

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING  
March 18, 2026  
Commission Office**

**Convened: 10:00 A.M.**

**Adjourned: 11:25 A.M.**

**Members in Attendance:**

Hon. Deb Baughman (via Zoom)  
Ms. Beth McGregor (via Zoom)  
Mr. Jay Cessna  
Hon. Brian Fochtman (via Zoom)  
Hon. Pamela Tokar-Ickes (via Zoom)  
Hon. Mike Stiles  
Hon. Scott Hunt  
Mrs. Sharon Clapper

Hon. Randy Bunch  
Hon. Hervey Hann  
Mr. Rick Strait (via Zoom)  
Hon. Patrick Reeder  
Hon. J.R. Winck (via Zoom)  
Mr. Donald Rhodes III  
Hon. Jeff Thomas

**Others in Attendance:**

Mr. Steven Howsare  
Mr. George Gvozdich Jr.  
Mr. Zack Lee  
Ms. Emily Hite  
Ms. Tina Taylor  
Mr. Ephraim Zimmerman

Mr. Lee Slusser  
Mrs. Rebecca Canavan  
Mrs. Renee Best  
Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski  
Ms. Jane Menchyk

**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 and introductions were made.

**MINUTES, JANUARY 21, 2026 and March 3, 2026**

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to approve the January 21, 2026 Board of Directors meeting minutes and the March 3, 2026 Personnel Committee meeting minutes, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bunch and was unanimously approved.

**FINANCE REPORT**

Mrs. Rebecca Canavan, Director of Finance, reported that the 2027 budget has been started and will be presented at the May 27<sup>th</sup> Board meeting for review and approval.

Mrs. Canavan shared that a Request for Proposal will be sent out for audit firms due to Maher Duessel's contract ending with the 2026 fiscal year. If anyone has suggestions for a firm, they are to let Mrs. Canavan know. She will need two volunteers from the Finance Committee to review and score the proposals. This process should be completed before the November 18<sup>th</sup> Board meeting to allow for formal approval.

Mrs. Canavan presented the Accounts Payable list of invoices that were paid in January and February in addition to the General Fund Ending Balance. The difference in the Money Market account is due to waiting for receivables to come in for reimbursement.

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

### **SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**

Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski, Director of Workforce Development, shared that the workforce board met on February 10<sup>th</sup> at the Hampton Inn. There was a full agenda that included final policy review and adjustments needed before the RFP can be released. The timeline has been adjusted to mid-April for release; a review group has been set up and they are eager to get started.

Mrs. Sklodowski reported that the budget was also reviewed at the meeting and it continues to reflect a responsible and stable financial position across all major funding streams. Workforce expenditures to date show consistent utilization across each Title I program that aligns with meeting the end of year fiscal targets. She continues to monitor expenditures to ensure the full appropriate use of funds within the program deadlines. The current reserve funding places SAP&DC in a strong position to sustain operations into the next fiscal year. However, youth funding is low. In speaking with state staff, Mrs. Sklodowski was informed that they do not know when the next youth allocation will be released or what the local amounts will be. Mrs. Sklodowski was able to apply for unspent PY24 funds and requested \$150,000 in additional youth funds in the event the new allocation is delayed. She is hopeful that the request will be approved.

TANF projected allocations were received for 2026, and SAP&DC will be receiving \$892,291 for TANF youth funding. This is an additional \$69,000, or an 8.5 percent increase from 2025.

Mrs. Sklodowski shared that every year the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association has a conference in Hershey, and this year's conference will be special for the Southern Alleghenies Region. Mr. Tyler Dorsey, a WIOA out of school youth program participant, will be receiving the Governor's Award for Individual Achievement. Mr. Dorsey is from Blair County and was nominated by staff who supported him.

Mr. Carter Cerully, Blair County CareerLink® Business Services Coordinator, has been chosen to hold a workshop for AI Robotics at the conference.

Mrs. Sklodowski reported that their computer replacement schedule is one year overdue, and several systems are no longer meeting operational needs. She reviewed the purchase details and price quotes: five laptops with docking stations costing \$7,184.20 and one surface pro costing \$1,465.48 for a combined total of \$8,649.68. This purchase was approved by the state.

A motion was entered by Mr. Rhodes to concur with the authorization to purchase new computer equipment for Workforce Development staff, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Thomas and was unanimously approved.

### **BUSINESS LENDING SERVICES**

Ms. Tina Taylor, Director of Business Lending Services, presented and reviewed the loan application and loan modification that were submitted and reviewed by the Commission's Loan Review Committee.

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 Mrs. Clapper to concur with the actions taken by the Loan Review Committee, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Winck and was unanimously approved.

### **BUSINESS LENDING JOB CLASSIFICATION CHANGE**

Mr. Steven Howsare, Executive Director, reported that the Personnel Committee had a Zoom meeting on March 3<sup>rd</sup> to review the proposed job classification change for Ms. Lisa Harten, Loan Fund Coordinator. A copy of the updated job description and SAP&DC's Classification Policy was included in the meeting packet.

During Ms. Harten's leave over the summer, a review of her workload revealed that she was doing more work than anybody was aware of. This justifies advancing her position to the next pay scale due to her extensive responsibilities and workload. The change would be effective July 1, 2026 when the new budget goes into effect. The Personnel Committee made a recommendation to approve the reclassification.

A motion was entered by Mr. Cessna to approve the job classification change for the Business Lending Loan Fund Coordinator position from an A1 Pay Grade to a P2 Pay Grade to be effective July 1, 2026. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Reeder and was unanimously approved.

### **EXECUTIVE ORDER 12372 PROJECTS**

Mr. Lee Slusser, Director of Planning & 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 Stiles to approve the Projects Under Executive Order 12372, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bunch and was unanimously approved.

### **SAP&DC MINI-GRANT PROGRAM RESOLUTION**

Mr. Slusser reported that SAP&DC plans to apply to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PaDCNR) Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) for \$150,000 to fund round 11 of the SAP&DC Mini-Grant Program. The current match requirement is 20%; this is down from 50% the previous year. The SAP&DC Mini-Grant Program is used to fund various smaller recreation and conservation projects throughout the region on the recommendation of the Planning Advisory Committee. The applications are administered and reviewed by SAP&DC staff, and the Board makes the final decision on the projects that get funded.

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to approve the application to the PaDCNR for \$150,000 to fund the SAP&DC Mini-Grant Program, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Thomas and was unanimously approved.

### **WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVANCY PRESENTATION**

Mr. Slusser shared that the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy has asked SAP&DC to apply for a \$200,000 C2P2 grant from PaDCNR to be matched against \$200,000 from WPC Natural Heritage Core funds. This grant will be used to update the Natural Heritage Inventory for the Southern Alleghenies region.

Mr. Slusser introduced Mr. Ephraim Zimmerman and Ms. Jane Menchyk from the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy who provided information on the PA Natural Heritage Program.

Mr. Zimmerman shared that there is a need for a Natural Heritage Inventory update for each county in our region. The Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PNHP) is made up of 25 field scientists and data management specialists who collaborate with the Fish and Boat Game Commission and DCNR to provide environmental review services which is a necessary aspect of permitting in PA. The program gathers and provides information on the location and status of important plants, animals, natural communities, and geologic features to inform environmental and conservation decisions. In addition to the environmental review activity, their staff are out in woods and water collecting data for studies.

Mr. Zimmerman provided program details. PNHP is part of the Natural Heritage Network that is made up of more than 90 independent member programs that focus on at risk species and ecosystems. PNHP works to prioritize inventory in the most significant places as indicated by the historic occurrences of rare species and natural communities. This information is used to guide proactive conservation activities. Some of the work behind inventories include permitted field surveys, county inventories that are available to the public, and providing detailed maps for local and regional planners. The Natural Heritage Inventory Report includes all species found in each natural heritage area organized by township. The Pennsylvania Conservation Explorer is a tool that developers use to check for potential conflicts in their development projects.

Mr. Zimmerman reported that information about proactive conservation in our region is becoming outdated. The proposed project is to apply for a C2P2 grant in the amount of \$200,000 to fund the update for the Southern Alleghenies region. It will be a three-year project executable across county lines to update all of the Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and develop new ones. They will be working with SAP&DC staff to meet data needs with minimal administrative impact on staff. The projected cost is \$400,000 which includes a \$200,000 match from WPC. The grant proposal is due in April 2026. If funded, priority targets will be identified immediately upon approval. Field work will take place from 2027 to 2029 with a target completion of 2029/2030 for the project. Updates will be given to SAP&DC throughout the project. The Pennsylvania Conservation Explorer tool will also be updated to include all of the latest information.

Ms. Menchyk provided information on the Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape (LHCL) that collaborates with partner organizations to foster conservation and stewardship of the natural and built environments to help promote our communities. The Leadership Team is made up of the Conservation, Outdoor Activities, Visitor Experience, and Sustainability Working Groups. If anyone is interested in any of these categories, please let Ms. Menchyk know.

Ms. Menchyk covered LHCL's footprint: 2.3 million acres, 220 municipalities, 677,118 residents, 6,000 miles of streams, 5 national park service sites, 9 state parks, 76,000 acres of state forest, and 87,000 acres of State Game Lands. The Landscape Teams work projects with priorities that include conserving land for parks, trails, and critical habitat, protecting watersheds and greenways, creating walking and biking trails, and protecting habitats. The Greenways, Trails, and Protected Lands Study was just completed and one of the recommendations was to help to support the updating of the Somerset and Cambria County Natural Heritage Inventories.

Ms. Menchyk shared upcoming events if anyone is interested in attending. The Annual Gathering will be on November 6<sup>th</sup>, and the Western PA Trails and Greenways Summit will be August 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

Commissioner Stiles asked whether publicizing endangered species might further jeopardize them.

Mr. Zimmerman stated that with the county inventory, the protection is because the size of the Natural Heritage Area is enough to protect that species. There are some species so rare that they are not listed in the county inventory or are listed as a sensitive species.

Commissioner Tokar-Ickes asked if the Allegheny Mountain Tunnel removal project is on their radar, noting that Somerset County would like to discuss the project with those involved in the landscape initiative. It is a major project that has been a 30-year goal of the PA Turnpike Commission to physically remove a large portion of Allegheny Mountain to bypass the tunnels. Ms. Menchyk expressed interest in further discussion to ensure all parties have the necessary information and understand potential project impacts.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Tokar-Ickes to approve applying for a \$200,000 C2P2 grant from PaDCNR to update the Natural Heritage Inventory for the Southern Alleghenies region, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Reeder and was unanimously approved.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Thomas to go into Executive Session to discuss personnel issues. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bunch and was unanimously approved.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Reeder to come out of Executive Session. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Clapper and was unanimously approved.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

- Next SAP&DC Board of Directors meeting: May 27, 2026 at 10:00 A.M. The Finance Committee will meet prior, beginning at 9:15 A.M. to review the budget.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:25 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. J.R. Winck

Secretary