

Minutes
Rural Virginia Action Committee Meeting
Board of Directors of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership Authority
December 7, 2016
901 East Cary Street
One James Center, 8th Floor – Washington Room
Richmond, Virginia

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Chairman Ned Masee, who noted that this was the first meeting of the Committee and that a quorum was present.

Members present: Mary Rae Carter, Sissy Crowther, Mark Heath, Chris Lumsden, Ned Masee, Gary Walker, Dan Clemente

Members absent: Mike Ligon, Dan Pleasant, David Hudgins

VEDP Staff Present: Kim Ellett, Carolyn Elliott, Dan Gundersen, Jay Langston, Sandi McNinch, Alex Thorup

Guests Present: Dan Clemente, Christy Morton, Sam Schreiber

Jay Langston, who has been appointed to work with the Committee, gave a presentation to explain the lay-of-the-land for rural areas, and to summarize our initiatives on behalf of rural areas.

Mr. Clemente stated that a standing committee forces everyone to be involved. He noted that rural Virginia has gotten lost and the goal of this Committee should be similar to International Trade: securing separate funding and determining how the money may best be deployed.

Mary Rae Carter spoke about what she does, working with economic developers in rural areas.

Sissy Crowther noted that there are areas in her region that do not have access to broadband. She explained the problem this presents when students need to do online work for school assignments. Christy Morton replied that this was being looked at, especially the last mile, which will be likely wireless. The need for a push for broadband in all areas of Virginia was recognized.

Christy Morton suggested having VEDP employees embedded in the regions, noting that we are moving toward regional economic development, since each region is different. Mr. Gundersen mentioned that prior to the reorganization, each region had a triumvirate of VEDP contacts, including a VJIP person, an International Trade person and a Business Expansion person. Following the reorganization, VJIP and International Trade still have people in the field, but the day-to-day contact with regions is being undertaken by the Competitive Initiatives division. Mr. Langston mentioned that the Competitive Initiatives division is undertaking a study to evaluate

the strengths and weaknesses of each region. It will take 9 to 16 months to complete the study, depending on the proposals selected.

Mr. Masee noted that there are two important areas: education and optics. There are a lot of other things going on, such as Go Virginia. He questioned if this Committee could be the means to coordinate and harmonize these other things.

Gary Walker said that timber was a big deal in his area. He said that small-to-medium sized businesses need help. It is hard for these businesses to make money with all the government stipulations. He gave the example of a phosphorus study involving the DEQ and the hurdles presented to a company in his area.

Mary Rae Carter said that VEDP could develop relationships with various organizations. Her purpose is to serve as the liaison between the companies and the various organizations. She said that many companies do not know she is available to assist. She stated that VEDP has an excellent opportunity being under Commerce and Trade. Maybe VEDP could develop a plan to become a facilitator for a variety of programs and initiatives. She mentioned that it would be helpful to have people in the field who could be a liaison. These embedded liaisons would be preferable to handling relationships from Richmond.

Mark Heath noted that marketing, finding projects and leads are VEDP's job. He is not sure that rural Virginia is VEDP's responsibility. In his view, keeping the project pipeline full is preferable to engaging with local economic developers. Other members of the Committee felt that focus might need to be directed to hiring more qualified economic development employees in the rural areas. Sissy Crowther noted that until economic leaders are localized, there is little chance of anything happening. For instance, in her area, they need help with broadband. Internet providers are ready to assist but VEDP needs to pull together leadership to give direction in this important area.

Mr. Gundersen said we need to determine VEDP's role. Many conflicting and contradictory ideas have been floated at this meeting.

Ned Masee further noted that VEDP needs to be good at certain things in order to be of value. Need to figure out what VEDP and the Committee are doing. There are two items in play: 1) a new CEO coming onboard; and, 2) the General Assembly wanting to reorganize VEDP. Not sure what this will mean to rural economic development, especially in the areas of finance and broadband.

There was further conversation around the table that Go Virginia is a regionally run economic development organization. Local governments need to be educated on who to contact for assistance with area needs. There is a perception among some people that past CEO's of VEDP have focused on bringing jobs to NOVA and Virginia Beach. The Committee agreed that the focus needs to be on all of Virginia. Someone should be looking at the overall State and establish priorities for the various regions.

It was concluded that the Committee had no answers today, but was the beginning dialogue. The legislature will be a determining factor as to where this Committee goes. Focus needs be on rural Virginia and any new initiatives should be reviewed with Stephen Moret.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The next meeting will be held in conjunction with the March 2017 Board meeting.

There being no further business, Chairman Masee adjourned the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'DCGundersen', written over the text 'Respectfully submitted,'.

Daniel. C Gundersen
Secretary