

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING  
May 27, 2026  
Commission Office**

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

**Adjourned: 11:10 A.M.**

**Members In Attendance:**

Mr. Jim Foster  
Hon. Randy Bunch  
Hon. Laura Burke  
Hon. Patrick Reeder  
Mrs. Sharon Clapper  
Hon. J.R. Winck (via Zoom)  
Hon. Scott Hunt  
Hon. David Kessling  
Hon. Jeff Thomas  
Hon. Deb Baughman (via Zoom)

Ms. Beth McGregor  
Hon. Mike Stiles  
Mr. Jay Cessna  
Mr. Rick Strait (via Zoom)  
Hon. Pamela Tokar-Ickes (via Zoom)  
Hon. Scott Walls  
Mr. Donald Rhodes III  
Hon. Hervey Hann  
Hon. Brian Fochtman

**Others In Attendance:**

Mr. Steven Howsare  
Mrs. Rebecca Canavan  
Mr. George Gvozdoch, Jr.  
Ms. Emily Hite  
Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski

Mrs. Sherry Socie  
Ms. Tina Taylor  
Mr. Lee Slusser  
Mrs. Renee Best

**CALL TO ORDER**

Commissioner Hunt, 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.

Commissioner Hunt welcomed Mrs. Sherry Socie as the new Business Development Director and introductions were made.

**MINUTES, MARCH 18, 2026**

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to approve the March 18, 2026, Board of Directors meeting minutes, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Cessna and was unanimously approved.

## **SAP&DC FISCAL YEAR 2026 - 2027 OPERATIONAL BUDGET**

Mrs. Rebecca Canavan, Director of Finance, referred to the Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Comparison Report that contained a comparison between the FY26 and FY27 budgets and provided an overview. The FY27 budget is down by \$1.5 million or roughly a 14% decrease. This decline is mainly due to the loss of the \$2.2 million Smart Grant. Direct Salaries decreased by 2%, while Fringe Benefits increased by 31% due to higher health insurance costs. The budget also includes a 2% staff pay increase.

Mrs. Canavan reviewed the projected revenues and expenses for each program. For the Workforce Program, WIOA funding decreased by approximately \$400,000 this year compared to a reduction last year of \$800,000. The EARN Program is level funding so there was no change. The Business Development Program is losing the Alleghenies Marketplace in June, so there is no funding budgeted for that program. Four programs in the Planning and Community Development Program were not renewed resulting in a loss of approximately \$1.2 million in budget funding. SAP&DC's in-house IT employee is retiring at the end of June; beginning July 1<sup>st</sup> SAP&DC's IT support will be handled by contracted IT services.

Mr. Steven Howsare, Executive Director, noted that the loss of the Smart Grant significantly affected SAP&DC. A second round of funding was expected, but Congress passed the budget in February and the funding was rescinded. He shared that SAP&DC had to furlough two employees. One employee was furloughed after CMAP funding ended, and a second employee was furloughed after Mr. Zachary Lee returned to his former role as Community & Economic Development Program Manager.

Commissioner Hunt stated that a recommendation was made by the Finance Committee that met prior to approve SAP&DC's Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Operational Budget, as presented.

A motion was entered by Mr. Foster to approve SAP&DC's Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Operational Budget, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Rhodes and was unanimously approved.

## **FINANCE REPORT**

Mrs. Canavan presented the Accounts Payable list of invoices that were paid in March and April in addition to the General Fund Ending Balance. She noted that there was nothing unusual that was paid; the Bank Account Summaries include the normal operations of the Commission.

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

## **REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR AUDIT SERVICE FOR FY 2027-2029**

Mrs. Canavan referred to the RFQ documents included in the meeting packet and provided an overview of the RFQ process and associated timelines. A legal notice will be published in the *Johnstown Tribune-Democrat* and the *Altoona Mirror* on August 18<sup>th</sup> and August 19<sup>th</sup> with a submission deadline of September 30<sup>th</sup>. The RFQ will also be posted on the SAP&DC website.

Mrs. Canavan reported that the RFQ guidelines were reviewed by SAP&DC's legal counsel prior to updates and final recommendations being made. The scoring evaluation panel will consist of five members: three Finance Committee members and two SAP&DC staff members.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Walls to approve the Request for Qualifications for Audit Service for FY 2027 - 2029, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Rhodes and was unanimously approved.

## **EARN PROGRAM**

Ms. Emily Hite, EARN Program Director, provided an update on the EARN Program and the approved 2026/2027 budget. The program received level funding for the new fiscal year. Contracted services' amounts listed on the summary are preliminary and final approval is scheduled for the June 25<sup>th</sup> LMC Meeting.

Ms. Hite shared that enrollment continues to rise across all six counties. Year to date referrals total 489 (391 TANF recipients and 98 SNAP referrals) compared to 413 referrals received last program year. SNAP participation continues to increase due to federal participation requirement changes that happened in 2025.

There are currently 189 active participants. This total includes 157 TANF recipients and 32 SNAP referrals. The program has successfully assisted 139 participants in obtaining new employment since July. Job placements consist of home health care jobs, Certified Nursing Assistants, retail, and housekeeping.

Ms. Hite reported that the new Program Monitoring position that was created in October 2025 has completed five subcontractor reviews since January. There were no major deficiencies found with the subcontractors. There were some recommendations made to strengthen subcontractor compliance and consistency. The program monitor has also started internal case file reviews to ensure SAP&DC documentation and data entry aligns with state requirements.

Ms. Hite shared that the EARN program has been invited by Cambria County Domestic Relations to help pilot a program for non-custodial SNAP recipients who face challenges making timely child support payments; this pilot began in April.

## **SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**

Mrs. Jennifer Sklodowski, Director of Workforce Development, shared that she has been enrolled in a fellowship through the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association that was focused on workforce policy and advocacy. On April 16<sup>th</sup> she participated in a graduation ceremony, where she also presented her fellowship group's final capstone on Pennsylvania Act 53 of 2020. Through this experience she gained valuable training in policy systems, thinking, and effective advocacy strategies, which is extremely important as our region has an aging population and shrinking workforce. The conversations around workforce development need to broaden in order to meet employer demand and sustain economic growth. Unfortunately, WIOA has not been reauthorized yet and is expected to be delayed until 2028. This provides a good opportunity for thoughtful discussions to take place around re-entry and recognizing justice-involved individuals as a viable talent pool to help address workforce shortages.

Mrs. Sklodowski stated that on May 1<sup>st</sup> SAP&DC received their projected allocations that revealed a \$400,000 loss for the region compared to a loss of over \$800,000 last year. These are significant reductions that require careful planning and difficult decisions. When WIOA is reauthorized in 2028, the 50% mandate for training will remain in place. This requirement forces a shift in how workforce development programs are looked at moving forward.

Mrs. Sklodowski reported that the workforce board met on May 12<sup>th</sup> in Somerset where discussions focused on funding losses, potential provider reductions, possible staff impacts, and a deeper review of PA CareerLink® costs moving forward. There was also discussion on future opportunities, including a mobile unit to better serve rural areas. Mrs. Sklodowski has asked providers to submit financial justifications for Title I staffing to support SAP&DC's fiscal analysis.

Regarding SAP&DC's Request for Proposals for provider services, Mrs. Sklodowski stated that these were released on May 12<sup>th</sup> with submissions due on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. A bidders' conference was held to support applicants, and the only proposals received were from the current providers: Employment and Training, Goodwill Industries, and Tableland. Based on that response, contracts have been prepared with an effective date of July 1, 2026.

A motion was entered by Mrs. Clapper to approve the provider services contracts for Employment and Training, Goodwill Industries, and Tableland with an effective date of July 1, 2026. The motion was seconded by Mr. Cessna and was unanimously approved.

Mrs. Sklodowski noted that moving forward, she is actively working to build partnerships with other workforce areas to pursue joint grant opportunities and bring additional resources into the region. This

includes exploring re-entry grants to expand workforce participation. She is also looking into manufacturing initiatives and a U.S. Department of Commerce pilot program focused on AI upskilling.

Mr. Cessna shared that relocating the Bedford County PA CareerLink® into the Bedford County Technical Center has been very beneficial. The Technical Center is in the process of an expansion due to additional program offerings in Advanced Manufacturing and other areas.

Commissioner Fochtman shared that the Somerset County Vocational School is becoming more in demand with positions getting competitive. He added that in terms of reentry, it would be beneficial if vocational schools were able to get more developed to help give students access to good marketable skills. He emphasized the importance of reaching students early before they make poor choices and reentry is needed.

Discussion focused on reentry and the need to secure funding for reentry efforts in the region. Commissioner Kessling, drawing on his corrections experience, noted that the state system offers many trade training opportunities. He added that a criminal record can still present challenges, even when employers are willing to hire, and emphasized the need for a realistic approach. Further discussion on this topic was encouraged.

Commissioner Hunt suggested that Mrs. Sklodowski contact the Cambria County warden for information on a successful reentry grant focused on employment, housing, and related support services.

### **BUSINESS LENDING SERVICES REPORT**

Ms. Tina Taylor, Director of Business Lending Services, presented and reviewed the actions taken by the Loan Review Committee. Ms. Taylor reported that there were four projects approved since the last Board of Directors meeting.

Ms. Taylor then presented and reviewed the list of applications and projects in detail. All applications were approved unanimously by the Loan Review Committee, as presented, and are now presented to the Board of Directors for concurrence.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Bunch to concur with the actions taken by the Loan Review Committee, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Tokar-Ickes and was unanimously approved.

## **PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM UPDATE**

Mr. Lee Slusser, Director of Planning and Community Development, presented an update on current regional activities and initiatives:

- Rural Health Transformation Challenge: Mr. Howsare is collaborating with LDDAPA to define SAP&DC's role in the Rural Care Collaborative.
- Appalachian Regional Commission Projects:
  - AD projects - Updates were provided on six active initiatives that include funding requests for the New Enterprise Rural Electric Cooperative (\$678,745), the Broad Top Area Medical Center (\$997,053), East Providence Rising (\$139,327), Bedford County Business Park II (\$1,299,691), the Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum (\$250,000), and the Fulton County Medical Center workforce initiative (\$250,000).
  - POWER: The NOSA dropped May 5<sup>th</sup>, with letters of intent due May 22<sup>nd</sup> and the final applications are due July 8<sup>th</sup>.  
Currently working with the Altoona City Authority, the Bottle Works, and Hyndman Area Health Center.
  - INSPIRE: Letters of intent are due May 12<sup>th</sup>, and final applications are due June 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - ARISE: Working on a \$190,000 ARISE planning application (\$90,000 match) with Tri-County and Region 8 (Petersburg, WV).
- Alleghenies Ahead Update: The DCED MAP application is due September 30<sup>th</sup>.
- Natural Heritage Inventory: \$200,000 application matched.
- SARPO: TIP hearings wrapped up May 14<sup>th</sup> and May 22<sup>nd</sup>. At the June RTTC/TRCC meetings, the TIP is scheduled to be adopted.

## **UDNI PROPOSAL REVIEW**

Mr. Slusser reported that Mr. Alan Montgomery, IT support for SAP&DC, will retire in June 2026.

In preparation for this transition, Mr. Slusser and Mr. Montgomery met with interested vendors to review the organization's scope of work and technical support requirements. Multiple proposals were submitted and included in the meeting packet for review. Upon evaluation, UDNI submitted the lowest bid. Their proposal outlining month-to-month IT support services for the Commission was reviewed for Board approval.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Thomas to approve UDNI's IT and Network Support Proposal, as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. McGregor and was unanimously approved with Mr. Rhodes abstaining.

## **EXECUTIVE ORDER 12372 PROJECTS**

Mr. Slusser 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.

Discussion centered on the Chesapeake Bay Project, focusing on whether any pushback had been directed at the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission regarding water quality impacts. Mr. Foster inquired whether SAP&DC could directly contact Chesapeake Bay representatives to raise these environmental concerns. Mr. Slusser will amend the Executive Order letter to include a note detailing the water quality concerns.

A motion was entered by Commissioner Bunch to approve the Projects Under Executive Order 12372, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kessler and was unanimously approved.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Howsare provided an update regarding the Rural Health Transformation Challenge. Originally it was reported that SAP&DC would hire the employee, but they will now report directly to DCED and be physically housed at SAP&DC's office. A meeting was held recently in Harrisburg to discuss the project's scope of work. Mr. Howsare advised that SAP&DC will receive minimal funding under the current arrangement. Guidelines will be provided to SAP&DC at a future date and will be shared with the Board of Directors.

- Commissioner Hunt reminded members that the next SAP&DC Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 15, 2026, beginning at 10:00 A.M.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. J.R. Winck

Secretary