southwest Virginia, emphasizing the region's distinctive, community driven approach to recruitment and workforce development, which differs from other parts of the Commonwealth. He noted that this approach enables deeper local engagement and allows companies to attract talent by offering meaningful connections and opportunities beyond compensation alone. Mr. Youll also highlighted the Program's continued national recognition, having been ranked #1 for customized workforce training in the prior year, and emphasized that its success is driven by highly customized recruitment and training services, as well as strong business satisfaction and outcomes.

Mr. Youll then discussed VFP, Inc., a Roanoke County-based manufacturer of customized building solutions for critical infrastructure, as a key example of the program's impact. Through a partnership with VEDP via the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program, VFP received tailored recruitment and talent attraction support, along with technical, safety, and process training, and consultative onboarding services to develop a skilled workforce. The Talent Accelerator Program also provided organizational development support, including executive leadership training for eight company leaders.

Rural Regional Insights from Economic Development Policy Input Sessions

David Devan, Senior Vice President of Policy & Strategic Partnerships, provided an overview of feedback gathered through Secretary Chenery's statewide input sessions for the Governor's economic development policy. He noted that in the Shenandoah Valley (Region 8), participants emphasized the interdependence of housing, childcare, and transportation as foundational to workforce attraction, alongside a desire to balance economic growth with preservation of the region's rural character. Stakeholders also raised concerns that current state funding models and incentive programs do not adequately fit the Valley's needs, and highlighted challenges related to business succession and an aging workforce. A consistent theme was the need for better coordination and consolidation of existing state resources, including streamlined access and permitting processes.

In Southwest Virginia (Region 1), feedback focused on competitive pressures from neighboring states, particularly along the Tennessee border, and the need for more flexible, region-specific program requirements for distressed localities. Participants also identified the opioid crisis as a significant barrier to workforce participation and cited limited local capacity to access and manage state resources as a key constraint. Similar to other regions, stakeholders called for greater coordination of programs, simplified access to resources, and enhanced support for smaller localities, including grant-writing assistance.

Adjournment

The next meeting of the Rural Virginia Action Committee will be held on September 16, 2026. There being no further business, Vice Chair Loughhead adjourned the meeting at 1:26 p.m.



DAVID MANLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VIRGINIA TOBACCO REGION REVITALIZATION COMMISSION