

**Minutes**  
**Rural Virginia Action Committee Meeting**  
**Board of Directors of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership**  
**June 16, 2021**  
**3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**  
**[Zoom Meeting]**

**Welcome and Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Chair Rick Harrell, who noted that a quorum was present.

Members present: Chair Rick Harrell, Carrie Chenery, Stephen Edwards, Deborah Flippo, Dan Pleasant, and Ned Masee, *ex officio*

Members absent: Secretary Brian Ball and Secretary Aubrey Layne

Other Board Members: Dan Clemente and Marianne Radcliff

VEDP staff present: Lindsay Barker, Vince Barnett, Christine Bell, Jamie Canup, Ryan Dunn, Jason El Koubi, Stephanie Florie, Sharon Grant, Sandi McNinch, Lori Melancon, Debbie Melvin, Stephen Moret, Christy Morton, Jordan Snelling, Karin Sun, and Carrie Vuori

Guests present: Greg Campbell, Charles Kennington, Melissa Lubin, Peirce Macgill, Liz Povar, Deputy Secretary Cass Rasnick, Nick Swartz, and Donna Tram

**Opening Remarks**

Chair Harrell welcomed guests to the electronic meeting of VEDP's Rural Virginia Action Committee. Chair Harrell shared these remarks: "As you well know, the Governor declared a state of emergency in March due to the potential spread of COVID-19. Because an in-person meeting is unsafe and we wish to discharge our lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities, we are permitted by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, as amended by the State Budget, to meet by electronic means without a quorum of our members being physically assembled at one location.

We are gathered now in a Zoom environment that is open to the public. Should anyone from the public get disconnected from the public Zoom environment and be unable to re-engage, he or she should call (804) 278-7702 and speak to Jennifer Garrett. We will do our best to re-engage and will halt the public portion of the meeting until the connection can be re-established.

Here are reminders of a few things that will be different than our in-person meetings:

- Everything on the public Zoom environment will be recorded, and the recording will be posted on VEDP's website.
- All votes will be taken by roll call.

- Please use the mute function unless you are speaking—and remember to unmute at the appropriate time.
- During the public comment period, any member of the public wishing to make a comment may simply unmute and speak at that time or use the Chat function and ask to be given an opportunity to speak.
- Likewise, during the meeting, Committee members may simply unmute themselves to speak or use the Chat function.

**Public Comment Period**

Mr. Kennington with the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee asked to make an introduction. Mr. Kennington shared that the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee staff have hosted a studentship over the past five years. The studentship has been done in cooperation with Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Business. The externship is an experiential learning opportunity available to high-achieving students. This year they are happy to have Donna Tram.

**Approval of Minutes for April 28, 2021, Meeting**

Chair Harrell asked for approval of the minutes from the April 28, 2021, meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Pleasant and seconded by Ms. Chenery, and the minutes were approved as presented by roll call vote:

Upon the vote:	Secretary Ball	Absent for vote
	Ms. Chenery	Aye
	Mr. Edwards	Aye
	Ms. Flippo	Aye
	Mr. Harrell	Aye
	Secretary Layne	Absent for vote
	Mr. Pleasant	Aye

**Regional Asset Development in Rural Virginia – SHD Ambassador Taskforce**

Ms. Chenery introduced the group of speakers that she has worked with over the years. The group consists of Mr. Greg Campbell, Executive Director of the Shenandoah Valley Airport, Dr. Nick Swartz, Associate Dean for Professional and Continuing Education at James Madison University (JMU), and Mr. Peirce Macgill, Assistant Director of Economic Development for the City of Harrisonburg. The group will highlight three things: asset-based development, university-based economic development, and innovative partnerships.

Ms. Chenery shared that the group would give an overview of some exciting efforts around the airport and the Ambassador Taskforce for the Shenandoah Valley region. Ms. Chenery said that hopefully, there would be some takeaways that can be replicated in other parts of the state.

**Mr. Greg Campbell, Executive Director, Shenandoah Valley Airport**

Mr. Campbell began by mentioning the Shenandoah Valley Airport is centrally located. He shared that business and community leaders came together back in the 1950s because they believed the region needed air access to be competitive. The business and community leaders were made up of the following five jurisdictions - the cities of Harrisonburg, Staunton, and

Waynesboro, and the counties of Rockingham and Augusta. This group came together to create the Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport Commission. The airport opened in 1960.

After almost a decade of talking to SkyWest airlines and United airlines, the airport convinced them there was an opportunity for United. United gave the airport SkyWest airlines which is the largest regional operation in the country. The airport needed help getting the word out to the business community that something big had happened, and they no longer had to drive to catch a flight. This need was the framework of creating this partnership with JMU and the air service taskforce.

Dr. Nick Swartz, Associate Dean, Professional and Continuing Education, James Madison University

Dr. Swartz began by saying the SHD Ambassador Taskforce was created in 2019 to support SHD's efforts to increase and maintain quality air service. The membership of the task force consists of 21 individuals representing 11 different organizations. The task force's mission is to support SHD by informing residents and businesses about the services offered by the airport.

Dr. Swartz talked about anchor institutions. An anchor institution is place-based and is tethered to its community. Examples of anchors are universities, hospitals, etc. JMU is the largest employer in the region. In addition to their anchor role, JMU was one of, if not the single, most significant contributors to SHD ticket sales.

Mr. Peirce Macgill, Assistant Director, Economic Development, City of Harrisonburg

Mr. Macgill began by talking about why the task force and promoting SHD are essential. He mentioned the importance of transportation and access to markets to economic development. In addition to a good transportation network, there are a few other benefits. The first is quality of life. Having direct flights to Dulles and O'Hare, and anywhere in the world. You don't have to fight traffic, and you can park for free. The second is talent attraction. Having a strong, reliable carrier that can take you anywhere in the world is attractive to potential residents. Finally, there is a positive marketing component, and that is having a solid airport and carrier. This gives the perception to outsiders that maybe the area isn't so remote, and we need to check it out.

Mr. Macgill talked about the Shenandoah Valley Partnership (SVP), the regional EDO, and their great partner with SHD and vice-versa. SVP takes advantage of SHD when hosting FAM tours for site selectors and CEOs.

Mr. Macgill concluded by saying they spend a lot of time on the taskforce to keep and grow air service. The taskforce wants to keep United and SkyWest in the valley and increase their connectivity to more markets. They need the communities to support them to make this happen.

Mr. Moret shared that what the task force has done is very impressive, and hopefully, it can be an example to other regions across Virginia. He wondered if it might be beneficial to give this presentation at a Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA) meeting. Mr. Moret said it speaks to the collaboration and leveraging of anchor institutions.

Mr. Moret mentioned that he just got back from the Site Selectors Guild, and he heard a lot of praise about the Shenandoah Valley. Mr. Moret complimented the speakers on their presentations and the brand awareness of the Shenandoah Valley across the country.

Ms. Flippo shared that her firm is an investor with the SVP, and she serves on the lead generation committee. She said the SVP does collaborate well.

**Open Discussion and Anticipated Topics for Next Meeting**

There was no discussion on topics for the next meeting.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Harrell adjourned the meeting at 3:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Bell  
Acting Recording Secretary

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