

SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING

January 21, 2026

Blair County Convention Center, Altoona, PA

Convened: 10:00 A.M.

Adjourned: 11:10 A.M.

Members in Attendance:

Hon. Randy Bunch
Hon. Laura Burke
Mr. Jay Cessna
Mrs. Sharon Clapper
Hon. Pamela Tokar-Ickes (via Zoom)
Mr. Jim Foster
Hon. Scott Hunt
Hon. Keith Rager
Mr. Donald Rhodes III
Hon. David Kessling

Ms. Beth McGregor
Hon. Hervey Hann
Mr. Rick Strait
Hon. Jeff Thomas
Hon. J.R. Winck
Hon. Michael Stiles
Hon. Patrick Reeder
Hon. Brian Fochtman (via Zoom)
Ms. Erin Abel
Hon. Thomas Chernisky

Others in Attendance:

Mr. Steven Howsare
Mr. George Gvozdich Jr.
Mr. Zack Lee
Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski
Ms. Tina Taylor

Mr. Lee Slusser
Mrs. Rebecca Canavan
Mrs. Renee Best
Ms. Emily Hite

CALL TO ORDER

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Commissioner Hunt called on Mr. George Gvozdich, the Commission's General Counsel, to conduct the election of officers for 2026. Mr. Gvozdich explained that under SAP&DC's By-laws the positions of President and Vice-President must be filled by County Commissioners, and the positions of Treasurer and Secretary may be filled by any member of the Board of Directors.

Mr. Gvozdich then requested nominations for the position of SAP&DC President.

Commissioner Thomas nominated Commissioner Hunt for the position of SAP&DC President. The motion was seconded by Ms. McGregor. Hearing no further nominations, the position of SAP&DC President was declared as being filled by Commissioner Hunt through acclamation.

Mr. Gvozdich requested nominations for the position of SAP&DC Vice-President.

Commissioner Hann nominated Commissioner Bunch for the position of SAP&DC Vice President. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Clapper. Hearing no further nominations, the position of SAP&DC Vice-President was declared as being filled by Commissioner Bunch through acclamation.

Mr. Gvozdich requested nominations for the position of SAP&DC Treasurer.

Commissioner Thomas nominated Mr. Rhodes for the position of SAP&DC Treasurer. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bunch. Hearing no further nominations, the position of SAP&DC Treasurer was declared as being filled by Mr. Rhodes through acclamation.

Mr. Gvozdich requested nominations for the position of SAP&DC Secretary.

Commissioner Hann nominated Commissioner Winck for the position of SAP&DC Secretary. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster. Hearing no further nominations, the position of SAP&DC Secretary was declared as being filled by Commissioner Winck through acclamation.

At this time, Mr. Gvozdich turned the meeting over to Commissioner Hunt.

EXECUTIVE, FINANCE, PERSONNEL COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS FOR 2026

In accordance with the Commission's By-Laws, nine members are appointed to each of SAP&DC's three Standing Committees: Executive, Finance, and Personnel. The appointments were presented, and Commissioner Hunt asked if there were any changes or revisions.

A motion was entered by Mr. Strait to approve the Standing Committee members, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hann and was unanimously approved.

DESIGNATION OF SAP&DC ADVISORY COMMITTEES FOR 2026

A list of SAP&DC's Advisory Committees and proposed members for each of the Advisory Committees was presented for approval by the SAP&DC Board of Directors.

Commissioner Hann stated that Mr. Thomas Peppernick has been hired as Fulton County's new Planning Director and will serve on the PAC and RTTC.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Winck to approve the Advisory Committee designations and appointments for calendar year 2026, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Clapper and was unanimously approved.

MINUTES, NOVEMBER 19, 2025

A motion was entered by Commissioner Bunch to approve the Finance Committee and Board of Directors minutes from the November 19, 2025 meetings, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Stiles and was unanimously approved.

FINANCE REPORT

Mrs. Rebecca Canavan, Director of Finance, presented the Accounts Payable list of invoices that were paid in November and December in addition to the General Fund Ending Balance. The Bank Account Summaries include the General Account, Money Market, LED, and SBFF accounts. The influx of funds in the Money Market account was due to getting funding back into the EARN and WIOA programs; the Money Market account was then reimbursed.

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

SAP&DC BUSINESS LENDING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Ms. Tina Taylor, Director of Business Lending Services, provided an overview of SAP&DC's lending program. The SAP&DC Business Lending Program operates with ten loan funds available to package loan requests. Currently there are 12 loans committed totaling \$2.9 million in loan funds, and they should close by the end of 2026. Most of these are construction loans.

Ms. Taylor provided a rundown of how dollars are committed and reviewed information on the total dollar amount committed, amount of available cash, and net funds that are available. There is approximately \$1.92 million in loan funds available for upcoming loans that will be packaged. SAP&DC's current portfolio has 166 loans with a principal outstanding of \$22.9 million and a delinquent amount of \$177,973. The delinquent loans are older than nine years old and have not been written off by PIDA yet, therefore they continue to show on the aging report.

Ms. Taylor shared that SAP&DC applied for \$1 million in USDA funds to get additional funds as there are a lot of loans in the pipeline for this year. Unfortunately, SAP&DC was not funded due to receiving a lower score compared to other applicants. The minimum funding score in the fourth quarter was 110; SAP&DC's score was 75. Some items that kept the score lower and were out of SAP&DC's control were Pennsylvania's unemployment rate being below the national average, and SAP&DC's service area had a higher median household income.

Ms. Taylor reviewed the scoring sheet and requirements in addition to changes that will be incorporated to increase SAP&DC's score for the January submission. The intermediary contribution will be increased to 55% or \$275,000 contribution which will add 15 points toward the score, and reducing the loan size to \$500,000 will gain 20 points toward the score. These changes will increase SAP&DC's score to 110 to hopefully get the USDA loan.

Ms. Taylor then reviewed pending projects for 2026 which include agricultural processing, manufacturing expansion, farm real estate purchases, and poultry farm expansions. The majority will be PIDA loans and some SAP&DC funds may be utilized.

Mr. Steven Howsare shared that he recently met with Representative Jesse Topper to discuss raising the lending cap from \$400,000 to \$1 million and is hopeful that it will be raised some time next year.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski, Director of Workforce Development, shared that the Workforce Development Board remains in a strong financial position for this fiscal year. This stability allows SAP&DC to continue delivering high-quality Title I services and to move confidently into the upcoming procurement cycle which has been suggested by the Commonwealth during monitoring.

Mrs. Sklodowski reported that the Executive Committee met on January 13th for its regularly scheduled meeting. During that meeting multiple policies and procedures were reviewed and updated in preparation for the release of the Request for Proposals for both the One-Stop Operator and Title I Services within the Southern Alleghenies region. The RFP will be released on February 11th, and the bidder's conference is scheduled for March 30th. This timeline ensures that interested applicants have the information and support they need to fully participate in the process. SAP&DC's focus remains on selecting strong partners who will support high quality service delivery and positive outcomes for the workforce in our region. Our current providers are phenomenal and do an excellent job for our region. The last time SAP&DC issued an RFP was in 2014; it is supposed to be done every four years.

Mr. Howsare stated that last year there was a new bill that was close to passing and it might have changed everything. He wanted the Board to be aware of the RFP process/status due to past controversies when SAP&DC's providers changed.

Mr. Jay Cessna shared that the Bedford County CareerLink is renting space from the Bedford County Technical Center and it is working out very well and has been successful.

Mrs. Sharon Clapper shared that during COVID, the PA CareerLink® systems never had a day when services were interrupted. The PACareerLink® centers are very strong and are always looking at additional services to meet the needs of our clients.

Mrs. Sklodowski will continue to keep the Board informed and engaged throughout the procurement process. The focus remains on selecting strong partners who will support high-quality service delivery and positive outcomes for job seekers and employers across the region.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 12372 PROJECTS

Mr. Lee Slusser, Director of Planning and Community Development, 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 Kessler to approve the Projects Under Executive Order 12372, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Thomas and was unanimously approved.

THE RURAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATION (RHT) PROGRAM

Mr. Slusser provided information on the Rural Health Transformation Program which is a new initiative from the Federal Government to fund rural healthcare which SAP&DC will have a role in. The program aims to improve healthcare, workforce development, and technology in rural areas. There will be \$50 billion to be allocated over 5 years; each state had to apply for their share based on their rural population. Pennsylvania was awarded \$193 million from the RHT Program which will then be distributed to grant applicants by PREP region.

Mr. Slusser provided information on the setting up of a Rural Care Collaborative (RCC). Each PREP region will create a RCC in the first year, and they must meet quarterly starting by this fall. Each RCC will be comprised of a prescribed roster; they will receive and decide on grant applications and identify priorities for their region. The Department of Health will provide a list of approved projects based on regional needs, how much of an allotment can be spent annually in each category, quarterly/annual progress reports, a funding allocation formula, and they will hire the staff. As the RCCs mature, they will take the lead in setting priorities and guiding implementation of statewide initiatives.

Mr. Slusser reviewed approved uses of RHT funds:

- providing payments to healthcare providers
- promoting measurable interventions to improve chronic disease management
- providing training and technical assistance for the development of technology enabled solutions that improve care delivery in rural hospitals
- recruiting and retaining clinical workforce talent to rural areas for a minimum of five years
- providing technical assistance designed to improve efficiency and improve patient health outcomes
- assisting rural communities to right size their health care delivery systems
- supporting access to opioid disorder treatment services

Mr. Slusser shared that the next steps include RCCs continuing to plan together, and names and contacts will be needed for the Southern Alleghenies RCC.

SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES COMPREHENSIVE AND GREENWAYS & OPEN SPACE NETWORK PLAN PROJECT UPDATE

Mr. Slusser summarized the existing plans and provided an update on revising the regional Comprehensive Plan and the Greenways & Open Space Network Plan.

- The Southern Alleghenies Comprehensive Plan, Alleghenies Ahead, was adopted in 2018. SAP&DC applied for \$180,000 from DCED MAP on May 11, 2016. Each county paid \$30,000 for their local share to match, the total cost was \$360,000.
- The Southern Alleghenies Greenways and Open Space Network Plan, Connections in our Landscape, was adopted in May 2007. Applicants from our region are no longer given full compliance points by DCNR because they consider this plan to be outdated. The purpose of this plan was to set up and prioritize the outdoor conservation and recreation projects that the region wanted to seek.

A scope of work has been drafted for both plans, and bids were solicited from consultants.

Mr. Slusser reviewed recommendations from DCNR and DCED regarding the cost and match needed for the GTRP Program. SAP&DC applied to GTRP on May 28, 2015 for \$212,500 to be matched with \$37,500 in local funds. Unfortunately, this application was not selected for funding.

In order to move forward, DCED MAP applications are due April 1st, and DCNR C2P2 applications are due April 30th with each program requiring a 50% local match. The average price for a six-county comprehensive plan is \$374,628, and the price for a six-county greenways plan is \$267,971. Assuming the applications are successful, each county's cost share will be roughly \$31,219 for a six-county comprehensive plan and \$22,331 for a six-county greenways plan which can be spread across two budget years beginning in 2027. If each county were to prepare their own comprehensive plan and/or greenways plan, the cost would be substantially higher. There are no administration fees to SAPDC for submitting the applications.

Mr. Slusser is seeking direction from each county on whether to proceed with applications to support updating the comprehensive plan and/or the greenways plan. If an application is desired, SAP&DC will need an adopted resolution authorizing the application and committed match, letters of support, and consistency letters from the county planning commissions.

The Commissioners will discuss with their respective counties and advise Mr. Slusser of their decision on whether to move forward with the applications by February 6th. Mr. Slusser can then determine the overall cost once he knows which counties are interested in moving forward. Resolutions will be sent out with the exact cost at that time.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Thomas provided an update on Alleghenies Broadband, Inc. (ABI) and shared that there are now four or five towers open between Bedford and Fulton Counties. There was a slight delay due to the government shutdown and getting things approved, but projects are moving along now.

ABI was preliminary awarded \$82 million for the six-county region in addition to Fayette and Indiana Counties for fiber optics to the home. This will be an open access network which means that any provider can lease fiber in the network. All of these companies will be competing in the same region for that business so the cost should be very cheap.

Blair County received a \$5 million grant through Crowsnest where they are currently running fiber to the home. All of the tower sites should be up by the end of the year in Fulton County; Commissioner Bunch has been very instrumental and helpful to ABI.

Commissioner Hunt asked members to complete and return the Annual Affirmation of Compliance and Disclosure Form as soon as possible.

The next meeting of the SAP&DC Board of Directors is scheduled for Wednesday, March 18, 2026, and will begin at 10:00 A.M.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 11:10 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. J.R. Winck

Secretary