

Minutes
Rural Virginia Action Committee Meeting
Board of Directors of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership
December 10, 2025
12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

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

Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m. by Chair Nick Rush.

In-person Committee members: Rick Harrell, Connie Loughhead, Nick Rush, Secretary Juan Pablo Segura

Absent Committee members: Mimi Coles, Stephen Edwards, Bill Hayter

Other Board members present: John Hewa, Todd House, Anne Oman, Steven Stone, Secretary Stephen Cummings

Public Comment Period

Chair Rush solicited public comments. There were none.

Approval of Minutes for June 11, 2025 and September 17, 2025

Chair Rush requested approval of the June 11, 2025 and the September 17, 2025, meeting minutes. Upon motion by Ms. Loughhead, seconded by Mr. Harrell, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Rural Healthcare and Impacts on Economic Development

Lindsay Akers, VP of External Affairs, introduced Julie Dime, Vice President of Government Affairs at the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA). Ms. Dime outlined VHHA's vision to make Virginia the healthiest state in the nation and its mission to collaborate with members and stakeholders to support the sustainability of hospitals and health systems while improving health outcomes across the Commonwealth. She noted VHHA's strategic priorities include sustaining hospitals, addressing behavioral health needs and workforce shortages, improving population health, holding health plans accountable, and fostering a positive business climate aligned with economic development.

Ms. Dime emphasized the role of hospitals as economic anchors, noting they contribute approximately \$62 billion annually to Virginia's economy and employ more than 125,000 individuals statewide, often serving as the largest employer in rural communities. She stated that hospitals provide critical infrastructure comparable to transportation and broadband and deliver significant community benefits. In 2023, hospitals provided \$3.7 billion in charitable contributions, supported 3.4 million emergency visits, 765,197 inpatient admissions, and 86,248 births. Private hospitals accounted for more than 92% of behavioral health admissions

statewide. Ms. Dime concluded by noting that investments in health care support community stability, workforce productivity, and economic growth.

Ms. Akers then introduced former Delegate Dave Nutter, Director of Rural Health Initiatives. Mr. Nutter provided an overview of health and economic challenges in rural Virginia, citing higher rates of chronic illness, shorter life expectancy, aging populations, and persistent primary care workforce shortages. He noted that more than 30 counties are designated Health Professional Shortage Areas and that limited access to services remains a concern.

He emphasized the relationship between community health, workforce stability, and economic competitiveness, highlighting the role of Medicaid expansion in reducing the uninsured rate and supporting hospitals and local economies. He noted that Virginia hospitals have fully funded the state share of Medicaid expansion since 2019, covering more than 650,000 low-income adults.

Mr. Nutter discussed the financial vulnerability of rural hospitals due to payer mix and thin operating margins and outlined potential impacts from proposed federal policy changes. He also addressed workforce shortages and strategies to strengthen health care workforce pipelines. He concluded with an overview of Virginia's Rural Health Transformation Program and ongoing collaboration to improve access to care and support rural communities.

Local and Regional Competitiveness Initiative

Adam Watkins, VP of Economic Competitiveness, provided an update on VEDP's Local and Regional Competitiveness Initiative (LRCI). He noted that LRCI was launched in 2021 to provide local and regional economic development organizations (EDOs) with peer benchmarking data to inform strategy and operations. Based on partner feedback, VEDP redesigned the survey and reports in early 2025 to improve usability, expand priority topic areas, and allow customized peer comparisons.

He stated VEDP launched the updated survey in July, with participation from 98 local and 16 regional EDOs. Participants received customized reports in November comparing their responses to selected peer organizations. Preliminary findings show that rural EDOs face greater staffing constraints and are more likely to identify housing and infrastructure as significant barriers to economic development.

Mr. Watkins noted that VEDP produced 114 customized reports and consulted with more than 60 state, local, and regional partners during the redesign process. He stated that VEDP will continue to support EDOs through follow-up engagements, case studies, shared resources, and potential capacity-building initiatives, including a proposed pilot grant program to address staffing challenges.

Adjournment

The next meeting of the Rural Virginia Action Committee will be held on March 18, 2026. There being no further business, Chair Rush adjourned the meeting at 12:56 pm.