

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING  
July 19, 2023  
Commission Office**

**Convened: 10:00 A.M.**

**Adjourned: 11:30 A.M.**

**Members In Attendance:**

Hon. Debbie Baughman  
Hon. Randy Bunch (via Zoom)  
Hon. Laura Burke  
Mr. Jay Cessna  
Mrs. Sharon Clapper  
Hon. Bruce Erb  
Mr. James Foster  
Hon. Alan Frederick

Hon. Scott Hunt  
Mr. Thomas Luciano  
Mr. Donald Rhodes  
Mr. Rick Strait (via Zoom)  
Hon. Jeff Thomas  
Hon. Pamela Toker-Ickes (via Zoom)  
Hon. Scott Walls  
Hon. Gerald Walker

**Others In Attendance:**

Mrs. Renee Best  
Mr. Daniel Blottenberger  
Mr. Daniel Bowers  
Mr. George Gvozdich  
Mr. Steven Howsare  
Ms Regina Klevan

Mrs. Trudy Mitchell  
Mr. Bob Morgan  
Ms Deborah Shaffer  
Mrs. Jennifer Sklowdoski  
Mr. Lee Slusser

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Commissioner Walls, President, called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Commissioner Walls then asked if there were any public comments. Hearing none, the meeting continued without comment.

**MINUTES:**

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to approve the May 24, 2023, Finance Committee and Board of Directors Meeting minutes, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster and was unanimously approved.

**FINANCE REPORT:**

Mr. Daniel Bowers, SAP&DC Director of Finance, presented the Accounts Payable/General Fund Ending Balance, reviewed some of the larger expenses and reported no changes to the information submitted. He also provided a summary of available Commission funds and reported that SAP&DC remains in a good cash position.

Mr. Bowers reminded members that the audit for SAP&DC's FY 2022-2023 is scheduled as the final audit to be conducted by Maher Duessel under SAP&DC's current auditor selection policy and of the decision made at the March 2023 Board of Directors meeting for rotation of supervisory audit staff rather than a complete change of audit firms. This movement is due to studies indicating that mandatory firm rotation would represent a significant change in practice and would increase costs and cause disruptions for companies. These studies also show that audit failures come at a much higher rate during the first three years of an audit engagement, indicating a significant learning curve in the first three years of the engagement for the external auditor. Mr. Bowers is preparing to release the Audit RFP for the FY 23-24 audit in the near future.

Mr. Bowers also reported the Mr. Robert Haberstroh, Fiscal Assistant, had recently resigned his position and that SAP&DC is in the process of hiring a replacement.

A motion was entered by Mr. Luciano to approve the Accounts Payable/General Fund Ending Balance, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Walker and was unanimously approved.

**FY 2024 APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION (ARC) INVESTMENT PACKAGE:**

Mr. Lee Slusser, Director, Planning & Community Development Division, reported that SAP&DC had formerly been required each year to submit its project recommendations for funding through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC); that is no longer required. However, SAP&DC is still providing the list of projects in its investment package to the Board of Directors for their information and to allow for any questions Board members may have.

Mr. Slusser then presented and provided a review of the list of the projects that were developed from requests received by SAP&DC staff.

Mrs. Deborah Prosser, Director, Business Development Services, provided an overview of the Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE), ARC's newest initiative that aims to drive large-scale, regional economic transformation through multi-state collaborative projects across Appalachia. Approximately \$64 million will be available for implementation grants and up to \$10 million can be requested per entity for an implementation grant.

Mrs. Prosser further explained that in discussion with staff from SAP&DC's Planning Division the 911 Memorial Trail was envisioned as the best project for this funding since it already crossed multi-state lines. The project would be designed to make the existing trails all "off road". This project would focus on completing the off-road connection between Pentagon Memorial and the Flight 93 National Memorial and progress on the off-road sections between the Flight 93 National Memorial towards Mt. Union. To receive funding for the project it is critical to demonstrate economic development including business and job creation. Therefore, the focus is on developing the trail towns in the four counties of The Alleghenies.

This would require the creation of a team of four circuit riders (one for each of the counties designated as a "trail town") with a diverse set of skills that would all be employed and managed by the Allegheny Ridge Corporation. Each circuit rider would have an assigned county and would work from that county with donated office space from a partner interested in the project. The circuit riders would have a four-year assignment to start. The Circuit Rider's purpose is to advance trail connectivity in the county. With special focus on the trail towns and working with local partners including the Startup Alleghenies, Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and others to identify new business needs to provide desired service by the trail users, and working to establish new businesses and/or expand existing businesses. Funding for the circuit rider positions would be available through the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) at 100% for the first year, reducing by 25% for the next three years. However, the ARISE grant would then be used to cover the reduction in salary thus not impacting the county budgets.

Discussion was held regarding the interest of the four trail town counties (Blair, Cambria, Huntingdon and Somerset) in applying for a circuit rider grant through DCNR with ARISE funding to be utilized as the match. SAP&DC staff will assist the counties with applying for the DCNR circuit rider grant. All four counties expressed interest in moving forward with this project.

### **BUSINESS LENDING SERVICES:**

Mrs. Trudy A. Mitchell, Director, Business Lending Services, presented and reviewed the action taken by the Loan Review Committee. Mrs. Mitchell reported that there was one project approved since the last Board of Directors meeting.

Mrs. Mitchell then presented and reviewed the application for Jeremy J. & Kaityln P. Imler. The application was approved unanimously by the Loan Review Committee, as presented, and is now presented to the Board of Directors for concurrence.

A motion was entered by Mr. Cessna to concur with the action taken by the Loan Review Committee relative to the loan application, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Frederick and was unanimously approved.

### **EARN PROGRAM REPORT:**

Ms Regina Klevan, EARN Program Director, reported that the EARN Local Management Committee met recently and approved the yearly budget, contract extensions, and yearly allocations for EARN sub-contractors for Program Year 2023-2024.

The number of clients in Cambria County remains high, currently 167, mostly due to the influx of clients from the Philadelphia area. Ms Klevan explained that a new case manager was recently hired for the EARN program in Cambria County and that the program is now fully staffed again.

As of July 1, 2023, the State is reinstating the policy of sanctions. The clients are receiving TANF and/or cash assistance and are, therefore, required to be working or participating in a program such as EARN. The policy allows for a client's case to be closed which means they could possibly lose their cash assistance if they are not meeting the working or participation requirements. It is not expected that this will happen with any regularity with the State's new emphasize on the human centered approach.

Ms Klevan then remarked that the lack of childcare continues to be an issue for clients. Therefore, the continuation of working with clients remotely is extremely important so that they can continue to be served.

**REGIONAL GREENWAYS MINI-GRANTS PROGRAM/ROUND 9 AWARDS:**

Mr. Slusser reported that the Planning Advisory Committee met on Thursday, July 6, 2023, to review, score and prioritize the applications for the ninth round of the regional greenways mini grant funding.

Mr. Slusser then briefly reviewed each of the four projects received and it recommended that all four applications be approved for funding. He also reported that SAP&DC had a total of \$150,000 to award and that \$52,000 remains unspent. Therefore, a supplemental round of applications will be sought to utilize the remaining funds.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Walker to approve awarding the four applications received for Regional Greenways Mini-Grant program funding, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Erb and was unanimously approved.

**PROJECT INTAKE WEBSITE RFP:**

Mr. Slusser reported that as part of our Community Capacity and Municipal Assistance Program (CCMAP), the Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission (SAP&DC) has issued a request for proposals to develop a “project intake” website. This website is intended to create a repository for project information and potential grant applications. The website will incorporate a “project profile form” through which sponsors will be able to provide project details and other documentation for grant applications to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and other miscellaneous state and federal programs. Additionally, SAP&DC plans to house a municipal survey on this website for transportation projects such as the Southern Alleghenies Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The website will enable clients and users to provide feedback or ask questions. It will thus provide clients and users with a more accessible path to interact with SAP&DC.

The request for proposals for the design and hosting of this website was issued on June 10, 2023. Proposals were required to be submitted prior to the close of business on July 10, 2023. SAP&DC received nine proposals which were reviewed and scored by SAP&DC staff. Based on the scoring it is recommended that the contract for Project Intake Website be awarded to 3twenty9.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Baughman to approve awarding the Project Intake Website to 3twenty9, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Clapper and was unanimously approved.

**EXECUTIVE ORDER 12372 PROJECTS:**

Mr. Slusser explained that SAP&DC is designated by the Federal Office of Management and Budget (under E.O. 12372) to review requests for Federal financial assistance within its six-county service area for concurrence with relevant regional planning documents. The projects requesting federal financial assistance were presented as consistent with the Commission's overall Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Thomas to approve the Projects Under Executive Order 12372, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hunt and was unanimously approved.

**OTHER BUSINESS & INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

Mr. Steven Howsare, SAP&DC Executive Director, introduced Mr. Bob Morgan, State Director, and Mr. Daniel Blottenberger, from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to present information on programs administered by the USDA.

Mr. Bob Morgan then explained that the USDA is rural America's partner in prosperity and invests in rural America with loan, grant and loan guarantee programs because strong communities are rooted in its people. The commitment and resources USDA brings to rural communities helps drive economic security and prosperity. These programs expand access to high-speed internet, electric, and transportation infrastructure and support business growth, healthcare, education, housing and other essential community services.

Mr. Morgan then briefly reviewed each of the main programs for which USDA provides assistance, including single and multi-family housing, energy and electric, telecommunications, water and environmental, community and business and cooperative services.

Mr. Howsare then reported that through the Local Development District Association of PA additional funding for OIBD for International Trade services was included in the budget. This additional funding would allow SAP&DC to hire for a second position in its International Trade program since that program is now experiencing an increase in demand for services.

The next SAP&DC Board of Commissioners meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 20, 2023

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Bunch

Secretary