



**Meeting Minutes**  
**Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board**  
**Peaks Conference Room at Falling Creek**  
**1257 County Farm Rd. Bedford, VA 24523**

**Wednesday, April 6, 2022**  
**7:00 p.m.**

**Present:** Jeff Powers (District 1), Joy Powers (District 2), Don Gardner (District 3), Chuck Grove (District 4), Ethan Tanner (District 5), Pete Fellers (District 7), Matt Baumgardner (At-Large), Sam Gardner (At-Large), Dorothy McIntyre (At-Large), Ken Newman (At-Large)

**Absent:** Lindsay Tomlinson (At-Large), Pam Willoughby (District 6)

**Staff Present:** Robert Hiss, Holley Scheffel, Scott Baker

**Staff Absent:** Pam Bailey

**Guests:** Supervisor Mickey Johnson, Beck Stanley, Ann Jones, Erika McFadden, Ann Jones, David Willoughby

**(1) CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

**(2) APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Chairman Powers asked for approval of the agenda.

**A motion was made by Mr. Baumgardner and a second by Mr. Newman to approve the March 2, 2022, agenda as presented.**

**Adopted unanimously**

**(3) SPECIAL APPEARANCE – Joe Guthrie, Commissioner of the Virginia Agriculture and Consumer Services**

Commissioner Guthrie thanked the Board for the invitation and expressed how important it is to have opportunities for him to speak with rural counties, especially those involved in economic development and agriculture because of their importance to the local economy.

The Commissioner shared some of his background stating that he grew up on a beef and dairy cattle farm in Pulaski County. After receiving several Ag-related degrees, he ran the beef side of his family's operation. As a young man, he was very active in 4-H and FFA. He farmed full-time for roughly 15 years before becoming a professor with Virginia Tech. He taught there for 15 years while also maintaining his farm on a smaller scale. He's held a variety of high-level positions including County Farm Bureau President and President of the Virginia Cabinet's Association. He's active in several other associations as well. He's been an elected local officeholder for the past ten years. He worked with Governor Youngkin on his campaign and then was tapped by Youngkin to head up the Virginia Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS).

He spoke about Governor Youngkin's interest and involvement in agriculture. He stated that the Governor attended three Ag events last week alone. Youngkin wants to be clear that Virginia is back open for business and that Virginia provides a business-friendly environment. In addition to this, he shared several of the Governor's policies which include increasing revenue for farms and agricultural businesses and agricultural exports, providing full funding for best management practices for farmers, increasing the number of agricultural processing facilities (primarily slaughterhouses), and doubling the fund for Agriculture & Forestry Industries Development (AFID). He also shared that on April 7<sup>th</sup> the Governor will sign an Executive Order that focuses on waste reduction which replaces former Governor Northam's recycling order. One area that the Youngkin administration is focusing on is reducing food waste as that is the #1 component in landfills. Governor Youngkin's team hopes to develop a plan to reduce food waste in landfills by developing solutions to questions such as what can we do with food that is still fit for human consumption; that is not fit for human consumption but can be utilized for animal consumption; and what can we do with food cannot be consumed, but can be processed as fertilizer in some capacity. The Governor's office is looking for ways to reduce input prices that will be sustainable long-term.

The Commissioner then gave a brief history of VDACS. The department was founded in 1877 shortly after Civil War and Reconstruction. This time is important to note as people were faced with widespread hunger. The department was created to ensure that Virginians had an ample, safe, and reliable food supply. He stated they are more than just agriculture, but they also incorporate things such as food safety and testing. He referenced the weights and measures department within VDACS and the fact that they regulate all gas pumps in Virginia. He shared the three-part mission of VDACS; to promote economic development and agriculture in Virginia, provide consumer protection, and encourage environmental stewardship.

Commissioner Guthrie then opened the floor to board members and guests for questions.

Vice-Chairman, Dr. Gardner spoke first and stated that many farmers in attendance at the meeting are concerned that the VDACS lab in Lynchburg has been inoperable for the past two years. He asked what the plan was for moving forward with this facility that previously offered necropsy services to the public.

Commissioner Guthrie shared that VDACS runs four labs across Virginia; each facility has its own specialty area. The labs are in Lynchburg, Warrenton, Wytheville, and Harrisonburg. VDACS is also affiliated with the veterinarian school in Blacksburg which has laboratory facilities including necropsy services. He further acknowledged that the Lynchburg facility has not performed necropsy services since October 2020 when the pathologist there left, but that the facility is still open. The Lynchburg facility has four paid staff; however, one will be leaving soon. Commissioner Guthrie stated that this position will be refilled. VDACS is also in the process of hiring a pathologist who will be based out of the Harrisonburg office. It is possible that the new pathologist may be able to split time between Harrisonburg and Lynchburg; however, there is a determination yet to be made regarding this position. He did recognize that this area is an important beef and dairy center and there are opportunities to provide services here that have not been offered for some time.

Dr. Gardner asked whether the Youngkin administration would be offering pay grade increases for diagnosticians in the laboratories to help with retaining and recruiting personnel. The Commissioner stated that there is no budget yet, so he cannot speculate; however, he shared that it was a top priority. Commissioner Guthrie also said that the proposed budget also includes a salary increase for newly hired and existing veterinarians. A hiring bonus will also be offered. VDACS is aware of and recognizes the need for competitive salaries.

Another question was asked regarding what kind of long-term solutions may be available so that future administrations cannot undo policies written by the Youngkin administration. Commissioner Guthrie responded by saying that implementing high-quality programs that work well (like the AFID program from the McDonnell administration) is the best way to avoid that.

Dr. Gardner then asked if there was any sort of grant system available that may provide processors with some relief or resources to enlarge or improve their facilities to meet consumer demand. The Commissioner said that they are currently working on this right now with the USDA. The USDA has a program for existing slaughterhouses to expand. The Commissioner also stated that even with improvement and expansion, the slaughterhouses are struggling with workforce issues which is a separate concern. He hopes that this issue will resolve itself soon.

**(4) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

**a. March 2, 2022**

Chairman Powers asked for approval of the March 2, 2022, meeting minutes.

Mr. Baker noted a clerical error on the minutes from March 2<sup>nd</sup> which indicated that cattle would be received on Friday, April 21st. The corrected day is Thursday, April 21st.

**A motion was made by Mr. Baumgardner and a second by Mr. Newman to approve the meeting minutes. Adopted unanimously**

**(5) APPROVAL OF BYLAW AMENDMENTS**

Ms. Scheffel indicated that Ms. Bailey was under the weather but sent her [Mrs. Scheffel] with copies of the marked-up Bylaws to disseminate. Chairman Powers reminded the Board that these were changes the Board had agreed to and were made in accordance with the BOS and the county attorney. He further clarified that tonight the Board was voting on the amendments to send to BOS. Mr. Baker noted that under the meeting section of the Bylaws that there is a statement that reads, "meetings will not exceed 90 minutes." Chairman Powers indicated that 90 minutes is what the Board aims for, and he does not feel as though this needs to be removed at this time.

**A motion was made by Mr. Baumgardner and a second by Mr. Newman to approve the Bylaws. Adopted unanimously**

**(6) ADMINISTRATION REPORT**

Mr. Hiss noted two items. He stated that they are still working through the county budget. Some of the larger items they are trying to work through include health insurance, pay rates, the school budget request, fuel costs, etc. that have big movement within the county budget. The county government is not immune to inflationary pressures found throughout the state and country and Mr. Hiss stated that we are going to be paying more for goods and services as a result. He spoke briefly on the state of Bedford's economy and shared that the county is doing well. Despite inflation rates, sales and lodging taxes have increased considerably which generates adequate revenue to cover the rise in costs. Capital improvement projects include significant renovations at the Courthouse and replacing some Fire and Rescue vehicles and equipment.

With regards to Broadband, the county has been successful in receiving Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) grants. Between grant funds, county funds, and Internet Service Provider (ISP) funds, we have secured roughly \$60 million dollars in infrastructure funding for Broadband projects in Bedford over the next few years. We are working with three ISPs on this large-scale effort and those companies are Shentel, River Street, and Zitel. It is Mr. Hiss' hope that contract negotiations will wrap up on the project within the next 30 days. Once contracts are signed, the ISPs will have 24 months to complete the project. There is a tracking tool currently in the works where citizens can input their home addresses to see which service providers will be available in their areas. He also shared that Bedford County now has a Public Information Officer (PIO); her name is Shelley Basinger.

A question was asked about lodging taxes and the \$1 million dollar revenue received from that tax. The question was whether that money was being used to fund the tourism department, or whether it was being used to fill holes in the budget? Mr. Hiss indicated that the money is being used for both. A certain percentage of that money must go to the tourism department so that it is fully funded. Whatever is leftover is deposited into the general fund.

**(7) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT**

Business Retention and Expansion visits were made recently to KMR Aviation, Sam Moore Furniture, Georgia-Pacific, and Apocalypse. Ms. Bailey also attended the Virginia Economic Development Association (VEDA) conference where she learned about upcoming prospect activities and available incentives. Legislative activity related to economic development was also a topic for discussion. She will attend the Virginia Agriculture Development Officers (VADO) group meeting in Richmond on Tuesday, April 26<sup>th</sup>. Virginia's new Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Matt Lohr and his team, as well as other agency leaders will speak about current trends and issues in Agriculture. There will be a briefing of the 2022 General Assembly session and how the priorities of the Youngkin Administration relate to agriculture and forestry. Information on new VDACS resources and initiatives is also expected.

Mrs. Scheffel stated that the Bedford One program is still offering Career Conversations. In March, Tyler Paitsel, Maintenance Tech II with BRWA spoke with students about his position. In April, Kennedy Chase with Runk & Pratt will share the path her career has taken. It is possible that students may be able to start field trips again in May, but more information from the schools are needed before that determination is made.

An announcement was made that Senator Mark Warner will be in Bedford on Wednesday, April 11 from 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. at the Goode Rescue Squad regarding Broadband projects.

**(8) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT**

Mr. Baker stated that he is meeting with the new PIO this week. He is hopeful that she will be able to help promote the Ag industry and discuss ways she can help. He shared a reminder about the newest Tobacco Commission Grant and there will be a public information meeting tomorrow night at 6:30 p.m. to go over the basics of the program and to answer any questions. Mr. Baker also shared that the next Value-Added Cattle Sale will be held on Friday, April 22. The cattle market is relatively strong right now. The 4-H and FFA livestock show will be held on the first weekend in May; there will be no limitations on spectators for this event. The pigs will show on Friday, May 6 and everything else will show on Saturday, May 7.

He also shared the newest invasive insect to Virginia (Spotted Lanternfly, *Lycorma delicatula*) which has migrated down from Pennsylvania. This insect can be a serious economic agricultural pest to many horticulture crops including tree fruits and vineyards; however, it has a wide host range. There was a breeding population that was positively identified in Lynchburg last summer. As a result, there will be a monitoring program launched in the region this growing season. It is unlikely that the insect can be stopped, but if it is found early it can be better managed. The preferred host is the Paradise Tree (the Tree of Heaven). Wallet-sized cards were disseminated with information about this insect and a picture for reference.

Commissioner Joe Guthrie asked meeting participants to refer to pages 30-31 in the Virginia Agriculture Magazine located on each table. This article shared additional information on the Spotted Lanternfly which is thought to have arrived in the United States from China.

Mr. Baker shared information regarding registration details for the private well testing. The price for this service is \$60. For interested homeowners who purchase this service, they will need to pick up testing kits on June 15. The results should be available about a month after that. The test analyzes 14-16 water constituents and has not been offered since 2020. Families with limited resources can request reduced-cost kits; those will be sold for \$20. There will be 40-50 kits available through the Bedford office.

**(9) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU YOUNG FARMERS REPORT**

Mr. Sam Gardner stated that cookbooks were sold last month at their meeting; there are still some available for purchase. Tomorrow at 7:30 p.m. at the Extension Office, Will Hodges from USDA Wildlife Services will be a guest speaker discussing how to manage problem animals.

Amy Johnson, President of Bedford County Farm Bureau, stated they are currently focusing on advocacy for members. They are very committed to safety and have a safety advisory committee with the state office. Unfortunately, there were two fatalities already this spring involving farm equipment in Bedford. They are working hard to increase farm safety awareness and decrease the number of incidents. She also stated that Farm Bureau state President Wayne Pryor is working with state and federal officials to ascertain what can be done to aid in supply chain issues and how to reduce costs for farmers regarding fertilizer and fuel costs. American Farm Bureau is also in communication with the Biden administration to determine what to do regarding input costs for Virginia farmers. She stated they are holding a member appreciation event at end of the summer. In the fall, they will return to their regularly scheduled annual meeting.

Chairman Powers then provided the Board with a copy of the wrap-up from the legislation which included 30-38 different issues related to Ag, several of which are not settled yet.

Another topic of conversation was the new Farm Use tags, how to obtain them, and what the requirements are.

(10) **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**a. Education & Events**

1. **Upcoming events** – Ms. Powers stated there were FFA and 4-H contests in Chatham today and Ms. Tomlinson is with those students now. It is a very busy time with FFA and 4-H. Students have participated in several livestock competitions at the state level; including a 3-man team that finished 6<sup>th</sup> in the state livestock skill-a-thon competition. Additionally, Ag students at Smith Mountain and Staunton River recently hosted their Food for America program. This program invites 4<sup>th</sup> graders to go through about 20 different Ag exhibits that the students offer. Students have also actively participated in regional cattle working contests. One exciting piece of news is that a 4-H member from southwest Virginia wrote a bill that would give 4-H activities the same exemption rules as sports and FFA. Gov. Youngkin signed this bill into law this past Saturday morning.
2. **County Fair update** – Ms. Powers stated that the fair committee will be meeting over the next few weeks. Things are looking positive for a more traditional event. Ms. Powers hopes to have some concrete details to share at next month's meeting or the following month.
3. **School Ag Programs update** – Several Ag teachers, at the middle school level especially, are struggling with how to balance what is expected of them and what is required by law. This is because they are working from a standard contract that does not include additional time for hours beyond a basic contract. FFA is inter-curricular, which means that when the government provides a district with funding for specific programs, then teachers and schools must honor the fact that FFA is not optional when it comes to Agricultural Education. The county pays teachers stipends for coaching sports, but there are no stipends for FFA nor is there an extended contract for those teachers. This is significant because teachers are required to work into the summer to meet the requirements of the program, but they are not being compensated for this time. This results in those teachers facing a personal financial loss because they cannot afford to pay childcare expenses because they are not paid for hours worked beyond their contract. This is a local issue that needs to be addressed. Adding an additional 10-20 days to an Ag teacher's contract would aid with retention.

Ms. Powers agreed to draft something and work on some talking points and use that data to come up with some numbers. Chairman Powers advised that this is time-sensitive, especially since it is budget season. Vice-Chairman Don Gardner stated that if the Board needs to do something in an official capacity to make this happen, he suggested that they do. That said, Chairman Powers also stated that if a special meeting were needed, it would be arranged. Ms. Powers said she would get something to the Board next week. Mr. Hiss stated that if there were some talking points, he would be happy to speak with the Superintendent of Schools as well.

**b. Marketing & Production** – Mr. Baumgardner had nothing new to report.

1. **Farmer's Market updates** – Mrs. McIntyre stated that there would be a market this week. April 30 is the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> season of the Forest Farmers Market. There will be a vendor meeting next week where weights and measures will be coming for the vendors that use them. She thanked Bedford County's Tourism Department for supporting her music program as they provided a scholarship for her. She advised the Board that classes are currently being offered by Virginia State University (VSU) in conjunction with Virginia Farmer's Market Association (VAFMA) to help new vendors learn best practices and the best ways to promote their products. She stated that May 7 is the beginning of the Bedford Market.

**c. Land Protection & Conservation** – Mr. Fellers stated that he received a postcard from Sun Co. Solar. The company received his address from a deed from the GIS. Mr. Hiss indicated that the GIS will undergo and upgrade very soon.

Ms. Powers stated that she received an email from a constituent in her district about tax evasion through land use. She spoke with Supervisor Tuck who stated that overall, the Commissioner of Revenue's office does a good job and there is no need to revisit the land use program. Mr. Hiss indicated that the Commissioner of Revenue's office works diligently and methodically regarding the land use tax.

Vice-Chairman Don Gardner shared a personal example of how the land use tax affected him directly and the steps he took to get it corrected.

**(11) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS**

Supervisor Mickey Johnson shared that inflation is on the rise and everyone can plant a garden at home. He asked if there is anything we can do to encourage people to grow their own food. He further questioned whether there was something like Victory Gardens or something similar the county can get involved in.

Mrs. McIntyre stated that the Society of St. Andrew has a program. Also, there is a church that comes to pick up food at the end of the market and that food goes directly to houses that same day; food does not sit around in a warehouse. Supervisor Johnson also noted that we do not want to be in competition with the Farmer's Market. Mrs. McIntyre will speak to the coordinator to see if she would be the point of contact for other churches.

Chairman Powers mentioned that Franklin County received a \$100,000 grant to work on their cannery. He also shared that was a similar grant available that closes May 15 and suggested that Bedford County look into applying for those funds.

Mrs. McIntyre shared that the Bedford cannery has antiquated equipment and that most people prefer to can at home. The trend now is to use glass over metal. This prompted a discussion about cannery options and ways to promote gardening, promote the Farmer's Market, and the potential for a food share program.

**(12) ADJOURNMENT**

**A motion was made by Mr. Baumgardner and a second by Mr. Newman to adjourn the April 6, 2022 meeting.**

**Adopted Unanimously**

**ADJOURN 9:12 pm**