

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING  
September 18, 2024  
Commission Office**

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

**Adjourned: 11:45 A.M.**

**Members In Attendance**

Mr. Jim Foster (via Zoom)  
Hon. Laura Burke (via Zoom)  
Hon. Patrick Reeder  
Mrs. Sharon Clapper  
Hon. JR Winck (via Zoom)  
Hon. Scott Hunt  
Mr. Donald Rhodes III  
Hon. Pamela Tokar-Ickes  
Mr. Jay Cessna  
Hon. Dave Kessler

Ms. Beth McGregor  
Hon. Randy Bunch  
Ms. Erin Abel  
Hon. Deb Baughman  
Hon. Scott Walls  
Hon. Jeff Thomas  
Hon. Brian Fochtman  
Hon. Mike Stiles  
Hon. Amy Webster  
Mr. Rick Strait (via Zoom)

**Others In Attendance:**

Mr. Steve Howsare  
Mrs. Rebecca Canavan  
Mr. George Gvozdich, Jr.  
Mrs. Renee Best  
Ms. Regina Klevan  
Mr. Matt Bauerlin

Mr. Lee Slusser  
Ms. Tina Taylor  
Mr. Zack Lee  
Mr. Ben Dworsky  
Mr. Tyler Schurr  
Mr. Dustin Bishop

**CALL TO ORDER**

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

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

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

**MINUTES, JULY 17, 2024**

A motion was entered by Commissioner Fochtman to approve the July 17, 2024, Board of Directors' meeting minutes, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Rhodes and was unanimously approved.

**FINANCE REPORT**

Mrs. Rebecca Canavan, Director of Finance, presented the Accounts Payable list of invoices that were paid in July and August in addition to the General Fund Ending Balance. She noted that there was nothing unusual that

was paid; the Bank Account Summaries included the normal operations of the Commission. The SAP&DC audit will start in October, and all documents have been uploaded to the auditors.

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to approve the Accounts Payable and Bank Account Summaries, as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. McGregor and was unanimously approved.

### **ALLEGHENIES BROADBAND, INC. UPDATE (ABI)**

Commissioner Jeffrey Thomas provided a brief history on how ABI was formed. In 2015 SAP&DC and the six counties in the region decided to do a ten-year comprehensive plan together. One of the main things identified besides cell phones was broadband; there was a severe shortage and need for broadband. SAP&DC & the Commissioners formed a broadband task force working together until 2019. Due to the number of people attending the meetings, the chairs of each committee decided to form an agency to help with broadband in the area. A 501c3 non-profit agency was formed the end of 2019, and by the end of 2020 ABI was formed. The Board consists of one member from each county and two members at large. After ABI was formed, they applied to the PUC for a provider license in 2021 which means that the phone companies cannot keep ABI off the poles. ABI will work with any provider or community that wants to get broadband in their area. In 2020 they became a stand-alone entity. They are continually going after grants and are funded by the administration fees from grants.

Mr. Dustin Bishop, ABI Project Manager, provided an overview on current and upcoming projects.

The Rural Equity Broadband Project involves the installation of new equipment on existing wireless tower sites and reimbursement of leasing costs on three tower sites. The total project cost is \$404,250 and the projected completion date is June 30, 2025. The funding sources are the Appalachian Regional Commission and the PA Department of Community and Economic Development.

Mr. Bishop spoke of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 that gave quite a bit of flexible funds to states, counties, school districts, and cities to help them bounce back from the pandemic. Many counties saw the need for broadband coverage during the pandemic. An RFP was put out to gain various projects and applications through this program and there were 13 responses received. There were five projects that were selected throughout four counties. ABI serves as an administrator and oversight for the use of the ARPA funds; these projects were awarded through the counties by their use of the ARPA funds. ABI makes recommendations and the counties have the final say in the selection of the projects. Mr. Bishop reviewed the projects in detail by county. Maps of the coverage areas for the projects were also shared.

Mr. Bishop shared information on the NTIA Project that has a projected cost of \$22,736,861. The funding source is the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. ABI is a subgrantee on this project, and Huntingdon County is the primary applicant in partnership with Fulton and Bedford Counties in addition to Crowsnest Broadband and Upward Broadband. SAP&DC staff assisted with the grant writing and application process which was a very selective process. In the United States there were only 11 projects selected for funding and ABI received one of them. The scope of work includes construction of new telecommunications towers and the installation of new equipment on existing tower sites. The projected completion date is February 2026. There will be leasing agreements with internet and cell phone providers. The environmental phase is almost complete in Bedford County, and construction has begun in Huntingdon and Fulton Counties. A map of the project was shared.

Commissioner Thomas stated that this site is on the mountains dividing several counties, so ABI will be able to provide coverage to additional counties which makes this project more desirable.

Mr. Bishop spoke of the Capital Products Fund which is the most recent award. The total cost of the project is \$2,412,843. The ABI grant award is approximately \$1.8 million. This is their first venture into fiber optic technology. The project is currently in progress with an expected completion date of December 2026. ABI and Crowsnest are the grantees. A detailed description of the project was reviewed in addition to the coverage area map.

Mr. Bishop provided information on a future project: Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program. The project cost is \$1.16 billion. The official guidelines have not been released yet. The anticipated application opening is mid-October and will be closing mid-December. ABI is trying to prioritize fiber projects, especially to those who are currently unserved or underserved in our region.

ABI constantly tracks mapping data in real time as to what other providers are doing. The most up to date website is: [Home - Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority \(pa.gov\)](https://www.pa.gov/PA/Broadband-Development-Authority) under the Maps & Data drop down. If anyone has any ideas for projects or has questions, they are to reach out to Mr. Bishop or Commissioner Thomas.

### **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM UPDATE**

Mr. Zack Lee, Director Business Development, provided an update on ARC PREP goals and metrics. The Impact Report which is mainly used for State PREP includes program metrics, projected goals, and percentage of goals met by quarter. Many of the goals made the 100 percent mark, and some were exceeded. SAP&DC staff does a very good job at meeting/exceeding goals. The ARC PREP Snapshot Matrix Summary includes

information on goal descriptions and outcomes and results achieved. Most of the categories achieved 100 percent or greater.

Mr. Lee also reviewed the Customer Satisfaction Survey results. These surveys are sent out quarterly to customers that SAP&DC staff has worked with. There was a high response rate and high satisfaction rate received.

Mr. Lee shared that the ENGAGE Program application was submitted on September 9<sup>th</sup>. The State PREP application is being submitted today. The PA Outdoor Alliance project is currently underway; an RFP was sent out in March for a PA Outdoor Recreation Alliance project. This project will focus on PA businesses and industries related to tourism and outdoor recreation and how this alliance can work with those businesses to help them grow and support the tourism industry.

### **FUNDING A POTENTIAL SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIWES GREENWAYS PLAN**

Mr. Lee Slusser, Director Planning & Community Development, reported that at the July 17, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting, Ms. Lindsay Baer of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) presented reasons and value for updating the 2007 Southern Alleghenies Greenways and Open Space Network Plan. Applications to DCNR for funding from any municipality in the Southern Alleghenies are assigned points for how consistent and up to date they are with the Greenways Plan and other local plans. Currently, many projects that are applied for throughout the Southern Alleghenies region are getting a few points deducted due to the Greenways Plan being so old. A new Scope of Work for the Greenways Plan has been put together by Mr. Tyler Schurr, SAP&DC Transportation Planner, who reviewed the information.

Mr. Schurr reviewed the Greenways and Open Space Plan draft in detail and noted that there are many updates needed, but the basic content has not changed. The scope of work is organized by section, and it lays out the background studies, planning process, and the plan that is needed. Essentially a greenway is a portal of land that connects people, places, recreational places, and it is very broad. The purpose of this type of plan is to give a regional vision of how it connects trail gaps, park improvements, etc. The Introduction section of the plan provides a general overview of the greenways plan and study, in addition to why it is an important document to the community.

Mr. Schurr stated that everything about the region will be explained in detail in the Background Studies & Inventory section. Regarding Public Participation, it is critical to engage with the public. The strategy will involve the formation of a study committee, a regular study, study committee meetings, and two rounds of

public meetings, one in each county. The Implementation is a vision of what we can do, what we could do, what might be good for the region, what type of areas should be given priority as well as information about what municipalities would be responsible for the proposed projects.

Mr. Slusser then reviewed two possible options for funding the Greenways Plan. The first option which is the slower option includes several choices: DCNR will fund up to 50 percent with a 50 percent match being secured at application which opens in January, DCED could fund the required 50% match and the application window opens in May, or PennDOT could fund the 50 percent match through supplemental planning funds which is how the 2007 plan was funded. The next UPWP for PennDOT will not go into effect until July 2025 which is the earliest SAP&DC could apply.

The second option is the faster option and would require counties to either provide the 50 percent match or guarantee it while SAP&DC applies to DCED or PennDOT for funds to replace the county match. SAP&DC could apply in January 2025 and start work on the plan in January 2026 with a plan completion date in January 2028. The county matches could be budgeted over two county fiscal years.

Mr. Slusser will send out the proposed funding information to Board members so they can review the options. This topic will be discussed at the next Board of Directors meeting on November 20, 2024.

### **2025-2029 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE (CEDDS)**

Mr. Slusser reported that SAP&DC staff has been working for the past year on updating the CEDDS document. It provides a major source of data and some coordination on a regional level. The CEDDS is required to receive EDA funding and is used on a regular basis to prove consistency with regional planning for any grant application. When setting goals, objectives, and strategies for this plan, everything that someone can apply for a grant for has to be included. In working with the CEDDS Committee, a public survey was developed and sent out this past summer by Mr. Matt Bauerlin, SAP&DC Regional Planner.

Mr. Bauerlin provided an overview of the CEDDS Survey results in addition to the first rough draft of the CEDDS goals, objectives, and strategies. There were 245 survey responses received from the six-county region. Responses from each county were highly varied by municipality with 88 locations represented across the Southern Alleghenies region. Mr. Bauerlin reviewed survey results in detail by county; the results included a list of strengths and areas for improvement. The survey results were turned into a list of objectives, goals, and strategies to meet for the upcoming five-year plan. A sample of the actual survey that was sent out was included in the meeting packet and was also reviewed.

Mr. Slusser then reviewed the proposed goals and objectives for the Southern Alleghenies region in detail. These goals were derived from the survey responses. This information was presented to the CEDS Committee at their meeting on September 17<sup>th</sup> where changes were made and items were added.

The Board is to let Mr. Slusser know if there is anything missing or should be added to the plan as it will need to be adopted at a future Board of Directors meeting.

### **EXECUTIVE ORDER 12372 PROJECTS**

Mr. Slusser introduced Mr. Ben Dworsky, SAP&DC Regional Planner who worked on the project updates.

Mr. Dworsky stated 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 two projects were reviewed in detail. These projects requesting federal financial assistance were presented, reviewed, and noted as consistent with the Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

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

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

The next SAP&DC Board of Directors meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 20, 2024 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