Minutes

Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board
Peaks Conference Room at Falling Creek
1257 County Farm Rd. Bedford, VA 24523
Wednesday, September 2, 2026
7:30 p.m.

Present: Jeff Powers *(District 1; Chairman;* ***arrived 7:50****),* Matt Baumgardner *(District 2),* Ralph White *(District 4),* Melody Divers *(District 6),* Pete Fellers *(District 7),* Dorothy McIntyre *(At-Large),* Ken Newman *(At-Large),* Chuck Grove (*At-large*)

Staff Present: Pam Armstrong (*Economic Development Director*), Niki Feazell (*Administrative Assistant),* Justin Stauder *(Deputy County Administrator*

Guests: Mickey Johnson (*Board of Supervisors, District 1, Guest*), Bob Davis (*Board of Supervisors, District 6, Guest)*

Absent: Scott Baker (*Extension Office Director),* Don Gardner *(District 3; Vice Chairman),* Ethan Tanner *(District 5),* Sam Gardner *(At-Large),* Joshua Leamy *(At-Large)*

(1) CALL TO ORDER

Secretary Dorothy McIntyre called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m. Chairman Powers and Vice Chairman Dr. Don Gardner were not present.

(2) APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Secretary Dorothy McIntyre called for a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Matt Baumgardner moved, seconded by Ken Newman, agenda approved as presented unanimously by members present.

(3) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES – AUGUST 5, 2026

Secretary Dorothy McIntyre called for a motion to approve August 5, 2026, minutes. Matt Baumgardner moved to approve meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Ken Newman. Minutes approved unanimously by members present.

(4) ADMINISTRATION REPORT

- Deputy County Administrator Justin Stauder recognized the committee and community members involved in the recently held Bedford County Fair, noting the positive publicity generated by the effort.
- The Blue Ridge Bee Festival will return on September 12. The event continues to be one of the community's larger and more heavily attended events and has grown in popularity each year.
- Staff encouraged continued community participation and support for upcoming Parks & Recreation events.

(5) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

- Director Pam Armstrong provided updates for next year's Ag Tour event which is still in the preliminary stages but is expected to be larger than originally anticipated. Staff have been in discussions

with other localities, including Franklin County and Campbell County, which have expressed interest in participating.

- A meeting is scheduled for Friday to recap the current concept and identify additional partners. Parks & Recreation and Tourism are expected to be involved, with staff also exploring additional events and promotional support.
- Because no funding was included in the current budget for the event, staff are exploring options to develop the event without a dedicated budget and will determine next steps as planning progresses.

(6) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT

- Scott Baker was not available however; staff did provide updates.
- The Master Gardeners graduation is scheduled for September 3, 2026.
- Dorothy McIntyre shared information from a Penn State study on spotted lanternflies, which indicates the insects are attracted to certain plants, including milkweed, and may be affected by compounds in the plant's sap. Penn State is researching whether the plant could have potential applications for managing spotted lanternfly populations. The discussion noted the importance of distinguishing native plants from invasive species and concerns about introducing or encouraging plants that could create agricultural or environmental problems.

(7) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU YOUNG FARMERS REPORT

- The Young Farmers held an event on August 13 with strong participation and interest from young people. An informal group is being organized with its first meeting scheduled for September 10 at the Bedford office.
- The Farm Bureau Annual Meeting is scheduled for October 6 at 6:00 p.m. at Thaxton Baptist Church, with dinner at 7:00 p.m. Farm Bureau members interested in attending should contact the office for tickets.
- Farm Bureau members can also receive discounted admission to the State Fair. The event is well attended by Bedford County residents, including youth livestock exhibitors.

(8) COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Education & Events

i. Upcoming Events

- Livestock and Equine Show, September 5th-6th
- Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, October 6 at 6:00 p.m.
- Young Farmers meeting, September 10th, 2026
- The Blue Ridge Bee Festival, September 12th, 2026
- Liberty/Staunton River FFA Chapters Joint Tailgate, September 11th

ii. School Ag Programs update

- Ethan Tanner was unavailable, so the report provided by the county's agriculture advisors was presented by Chairman Powers. FFA chapters are beginning the school year with chapter leadership training at Falling Creek Park, where officers will participate in workshops led by state officers focused on leadership development and serving as positive role models.
- On September 11, the Liberty and Staunton River FFA chapters will hold a joint tailgate at Liberty High School before the football game to recruit new members and build connections among students throughout the county.
- Later in September, several chapters will compete in Virginia State FFA contests, including events such as junior forestry and tractor troubleshooting.
- The County Fair will hold a follow-up meeting later this month after the remaining livestock and horse shows. An official report will be provided at the October meeting.

iii. County Fair Report

- The Bedford County Fair was well received, with strong attendance and positive feedback. Staff recognized the Fair Board, Superintendent Mackenzie, Vice Superintendent Carolyn, and others for their work organizing and leading the event.
- The fair attracted visitors from outside the county, including a notable number from Lynchburg. It noted the strong community support and cooperation among local organizations, including churches and volunteers.

- A storm on Saturday evening required the fair to close temporarily, but the evacuation was handled safely and without significant disruption. Ride tickets purchased for Saturday were honored on Sunday, contributing to another strong attendance day.
- The next Fair meeting is scheduled for September 29 to review the event and discuss potential improvements for next year.
- The Bedford County Fair Horse and Livestock Show is scheduled for September 5–6 at Timber Ridge, featuring local youth and adult exhibitors with cattle, goats, and horses. Admission is free and the event is open to the public.
- Members discussed fair promotion through radio advertising and local media. Media Squatch provided an in-kind mini podcast and additional commercial airtime at no charge.

B. Marketing & Production

i. Farmer's Market updates

- Dorothy McIntyre spoke with the Montvale market coordinator following its final market of the season. The market increased from approximately 7 vendors, nearly doubling participation, and saw more than 100 customers in most markets. A reduced vendor fee in September appeared to help attract additional vendors. Mrs. McIntyre noted strong vendor sales and plans to continue the market next season.
- The Moneta market will continue offering produce, meat, and other agricultural products while expanding its artisan component. The market continues to build momentum, with vendors already expressing interest in participating next year Also working to improve visibility, including updated signage and graphics.
- Forest Farmers Market: The market has experienced significant growth, with approximately 2,500–2,600 visitors during two recent record-breaking markets. Holiday markets are planned for November and December, with current vendors receiving priority before additional vendors are added. Staff is coordinating with Parks & Recreation, the library, and the neighboring church to address parking needs.

C. Land Protection & Conservation

Nothing new to report.

D. Public Relations

- The PR committee met before the meeting to develop public relations priorities for the remainder of the year and begin planning for next year.
- The Bedford County Virginia Agriculture Facebook page gained 95 new followers over the past 28 days, with engagement increasing 150% and total views increasing 167%. A post highlighting the Bedford County Fair reached more than 39,000 views.
- The August podcast focused on tractor and farm safety, sharing the road with farm equipment, and being a good community neighbor, featuring Sheriff Miller, W.P. Johnson, Eric Johnson, Johnny & Melody Divers. The episode emphasized safe driving practices and reducing the risk of accidents involving farm equipment.
- The next podcast, scheduled for September 10, will feature Josh Leamy discussing young farmers and will include information about the upcoming Bee Festival.
- Melody Divers expressed appreciation to Media Squatch for providing podcast production as an in-kind service at no cost.
- Board members were encouraged and local farmers to submit farm information and photos for potential social media features and to refer other agricultural producers who may be interested in being highlighted.

(9) OTHER BUSINESS

Informational items

- On August 12, Chairman Powers presented Abby Salkowitz with a belt buckle on behalf of the Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board and the Board of Supervisors in recognition of her first-place finish among Bedford County youth for the Overall Excellence Award at the Central Virginia Livestock Show.
- 2026-2027 Doe Lottery information was discussed and flyers handed out for advertising.

Committee discussion

- No additional discussion

(10) ADJOURNMENT

- Chairman Powers stated no further business.

Adjourned
8:07 p.m.