

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING
March 19, 2025
Commission Office**

Convened: 10:00 A.M.

Adjourned: 11:30 A.M.

Members in Attendance:

Hon. Deb Baughman (via Zoom)
Hon. Randy Bunch
Hon. Dave Kessler
Mr. Jay Cessna
Hon. Amy Webster
Hon. Pamela Tokar-Ickes
Mr. Jim Foster (via Zoom)
Hon. Scott Hunt
Ms. Erin Abel

Hon. Scott Walls
Ms. Beth McGregor
Hon. Hervey Hann
Mr. Rick Strait (via Zoom)
Hon. Brian Fochtman
Hon. J.R. Winck (via Zoom)
Hon. Michael Stiles
Hon. Patrick Reeder
Mr. Donald Rhodes III

Others in Attendance:

Mr. Steven Howsare
Mr. George Gvozdoch Jr.
Mr. Zack Lee
Ms. Regina Klevan
Ms. Tina Taylor

Mr. Lee Slusser
Mrs. Rebecca Canavan
Mrs. Renee Best
Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Hunt, SAP&DC Board President, called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

MINUTES, JANUARY 15, 2025

A motion was entered by Commissioner Walls to approve the January 15, 2025 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 January and February in addition to the General Fund Ending Balance. She noted that there was a fluctuation in the Delaware Valley invoices for January and February as a result of an employee changing from full time to part time employment status.

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

Mrs. Canavan shared that there was a fraud incident that occurred a few weeks ago when a fraudulent ACH request from one of SAP&DC's vendors was received via email. The proper follow up was not performed, so funds were transferred to an incorrect account. Fortunately, the majority of the funds have been recovered and only \$600 was lost. She reported that SAP&DC employees will be attending a Cyber Security course in April. SAP&DC will also be updating their current ACH policy in addition to making changes to the current insurance policy to include fraud coverage.

Commissioner Kessler thanked Mr. Steven Howsare, Executive Director, and the staff for their quick response in getting the fraud issue resolved in addition to the extra steps being taken to further their security education.

Mrs. Canavan thanked First National Bank staff for all of the support and help received to get the funds back. Commissioner Hunt thanked Mr. Rhodes for all of his help in getting the funds back to SAP&DC.

SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD (SAWDB)

Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski, Director of Workforce Development, shared that the SAWDB Executive Committee met on Tuesday March 11th at the Commission Office where revisions to the ITA policy were approved. Increases to the training caps were made: programs less than one year in length can be funded up to \$5,500 and programs one year up to two years in length cannot exceed \$7,000.

Mrs. Sklodowski attended a director's event on March 11th and March 12th in Dubois. This event gave local workforce development directors the opportunity to discuss leadership focus and priorities, explore ideas and discuss the current federal situation with the Secretary of Labor and Industry, Nancy Walker, and Deputy Secretary Dan Kuba. Although SAP&DC has not received their definite allocations for PY25, they have received an estimate from the state showing an allocation total of \$3,227,000 which is a loss of \$882,000 for WIOA Title I programs for the region. Mrs. Sklodowski stated that WIOA reauthorization is currently at a standstill, but federal legislation is pushing for 50 percent of SAP&DC's dollars to go towards training, which is a big issue for all involved.

Mrs. Sklodowski also shared that she will be attending the Workforce Advocacy Day on April 2nd at the US Capitol where she will be meeting with area congressional representatives to discuss WIOA reauthorization and how it will impact the Southern Alleghenies region.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM UPDATE

Mr. Zack Lee, Director of Business Development, provided an update on upcoming initiatives and performance program metrics. He referred to the ARC PREP Summary included in the meeting packet and noted that most metrics from July through December were on target.

Mr. Lee shared that he received word from DCED that SAP&DC would be receiving additional PREP funding in the amount of \$53,000. They would like SAP&DC to propose a special initiative for the upcoming year to take on. In 2023 there was \$70,000 additional money received that went towards the Alleghenies Outdoors Recreation plan. If anyone has project ideas or how this funding can be used, please contact Mr. Lee.

Mr. Lee provided information on a PA Outdoor Recreation Project which is led by SAP&DC and the Pennsylvania Office of Outdoor Recreation: [Elevate: Advancing PA's Outdoor Rec Industry](#). This project is in an implementation phase where Fourth Economy and Mr. Nathan Reigner, Director, Pennsylvania Office of Outdoor Recreation, are hosting roadshow events. There was a great turnout at the event held in Bedford on March 18th. Workshops are being held to engage directly with the businesses that drive the outdoor recreation industry and to get feedback on their needs. The intent of this project is to form a statewide outdoor business alliance to represent the needs of the growing outdoor recreation industry throughout the commonwealth.

Mr. Lee shared information on a new Pennsylvania annual report filing requirement in the hope of getting the word out to other agencies that might not be aware of. There are many smaller businesses, non-profits, and other entities that may struggle with filing online, finding the correct information, etc. or they may just not be aware of this new requirement.

EARN PROGRAM UPDATE

Ms. Regina Klevan, EARN Program Director, provided an update on the EARN (Employment Advancement and Retention Network) Program that serves individuals who are receiving TANF cash assistance. Their goal is to get individuals off of assistance and into full-time employment where they are no longer dependent on assistance. SAP&DC directly employs six Case Managers, and they also subcontract for services such as instruction and job development.

The enrollment numbers are up in Bedford, Fulton, and Huntingdon Counties with an increase in Blair County. Job trends continue to be positions like home health aides, door dash type jobs, fast food, retail, and remote work. It has been tough to get clients into credentialing activities which is one of the program goals. They continue to see mental health problems and the shortage of therapists to deal with these individuals.

There are more individuals needing English as a second language instruction. These individuals must be served without delay; the Language Line is used to help with the translation of documents.

Ms. Klevan shared an update on the Pilot Project that was successful in Blair County. Additional tablets were purchased for Cambria, Somerset, and Huntingdon Counties and are starting to be deployed. The tablets allow staff to provide a better service to those clients who are remote and to communicate with them in real time.

Ms. Klevan noted that she received kudos from the state for the first welfare sanction in the state since 2018. During Covid when all services went remote, the state decreed that there would be no sanctions during that time which means that there are no consequences for individuals who are receiving cash assistance but not meeting the requirements. There is a lot of work involved in getting individuals sanctioned for openly ignoring the rules knowing there will be no consequences. Detailed documentation is required to illustrate that staff did everything possible to get the individuals to participate in the program.

Commissioner Hunt asked Ms. Klevan to relay to the Case Managers that their hard work is greatly appreciated.

COMPREHENSIVE AND GREENWAYS AND OPEN SPACE NETWORK ACTION PLAN

Mr. Lee Slusser, Director Planning & Community Development, shared that a scope of work has been prepared for replacing 2018's *Alleghenies Ahead* which is the regional comprehensive plan that serves as the county comprehensive plan of each county and 2007's *Connections in our Landscape: The Southern Alleghenies Greenways and Open Space Network Plan*. This scope of work seeks a new Comprehensive Plan for the region and each county except Somerset. It also seeks a new Greenways and Open Space Network Plan for all six counties.

Mr. Slusser provided background information on the Greenways and Open Space Network Plan in addition to the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Slusser then presented a detailed budget based on consultant estimates, the percentage of those costs that Commonwealth agencies are potentially willing to fund, and a proposed cost sharing plan amongst the counties for a required local match. He reviewed the Local Share Plan comparisons between DCED's GTRP (Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program) and DCNR's C2P2 Program for each county in addition to timelines involved. The requirements of what is needed from each county for the funding sources were also reviewed.

Mr. Lee requested direction from the individual counties as to how to move forward and which funding plan to use. If the GTRP grant is selected, Mr. Slusser will work on getting the resolutions and letter templates that are

required. A strategy on how to reach out to the legislators will also need to be worked out. The Boards' consensus is to move forward with the GTRP grant; the work will be performed in 2026-2027.

Discussion centered on the local share amounts needed from the counties and where the funds would come from. Commissioner Reeder suggested using the hotel tax to cover the cost if possible.

Mr. Slusser will provide the information to be covered at the Commissioners' meetings to get formal approval, and he will be available to attend the meetings if requested. Commissioner Hann requested that the approval for the Comprehensive Plan be separate from the Greenways and Open Space Network Plan.

Mr. Howsare noted that it is important to reach out to Senator Ward, Senator Langerholc, Representative Burns, and Representative Topper for support.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 12372 PROJECTS

Mr. Lee 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, reviewed, and noted as consistent with the Commission's 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 Kessler and was unanimously approved.

BUSINESS LENDING SERVICES

Ms. Tina Taylor, Director of Business Lending Services, presented and reviewed the loan applications that were submitted and reviewed by the Commission's Loan Review Committee: Adam N. & Linda N. Nolt and Equipment Road Property Group, LLC / Gap View Events, LLC.

All applications, as presented, were approved by the Loan Review Committee, for submission to the Board of Directors for concurrence.

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

Ms. Taylor shared that SAP&DC has joined the Farm Bureau Agency, and she has been doing a few presentations with them. She attended Farm Bureau Day last week and shared details of the Integrators Meeting that she went to. Dutchland Farms has been coming into our area and Ms. Taylor has been working with the bank. They will be constructing poultry barns and are looking to put anywhere between six to eight barns in Bedford and Somerset Counties in addition to building feed mills. Ms. Taylor set up a meeting with individuals from 10 Amish farms who are looking to build poultry barns; seven of the farms are in Bedford County and are interested in moving forward.

Ms. Taylor reported that the loan department is looking at doing a \$1 million dollar USDA IRP loan with a one percent interest rate. Currently SAP&DC has four USDA funds: two of them have been paid off, one will be paid off on March 31, 2025, and the fourth loan will be paid off on April 31, 2030. In looking at the Amish farms, they are out of funds and have committed \$1.24 million dollars in EDA, USDA, and ARC funds. There is currently \$2.4 million dollars committed in PEDA loans. A GMS Report was run to look at all of SAP&DC's USDA loans. Since 1987 there have been 240 loans processed for a total disbursement of \$13.4 million dollars, \$2.1 million dollars has been collected in interest, and \$156,000 has been collected from origination fees.

Ms. Taylor shared that a request was sent to PEDA asking them to increase the PEDA loan amount for Ag; currently the limit is \$400,000, but legislative approval is needed. She is on the Ag Finance Committee that was created to map out a political strategy to try to get reform to the legislation to get an increase into the PEDA funding. The first meeting will be on March 24th, and Secretary Redding from the Department of Agriculture will be in attendance.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Steven Howsare stated that the next meeting of the SAP&DC Board of Directors is scheduled for Wednesday, May 28, 2025, beginning at 10:00 A.M. The Finance Committee will meet prior, beginning at 9:00 A.M. to review the budget and the Accounting Policy Manual.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. J.R. Winck
Secretary