

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING
September 20, 2023
Commission Office**

Convened: 10:00 A.M.

Adjourned: 11:45 A.M.

Members In Attendance:

Hon. Debbie Baughman
Hon. Randy Bunch (via Zoom)
Hon. Laura Burke
Mr. Jay Cessna
Hon. Jeff Thomas (via Zoom)
Hon. Pamela Tokar-Ickes
Mr. Jim Foster (via Zoom)

Hon. Scott Hunt
Hon. Barry Dallara
Mr. Donald Rhodes
Hon. Stuart Ulsh (via Zoom)
Hon. Gerald Walker
Ms. Beth McGregor
Hon. Scott Walls

Others In Attendance:

Mrs. Renee Best
Mr. Daniel Bowers
Mrs. Debbi Prosser
Mr. Steven Howsare
Ms. Regina Klevan

Ms. Tina Taylor
Mr. Lee Slusser
Ms. Johnna Pro (via Zoom)
Ms. Madra Clay (via Zoom)
Mr. Brad Burger

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 Commissioner Walker to approve the July 19, 2023, Board of Directors Meeting minutes, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hunt 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. The bulk of the expenses run through the general fund and are then allocated through the cost allocation program to other programs as necessary.

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

Mr. Bowers announced that the audit for SAP&DC's FY 2022-2023 is currently underway, and this will be the last year under contract with Maher Duessel. Documents are being pulled for sampling, bank confirmations and loan fund balance confirmations were sent out, and field work is scheduled for mid-October. There was an Audit RFP released in August for the FY 2023-2024, but there has been limited interest. So far Maher Duessel is the only firm that has reached out for information.

Mr. Bowers also announced that Ms. Rachel Raschella has been hired to replace Mr. Rob Haberstroh and is working out very well.

SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT WORD:

Mr. Steven Howsare, SAP&DC Executive Director, reviewed county snapshots provided by the PA CareerLink® One Stop Operators. The snapshots were for PY 2023 quarter 4 and provided statistics on unemployment, job seekers served, job postings, and employers served. If anyone has questions, they are to follow up with Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski, SAWDB Director.

Mr. Howsare introduced Mr. Brad Burger, President/CEO of Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, and asked him to provide an update on the Bedford County PA CareerLink® center move in addition to presenting information on current workforce statistics.

Mr. Burger reported that the PA CareerLink® Bedford building was purchased, and they were asked to vacate the building. They have been searching for a new permanent location and have found a temporary location at the Bedford County Technical Center until April, 2024 while continuing to vet a permanent location.

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF REGIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PRESENTATION:

Mr. Burger delivered a presentation on Workforce Development Concerns in a Declining Population Environment. There were trends taking place prior to the pandemic of the labor supply not meeting up to the labor demand in the region, and the pandemic has accelerated and amplified this trend.

Mr. Burger reviewed data related to Southern Alleghenies regional population and reported that 32 percent of the current population will be lost by 2060, and this is not unique to our region. Data was then reviewed in detail by county; certain counties are being impacted more by the population decline. There are challenges being faced in the PA CareerLink® centers that will amplify as they try to serve more people in more places in better ways. The possible impacts of population loss were also reviewed, and this will require a coordinated effort to address the aspects of population decline and how to push against the negative aspects of it.

Mr. Burger discussed the intentional impact of productivity increasing the productivity of our region and the push against other downward forces. Mr. Burger then reviewed charts for each county in detail regarding employed individuals, GDP, and Real GDP data through 2021. The focus should be on keeping Real GDP either level or increasing disproportionate to the loss of employed persons and using productivity to do that.

The PA CareerLink® centers use BOTS to run back-office functions that many organizations take advantage of. Employers need to take their labor footprint and extend it in order to grow their business through applying different forms of technology and different lean techniques within their organizations. If this is done in a coordinated way, the workforce system can push against the downward pressure of Real GDP over time and prosper as a region.

Mr. Burger shared information on job fair attendance. Since the pandemic, the majority of people attending are already working. Thirty percent of those individuals say they need more training. There currently is not a mechanism in place to help these people in a coordinated way, and they are trying to redesign the system to help them.

Mr. Burger discussed his recommendations for the region's future that include utilizing real GDP/employed persons as a primary metric, increasing employee productivity, encourage employers to invest in automation, and a coordinated eco-system must be developed to best deploy the human resource.

Mr. Burger shared that there will be a Southern Alleghenies Workforce Symposium on November 9th at the Blair County Convention Center at 8:00 AM. There will be representatives attending to discuss technology in the workforce and how ChatGPT can be used to increase worker productivity.

CEDS DIGITIZATION EFFORTS:

Mr. Lee Slusser, Director, Planning & Community Development Division, explained that the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is a planning document that is produced every few years that updates the economic development goals and objectives for the organization and is used in grant applications.

Mr. Slusser reported that SAP&DC is interested in digitizing its CEDS to make it more accessible to the public. SAP&DC is also interested in putting the demographic and socioeconomic statistics that the CEDS is based on into a real-time, self-updating website dashboard. Such statistics are regularly needed for county, municipal, non-profit, private sector, economic development agency, and our own planning documents and grant applications. Currently, SAP&DC's CEDS and its statistics are only updated every few years and posted on the SAP&DC website as a PDF. SAP&DC explored pursuing an EDA grant with two fellow LDDs. After further consideration and speaking with North Central, SAP&DC staff opted out of the EDA project due to concerns about the price of the project and the long-term financial sustainability of the subscriptions. SAP&DC will continue working with North Central to replicate their lower cost option.

Mr. Howsare explained that two of the other LDDs were applying for a grant to digitize their CEDS but found out the recurring maintenance could be as high as \$30,000. SAP&DC will continue to explore ways to make this happen in the future.

BUSINESS LENDING SERVICES:

Ms. Tina Taylor, Business Lending Program Manager, presented and reviewed the action taken by the Loan Review Committee. Ms. Taylor reported that there were three projects approved since the last Board of Directors meeting.

Ms. Taylor then presented and reviewed the list of applications and projects in detail: all applications were approved by the Commission's Loan Review Committee, as presented, and are now presented to the Board of Directors for concurrence.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Walker to concur with the action taken by the Loan Review Committee, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bunch 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 eleven projects requesting federal financial assistance were presented and reviewed and noted as consistent with the Commission's overall Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Tokar-Ickes to approve the Projects Under Executive Order 12372, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Baughman and was unanimously approved.

PA ECONOMIC COMPETITIVE STRATEGY:

Mr. Howsare introduced Ms. Johnna Pro, DCED SW Regional Director and Ms. Madra Clay, DCED Central Regional Director, and stated that Governor Shapiro is looking to form an economic competitive strategy for the state of Pennsylvania and has reached out to PREP regions in an attempt to gather information from key stakeholders.

Ms. Pro explained that the state has not had a statewide economic development strategy in more than 20 years. The DCED will be collecting data over the next few weeks from stakeholders across the commonwealth. The collection of this data will take place via in-person meetings, zoom calls, and the Team PA survey. There are three areas that will be the main focus: programs that work or do not work, Pennsylvania industries that should be targeted in the future, and reviewing current processes.

Discussion was held regarding the programs that are effective and what needs to be changed.

There are problems filling jobs in all areas and industries. Regarding building the economy and retaining workers, we need to work on how to make this happen. As the population declines and the workforce shrinks, workers need to be more productive, and we need to be able retain them.

The education and training system needs to look at how we are addressing the issue of out migration as potential employees are now at a younger age. If technology is infused and there are workers not doing certain jobs now, we need to scale up the skillset of workers so they are equipped to handle jobs of the future.

The Bedford County Technical Center had a record number of kids signing up for the tech center this year. They are at full capacity and could use help in expanding that. There is a lack of housing in Bedford County; state regulations on builders have stifled development in the housing industry.

There is a need for better middle management people and better direct supervisor training to retain workers. Certain skillsets are needed for supervisors to keep people in place and happy. Funding could be provided for companies that do mid-level management training.

Companies that offer on the job training for individuals who might not want to attend college or are unsure of a career path is beneficial. There could be more programs available for these companies to take advantage of.

In Huntingdon County there are no regional processing facilities for beef in our region. Housing issues are a detriment to recruiting and keeping people in the region.

In Business Lending, many people call asking for available grants. If there was some form of incentive or lower interest option available, this would provide an opportunity to get one year of operating experience in.

Commissioner Walls suggested that Ms. Pro and Ms. Clay make appointments to visit each county with the commissioners and the economic development groups if their time allows for it.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Howsare shared that Ms. Debbie Shaffer, Administrator Officer/HR, will be retiring on September 29th after 36 years of service. Ms. Shaffer has done a tremendous job for SAP&DC over the years and will be greatly missed.

On behalf of the Somerset County Commissioners and the Board, Commissioner Walker stated the importance of Ms. Shaffer's work at SAP&DC and thanked her for her years of service.

The next SAP&DC Board of Directors meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 15, 2023 beginning at 10:00 AM. A Finance Committee meeting will be held prior to the Board of Directors meeting and will begin at 9:00 AM.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Randy Bunch

Secretary