

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Alleghany Highlands Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy**  
**Committee**

May 18, 2006

12 Noon, Room 375A in the Scott Hall Building at Dabney S. Lancaster Community  
College

**Committee Members:**

*Present:* Annette Anderson, Doris Baker (Representing the Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Corporation), Carolyn Barnette, Claire Collins, Jack Hammond, Thomas Harris, George “Chip” Snead, Dr. Richard Teaff, Tim Tobin

*Absent:* Suzanne Adcock, Glen Anglin, Don Carter, Stephanie Clark, Robert Daniel, Butch Kemper, David Price, Phil Sparks, Mark Taylor, Christine Visscher, Alan Williams, John Williams, Bill Zimmerman

*Others Present:*

John Hull, Regional Economic Resources Planner, RVARC  
Holly Paxton, Planning Intern, RVARC  
Wayne G. Strickland, Executive Director, RVARC  
Eddie Wells, Senior Planner, RVARC

**Proceedings:**

· *Meeting called to order at 12:08 PM.*

*Welcome and Introductions:*

Wayne Strickland welcomed the committee members to the meeting and thanked each participant for coming to discuss the draft of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. He introduced Ms. Holly Paxton, a new Planning Intern with the Roanoke Valley – Alleghany Regional Commission from Covington, VA, to the participants and asked each committee member and all others present to introduce themselves.

Mr. Strickland noted that he has called Mr. Tyrone Beach at EDA’s Philadelphia office and that Mr. Beach indicated that it sounded like the procedural errors from the first Alleghany Highlands CEDS have been corrected with this CEDS planning effort. Mr. Strickland noted that he hoped to have EDA approval in September and that applications for projects could begin at that point. Mr. Strickland noted that staff would continue to work with the Philadelphia EDA office until the vacant Virginia state EDA representative position is filled.

Mr. Strickland asked John Hull to present information on recent public involvement efforts related to the CEDS process.

*Summary of Recent Public Involvement Efforts:*

- Mr. Hull reported that staff had held a public informational meeting and comment session on May 4, 2006 in the Council Chambers of Covington City Hall. He noted that approximately 30 individuals attended and 13 individuals returned a survey form. He summarized the statistical findings of that survey. Mr. Hull then reported on the series of high school class presentations on the CEDS that he is working on in the region. He noted that one such presentation has been completed in Covington High and that another would be done immediately following the meeting in Alleghany High. In these presentations, Mr. Hull explained, the definition of economic development is given, the CEDS is explained, and the Alleghany Highlands CEDS project list was presented. Each student was then asked to complete a survey that asked whether the student felt the project list was adequate and whether he or she intends to stay in the Alleghany Highlands. He reported the statistical findings from the Covington High School presentation and noted that the results from the Alleghany High presentation would be distributed via email in the next few days. He asked if there were any comments or questions.

- Committee Member Teaff noted that it is discouraging to see that 70% of the students stated that they wanted to leave the region. He stated that it is truly unfortunate considering that of the 30% that stated that they want to remain in the area, another 10% may have to leave because they cannot find the job that they want.

- Committee Member Collins noted that results such as these are not uncommon in any school in any area of the country as many young people have a desire to venture out and explore. The hope is that many will come back.

- Mr. Strickland asked Ms. Paxton to share her perspective on the issue.

- Ms. Paxton stated that all her friends enjoy coming back over break and that most of those that she knows from the area love the region. Ms. Paxton stated that she would like to come back but that it is difficult to find employment. It is much easier to find jobs for college graduates in a place like Roanoke, she stated.

- Dr. Teaff asked if there was any data available on people who return to localities after leaving. He stated that it would be troubling if perhaps young people are not coming back to the Highlands region after venturing out.

- Several committee members echoed the sentiment that it is important that the region gets more of its young back. Dr. Teaff asked if it is possible to compare these results to other regions.

Mr. Strickland noted that unfortunately many schools do not ask this sort of question any longer, instead preferring to focus on other issues in student surveys. Those schools that do track post-graduation student activity simply track whether the student is going to school or working, etc. and not whether the student plans to return to the area after completing his or her education. He agreed with Ms. Collins that hopefully the region's

young will want to return after experiencing traffic, longer commute times, etc. He explained that the issue is simply developing what it takes to get the youth to come back to the region.

He noted that the problem is not isolated to the Highlands area. He referenced recent population estimates published by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia that show negligible population growth through most of Southwestern Virginia. He explained that it is an issue that all the localities in Western Virginia need to address. Areas like the Coalfields in Southwestern Virginia and Southside Virginia that have experienced overwhelming population/economic decline seem to get a lot of political attention. All of Western Virginia is experiencing similar trends and needs the same sort of attention. Mr. Strickland argued that Western Virginia localities need to be much more proactive in seeking assistance from the Commonwealth.

- Ms. Collins agreed and noted that it is a timing issue, saying that the time is now that the region can present this information in a professional manner and convince legislators. She stated that, in order to be successful, the region needs more than 2 or 3 advocates. The region needs overwhelming support among its own residents, people calling legislators and speaking out in support of assistance for the area.

- Committee Member Hammond noted that a large part of the Highlands difficulty in getting state assistance is the lack of a dedicated funding source for the area. He noted that the Coalfields benefit from the proceeds of the Coal Severance Tax collected from mining operations there. He noted that Southside has benefited from a great deal of workforce development funds and funding from the Tobacco Commission. There is no similar dedicated source of funding for the Highlands.

- Mr. Strickland noted that part of the solution might be a Statewide Technology-Based Economic Development Plan. Traditionally localities have done their own plan but it might benefit the State if the Commonwealth thought about technological deployment more strategically. Mr. Strickland argued that areas other than Northern Virginia need technological investment.

#### *Summary of Recent Public Involvement Efforts:*

- Mr. Strickland mentioned that there are some final issues to be decided in regards to annual monitoring of the CEDS process. The first step, he noted, is adopting the CEDS document. Next, annual monitoring activities must take place. Mr. Strickland asked Eddie Wells to discuss the options for annual monitoring that he has researched.

- Mr. Wells noted that the region has a few options for annual monitoring activities. The first option is to continue the Alleghany Highlands CEDS Committee in its current form, which meets EDA requirements for board composition. The second option is to transition the CEDS monitoring activities over to the Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Corporation (AHEDC) board (which also meets EDA requirements for board composition). A third option is to create a new organization to coordinate annual

monitoring activities. Lastly, Mr. Wells noted that most regions in Virginia use their Planning District Commission boards when the geographic service area of the Planning District Commission and the area covered by the CEDS are the same.

- Ms. Collins noted that the AHEDC board will meet Wednesday, May 24<sup>th</sup> and that the localities in the region want to keep moving forward in spite of the vacancy on the Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Corporation staff. Committee Member Snead and Committee Member Harris echoed Ms. Collins sentiments.

- Mr. Strickland noted that if for instance the region wished to request funding for a tourism office, it would need someone on the ground to staff the office. The Chamber could possibly fill that role if it wished to take on that responsibility.

Mr. Strickland noted that Mr. Beach at the EDA has said that the CEDS Committee would be sufficient in filling the EDA requirements for a monitoring body. The other option is to turn the process over to the Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Corporation.

- Mr. Harris stated that regardless of what decision is made he is sure that RVARC staff will be involved. Whether or not the AHEDC takes on the responsibility is a decision that the AHEDC board would have to make. Mr. Harris also stated that he does not wish to jury rig a solution because of an unfortunate circumstance, in this case a staffing concern at the AHEDC.

- Mr. Hammond mentioned that he was involved with Brian Wishneff & Associates in forming the AHEDC. He stated that the AHEDC will need to reconstitute itself and its board structure if it is to remain functional. He argued that the organization cannot function efficiently with a 15 member board. Mr. Hammond stated that the AHEDC needs a director empowered to do what he or she needs to do and an executive committee that is small enough to execute business. Internally, the AHEDC needs to address these issues.

- Mr. Strickland asked for clarification purposes if he was stating that the executive committee needs to be smaller and to meet more often than the full AHEDC board.

- Mr. Hammond stated that the board composition simply needs to be looked at. He mentioned that he had traveled to Martinsville to look at how its regional Economic Development Corporation functioned. He noted that the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation had government representatives on its board but that it had no elected officials.

- Ms. Collins stated her opinion that the AHEDC leadership needs to be more strongly private sector and that it is extremely important to have private sector leadership on such a board.

- Mr. Snead noted that in a region very close to the Alleghany Highlands a similar transformation was made when the private sector became more involved in economic development. Mr. Snead stated that by involving the private sector what really is being done is more completely utilizing the brain power in a region towards the end of economic development.

- Mr. Harris stated that the region has a long history of the long arm of government and that government in the region has not always been willing to cut the strings and let individuals have the responsibility to make things happen. He stated that the AHEDC is the only economic development organization that he has ever been involved in that has no private funding. He reiterated that there are models out there that exist in the Commonwealth of Virginia where economic development offices have more private sector involvement.

- Mr. Hammond noted that the private sector has the most to lose in economic development because they pay the taxes. He also noted that when local elected officials are involved on economic development boards people find themselves in conflicting roles because they have a responsibility to constituents who elected them and they have responsibilities to the economic development organization.

- Mr. Harris noted that the bottom-line is that everyone wants to do what is right for the people that are served. Economic development is a funding issue for the public sector and a lifeline issue for the private sector. He stated that the local governments need to give the program funding and cut the strings on the director of the EDC and evaluate the program at regular intervals for efficacy.

- Dr. Teaff noted that given the circumstances with staffing at the AHEDC and other concerns that perhaps the Alleghany Highlands Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee should be the group to monitor the CEDS.

- Mr. Strickland noted that the Committee needs to indicate in the document which organization will perform the role of monitoring. The monitoring process could perhaps be turned over to another group, such as the EDC, at a later time.

*Discussion/Approval of CEDS Draft Document:*

- Mr. Strickland noted that the Committee also needs to decide whether it is comfortable sending the CEDS to the region's local governments for review and adoption.

- Ms. Collins stated that while the CEDS contains a list of projects, the projects do not seem properly prioritized. She stated that she thinks there needs to be more detail in the plan.

- Mr. Strickland stated that the Committee talked about reducing the project list, especially the short-term priority list, to make it more realistic but that no consensus was reached on which projects should be eliminated. He explained that sometimes it is best to

have a full listing of projects with an understanding that while hopefully most of the projects will be started, not all will be completely finished in five years.

- Ms. Collins stated that she thought the CEDS priorities need to be more fine-tuned.

- Mr. Hammond stated that the first step is developing the CEDS and a list of projects, which has been done; the next step is to start the process of coordinating and planning to fulfill the schedule of projects.

- Committee Member Tobin stated that he is interested in the idea of an executive committee and that an executive committee might be key in the annual monitoring process in first developing a list of the most important of the short term priorities to pursue. He stated that the executive committee should perhaps be composed of public and private sector representatives who would perform this work.

-Mr. Hammond noted that it brings back the question of whether you perform the monitoring process in the CEDS committee or in the AHEDC.

- Mr. Tobin noted that he has difficulty in distinguishing between the two groups because of similar membership.

- Mr. Strickland asked the elected officials present if they would feel comfortable supporting a proposal to form an executive committee with no elected representation to aid in the monitoring process.

- Committee Member Anderson and Committee Member Barnette agreed that they were comfortable with the concept. The committee developed consensus that the Alleghany Highlands Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee would carry forward the annual monitoring process and that nomination of an executive committee would be one of its first activities after the approval of the CEDS document by the local governments.

**ACTION ITEM:** Hold regular meetings to monitor activities recommended by the Alleghany Highlands Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and form an executive committee to make more detailed decisions regarding project scheduling and prioritization after CEDS adoption and approval (*Alleghany Highlands Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee*).

**MOTION:** Mr. Hammond made a motion to accept the CEDS document and to forward the document to the local government boards and councils in the region for consideration.

**SECOND:** Mr. Tobin seconded the motion.

**APPROVAL:** The Alleghany Highlands Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee unanimously approved the CEDS document and recommended forwarding the document to local governments in the region for consideration.

- Ms. Anderson noted that the format seems appropriate. She stated that an executive summary should be developed for distribution among the council and board members and that one copy of the report should be available for perusal at each local government office.

- Ms. Collins stated that a standard resolution should also be provided to the local governments.

- Mr. Snead added that a description and estimate of how long it would take to get approval of the CEDS from EDA. He noted that drafts of the CEDS document should be made available at libraries in the region.

- Ms. Collins stated that it might be helpful if there could be a mention of what projects are already being pursued.

- Mr. Strickland stated that the Commission staff would develop an executive summary and get this material to administrators hopefully by the end of next week. He stated that Mr. Tyrone Beach at EDA is expecting a CEDS document in July and that he would be willing to send a representative from his office for a visit to the area.

**ACTION ITEM:** Develop concise executive summary with examples of goals, objectives and projects as well as other items requested by committee members. The staff will also prepare a draft resolution for consideration by each local governments. Finally, the Commission staff will send a copy of the CEDS to local public libraries. (RVARC Staff).

- Committee Members discussed preliminary planning items surrounding the EDA representative's visit.

- Mr. Strickland noted that the CEDS Committee would not meet again as a body until after the local governments have adopted the CEDS document. Mr. Strickland noted that discussions would begin in the next meeting as to which grant applications should be pursued first.

- Mr. Snead shared some good news with the group that he had heard that Governor Kaine has vetoed the Idle Machinery and Tools Tax, which would have had adverse effects on the fiscal budgets of the region's local governments.

- Mr. Tobin asked Mr. Hammond if he thought the move of MeadWestvaco's headquarters to Richmond was a positive development. Mr. Hammond responded that he believed it to be a potential opportunity. He stated that he does not believe that more plants will be built but that it was a good management decision and could be beneficial for the region.

- Mr. Tobin noted that he's had discussions with area realtors on the Multiple Listing Service issue and that he has met resistance. He stated that the Highlands absolutely must get on the national map in terms of its real estate. He said that people do not have the patience or time to find a Highlands realty page. In most cases, he said individuals started at a national realty site that utilizes MLS to drill down to a local area's offerings. He warned the committee that early indications suggest that the MLS issue will not be an easy issue to address in the area. He stated that he is still of the opinion that the MLS issue must still be addressed. He expressed his opinion that there needs to be some speculative housing development in the region.

- Ms. Collins noted that there is available land in and around the City of Covington that is prime for real estate development if water and sewer services can be extended.

- Mr. Tobin stated that early research indicates that membership to MLS costs only an additional \$2000 per year per realtor. Ms. Collins stated that most of the realtors are probably paying a similar amount to use VAMANET.

- Mr. Strickland closed the meeting and mentioned that RVARC staff can be available at upcoming board and council meetings to answer any questions about the CEDS document. Mr. Strickland also noted that John Hull would get information out to the committee members on his upcoming presentation to students at the Alleghany High School. Mr. Strickland noted that the executive summary and resolution would also be sent once it is completed.

· Meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

· Minutes submitted by John M. Hull, Regional Economic Resources Planner.