

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
December 4, 2024
Commission Office**

Convened: 10:00 A.M.

Adjourned: 11:30 A.M.

Members In Attendance

Mr. Rick Strait (via Zoom)
Hon. Laura Burke
Hon. Patrick Reeder
Mrs. Sharon Clapper
Hon. JR Winck (via Zoom)
Hon. Scott Hunt
Mr. Donald Rhodes III (via Zoom)
Hon. Pamela Tokar-Ickes (via Zoom)

Ms. Beth McGregor
Hon. Hervey Hann (via Zoom)
Mr. Jay Cessna
Hon. Deb Baughman (via Zoom)
Hon. Scott Walls
Hon. Jeff Thomas
Hon. Brian Fochtman (via Zoom)
Hon. Mike Stiles

Others In Attendance:

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

Mr. Lee Slusser
Ms. Tina Taylor
Mr. Zack Lee
Mr. Matt Bjorkman
Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski
Mr. Dustin Starr

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, SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to approve the September 18, 2024, Board of Directors' meeting minutes, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Stiles and was unanimously approved.

FY 2023-2024 SAP&DC SINGLE AUDIT

Mrs. Rebecca Canavan, Director of Finance, introduced Mr. Dustin Starr and Ms. Linsie Vieira of Maher Duessel, who then presented a detailed overview of SAP&DC's Financial Statement/audit for Fiscal Year 2023-2024.

Mr. Starr provided an overview/summary of the audit procedures and financial statements included in the meeting packet. There were several reports issued that were consistent with the prior year, and he reviewed them in detail.

Mr. Starr then shared the outcomes from those reports and explained the reporting structure. Maher Duessel's responsibility under GAAS and Uniform Guidance is to provide an audited opinion that is financially driven. There were three audit reports issued that were backed with findings and deficiencies in which none were found. There were no audit findings or issues found during the course of the audit, nor were there any changes or anything out of the ordinary found. Everything was consistent with the prior year.

Mr. Starr thanked SAP&DC staff for their cooperation and assistance during the audit. He shared that staff were extremely responsive, and the process went very smoothly. There were no corrected or uncorrected misstatements found within the financial statements. Upon finalization of the audit, Maher Duessel will obtain the Management Letter stating that all information is factual and complete.

Mr. Starr reviewed the summary of results and reported that there were no findings or issues found within the Financial Statements, Government Auditing Standards, or Uniform Guidance.

Mr. Starr reviewed Form 990 and noted that it is currently in draft form. He stated that it is best practice to have Form 990 reviewed by Board members for comment prior to filing. Mrs. Canavan will provide a copy of Form 990 to all Board members for comments/responses and will be due back by January 4, 2025.

Mrs. Canavan thanked SAP&DC staff and the Board for their help with her transition and support during the audit.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Stiles to approve SAP&DC's Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Audit and submission of SAP&DC's Form 990 following review by the Board of Directors and contingent upon any comments/concerns being received by January 4, 2025, and those changes being made. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hunt and was unanimously approved.

FINANCE REPORT

Mrs. Canavan presented the Accounts Payable list of invoices that were paid in September and October 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.

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

SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD (SAWDB) PRESENTATION

Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski, Director of Workforce Development, provided an overview of Workforce Development events that have recently taken place in the Southern Alleghenies region.

Mrs. Sklodowski reported that Ms. Nancy Walker, Secretary of Labor and Industry, attended the Blair County Job Fair that was held on October 9, 2024. After attending the job fair, Ms. Walker met with members of the workforce development board and discussed best practices and the needs of the state workforce system within the region. Outcomes of the job fair were shared. There were 88 employers on site with 1,180 open positions, 2,391 prospects were spoken to, 268 interviews were conducted on the spot, and 30 conditional offers were extended.

Mrs. Sklodowski provided an update on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Reauthorization. On November 21st it was announced that a bipartisan and bicameral agreement had been reached on legislation to reauthorize WIOA for five years. Mrs. Sklodowski shared some concerns and oppositions that have been expressed if this bill moves forward. This reauthorization is especially important because it continues workforce funding in the Southern Alleghenies region and provides necessary adaptation to modern workforce needs and offers streamlined services for the public workforce system. One of the significant concerns is the Mandated Training Expenditure Requirement. This legislation requires that our local workforce development board allocate a minimum of 42 percent of their funding to direct training activities, not including career services. Currently SAWDB allocates 10 percent of their funding. This requirement will restrict their capacity to adapt to the evolving needs of local employers and job seekers. Additionally, the bill outlines that only 8 percent of training funds may be used for Supportive Services which will leave many without the necessary support for a successful and long-lasting career.

If this WIOA legislation is passed, it will require that 12.5 percent of local youth funds be used for apprenticeships or pre-apprentice programs. The concern is that within the many rural populations, there is a lack of infrastructure to successfully promote and place youth into these programs.

The suggested Redesignation of Local Workforce Development Areas threatens to weaken local governance and stifle innovation. Local expertise and engagement are key to creating effective employer programs. Funding in the Southern Alleghenies region could be decreased if they were moved to a smaller area.

A joint letter between the PA Workforce Development Association and CCAP was sent to Senator Casey and Senator Fetterman on December 3rd. Senator Casey placed a temporary hold on the WIOA Reauthorization during the hotline process. As long as it is on hold, opposition letters can be sent out. Mrs. Sklodowski will send letters out to the commissioners' offices after the meeting.

If the Reauthoraztion goes through, PA CareerLink® centers may be shut down due to lack of funding.

Mrs. Clapper shared concerns around the lack of supportive services and the dollar amount; the program operators are seeing an increase in need for supportive services. The SAWDB is very cognizant of the training needs in the region; they work with program operators and partners to make necessary funding decisions.

Commissioner Tokar-Ickes asked if there has been any communication with Senator McCormick's office yet. Mrs. Sklodowski was not sure but will look into it.

EARN PROGRAM UPDATE

Ms. Regina Klevan, EARN Program Director, provided an update on the EARN (Employment Advancement and Retention Network) Program. There continues to be a high number of enrollments compared to the rest of the state. Currently there are 177 TANF recipients being served and four SNAP food stamp only recipients. There have been over 130 job placements in the last year with 92 percent of those meeting the wage goal which is at least \$9.25 per hour. The program continues to work on barrier reduction with the most frequent being childcare. The Early Learning Resource Center representatives are now going to the EARN sites on a regular basis which is helping to connect more clients with childcare facilities which has led to more job placements.

Ms. Klevan reported that there is now a representative on site at the PA CareerLink® in Cambria County on a regular basis. This helps to make sure the clients are registered with the PA CareerLink® and helps with the job placement process.

Ms. Klevan shared that the pilot program that lends tablets to clients in Blair County has been going very well and will be expanding to other counties. The tablets are also being used to serve Spanish speaking clients.

There are now more clients coming on site, which is more of a benefit for them. Staff continue to deal with disgruntled clients who take it out on them, but they do an excellent job as it is a thankless job.

The monitoring review process has started with the contractors and the yearly monitoring visit will be in mid-December.

SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES GREENWAYS PLAN

Mr. Lee Slusser, Director Planning & Community Development, reported that at the last Board of Directors meeting he asked the counties for feedback on how to fund the 50% match (\$150,000) required to finance an estimated \$300,000 regional greenways plan. The first option was to apply to DCED or PennDOT for the local match and start work in January 2027. The second option was to use local funds and spread out over two fiscal years, which would enable work to start in January 2026. There is now a third option that would be to complete the regional greenways plan and a new regional comprehensive plan at the same time under the same contract. The advantages of completing the projects at the same time were reviewed. He opened the topic up for discussion to determine how the Board would like SAP&DC to proceed.

Commissioner Reeder asked how often both plans need to be updated and if the dates could be lined up together. Mr. Slusser stated that both plans could be updated together every ten years. This would also be a cost savings to the counties.

Mr. Steve Howsare, SAP&DC Executive Director, stated that the goal would be to split the match out over two budget years; this will be a 2-year project. There will be five counties together excluding Somerset as they will be completing their own comprehensive plan.

The consensus of the Board is to complete the regional greenways plan and a new regional comprehensive plan at the same time under the same contract.

2025-2029 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

Mr. Slusser reported that as an Economic Development District under the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, SAP&DC is required to maintain an active and up-to-date Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy which includes a list of goals, objectives, and strategies to help guide investments in the region. EDA requires that the strategy document be updated every five years to ensure the data and analysis are relevant to the current economic climate of the region. The 2020-2024 CEDS is now due to be updated.

Staff began the process of writing *Advancing the Alleghenies: the 2025-2029 Southern Alleghenies Region Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)* in November 2023. The CEDS Committee approved a draft of this document for a 30-day public comment period on October 15, 2024. SAP&DC staff is recommending adoption of the new CEDS, which is available for review on SAP&DC's website

<https://sapdc.org/plans-reports-and-publications/>). Following adoption by the Board, the 2025-2029 CEDS will be provided to the EDA for final review and approval.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Thomas to approve the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hunt and was unanimously approved.

SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES REGIONAL GREENWAYS MINI-GRANT PROGRAM PROJECTS

Mr. Slusser stated that under the terms of an April 2024 grant contract with PaDCNR for \$150,000, SAP&DC announced the tenth round of the Southern Alleghenies Regional Greenways Mini-Grant Program in March 2024. There were four projects totaling \$68,374 that were awarded in July 2024. The Mini-Grant round was reopened to award the remaining \$81,626. Antis Township submitted an application requesting \$30,000 in grant funding to install trail enhancements along the Bells Gap Trail. The summary of the four previously awarded Mini-grants and a summary for the Antis Township project were also included in the meeting packet.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Hunt to approve the Regional Greenways Mini-Grants Program Award to Antis Township in the amount of \$30,000, as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. McGregor and was unanimously approved.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 12372 PROJECTS

Mr. Slusser reported 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 three 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 Commissioner Hunt to approve the Projects Under Executive Order 12372, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Burke and was unanimously approved.

BUSINESS LENDING REPORT

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

Ms. Taylor reviewed the list of applications and projects in detail. All applications were approved unanimously by the Loan Review Committee, as presented, and are now presented to the Board of Directors for concurrence.

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to concur with the actions taken by the Loan Review Committee, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Stiles and was unanimously approved.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Walls stated that the Southern Alleghenies Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) specifies the work program that our transportation planning staff will perform for the next two fiscal years. Because the Southern Alleghenies Rural Planning Organization is staffed with SAP&DC personnel, the entire board must approve the UPWP. Currently, this document is being reviewed by our state and federal partners. It will be adopted and sent to PennDOT Central Office by January 31, 2025.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Thomas to approve the UPWP, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hunt and was unanimously approved.

Mr. Matt Bjorkman, Transportation Program Manager, reported that because of deliverables that contractors must send to the U.S. Department of Transportation prior to the next Board meeting, SAP&DC staff is requesting a vote to issue a notice of award with authorization to proceed for the Emergency Life Saving Through Multi-Mobile Mobility (ELSa-M3) project. On July 1, 2024, SAP&DC was awarded \$1,925,256 to plan, prototype, and perform medical package delivery for improved transportation and better patient outcomes. SAP&DC issued an RFP for this project on November 5, 2024, and received only one response from Team Aerium. The response was within the budget given for the contract.

SAP&DC staff will need to draft contracts with Cambria and Somerset Counties so that their Emergency Management Departments can participate in and bill to this project. The period of performance for this project is December 2024 through January 31, 2026.

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to approve the notice of award with authorization to proceed to Team Aerium for the ELSa-M3 project, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hunt and was unanimously approved.

Mr. Bjorkman shared that SAP&DC has identified outdoor recreation and tourism as an opportunity for economic growth in the Southern Alleghenies Region. SAP&DC has been working to identify municipalities, like the Borough of Saxton in Bedford County, which have the potential to become trail town hubs by connecting existing trails in their vicinity. On October 5, 2023, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources awarded SAP&DC \$45,000 to prepare the Saxton Trail Connectivity Study which is a feasibility analysis for connecting trails around Saxton through Saxton. The study will examine several aspects

of connecting the Terrace Mountain trail, H&BT Trail, and Huntingdon and Broad Top Mountain Trail. SAP&DC issued an RFP on October 31, 2024, to which it only received one response from GAI Consulting, Inc. SAP&DC staff recommends that the contract be awarded to GAI Consulting, Inc. The period of performance for this project is December 2024 through January 2026.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Baughman to approve the awarding of the contract to GAI Consulting for the Saxton Trail Connectivity Study project, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hunt and was unanimously approved.

Mr. Howsare reported that Mr. George Gvozdich, SAP&DC Solicitor, has agreed to continue to represent the Commission as both its general counsel and revolving loan program legal counsel for Calendar Year 2025 with no requested increase or adjustment, that being \$15,000 for each function.

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to approve retaining Mr. George Gvozdich as SAP&DC's general legal counsel and revolving loan program legal counsel at the rate of \$15,000 for each function, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hunt and was unanimously approved.

Mr. Howsare provided Board members with a copy of SAP&DC's staff Holiday list for 2025 and the SAP&DC Board of Directors meeting schedule for 2025.

Mr. Howsare reminded members that the next Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for January 15, 2025, and will serve as the Annual Reorganization meeting. This meeting will be held at the Huntingdon Country Club beginning at 10:00 AM.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Randy Bunch

Secretary