

**HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING
APRIL 20, 2020
MINUTES**

The Executive Board of the High Country Council of Governments met April 20, 2020, 7:00pm, virtually via Zoom. The following members were present at the meeting: Charles E. Vines, Robert L. Johnson, Brenda Lyerly, Gary D. Blevins, Todd McNeill, Andrew Soots, Kelly Melang, Doug Matheson, Dennis Aldridge, Rocky Buchanan, Tom Hartman, Jim Blevins, Rennie Brantz, Larry Fontaine, and Valerie Jaynes. The following staff and guests were present at the meeting: Julie Wiggins, Jeff Hedrick, Phil Trew, Nicole Hiegl, Keith Deveraux, Julie Page, Ken Noland, Anna Oakes, Antwon Keith, and Victoria Potter.

CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION

Chairwoman Jaynes welcomed everyone to the Zoom meeting and called roll. Chairwoman Jaynes called on Dennis Aldridge to lead the invocation. Chairwoman Jaynes then led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES

Charles E. Vines made a motion to approve the Executive Board minutes for February 17, 2020. Robert L. Johnson seconded the motion. Motion carried.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Financial Highlights

Finance Officer, Julie Page, presented the financial highlights as of March 31, 2020 (Attachment A). Mrs. Page gave updates on current balances and projects she is focusing on including organizing financial records, budget transfers/finalization of FY2020, and reviewing processes for FY2021 Budget. Robert L. Johnson made a motion to approve the financial highlights. Dennis Aldridge seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Budget Amendment #4

Finance Officer, Julie Page also discussed Budget Amendment #4 (Attachment B). This amendment is appropriating the Area Agency on Aging budget with revisions within certain funds, reducing state and local funding by \$5,048.00. Kelly Melang made a motion to approve Budget Amendment #4. Rennie Brantz seconded the motion. Motion carried

UPDATE ON UNEMPLOYMENT AND CLAIMS IN NC

Antwon Keith, Chief Deputy of Programs for NC Department of Commerce reported that over 672,000 unemployment claims (compared to 150,000 claims last year) have been filed in NC and the Department of Commerce has paid 500 million dollars in unemployment benefits. The Department of Commerce is currently expanding call center staff and by the end of the week should have about 1,000 more people to take the 10,000 calls a day. The CARES Act is also providing additional funding in NC through two programs. First, any individual filing for unemployment insurance in NC, regardless of reasons and regardless of the program they file on, if they get at least \$1 of benefits they will also get the additional \$600. After July 25, 2020 this program ends. Secondly, the PUA (Pandemic Unemployment Assistance) will provide unemployment benefits for those ineligible (those who are self-employed or independent contractors) for state unemployment insurance benefits, these individuals will also get the extra \$600 on top of whatever

they qualify for. This PUA will last for 39 weeks. The Department of Commerce is working with other programs and organizations to make these processes easier and sufficient. Also, the PEUC (added on to regular unemployment) provides an additional 13 weeks of benefits for those exhausting their regular state benefits. Mr. Gary Blevins asked what percentage of those that have applied have begun receiving the unemployment benefits, Mr. Keith said that about 135,000 of the 672,000 did not have enough money to establish a claim, so about 50% (275,000) have received the benefits. Mr. Gary Blevins expressed his appreciation of the Department of Commerce's efforts and commented on the low unemployment rate that had been reported for a long time before this pandemic. Mr. Gary Blevins thanked Mr. Keith for joining the board meeting and providing this update and also thanked Keith Deveraux for asking Mr. Antwon to attend. Mr. Blevins asked Mr. Deveraux to provide Mr. Keith's information to the Executive Board. Chairwoman Jaynes also thanked Mr. Keith for the information.

WORKFORCE UPDATES

Keith Deveraux, Workforce Development Board (WDB) Director gave an update on his department and explained that the information in the board packet (Attachment C) is as of February 2020 and does not reflect the current unemployment rate. Mr. Deveraux is working with the Department of Commerce on getting updated data reflective of current rates per county. Mr. Deveraux let everyone know that workforce services are still being provided remotely and virtually. Mr. Deveraux stated that the Division of Workforce Solutions was selected for a national emergency grant focusing on dislocated workers and they are waiting to see what the funding portion will be for our region. Mr. Deveraux and staff are working with the Division of Employment Services by sending contract staff to help take calls as well.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

Phil Trew, Planning and Development Director gave an update on his department and programs. Mr. Trew stated that all transportation projects are still underway, however the schedule for getting new projects in the pipeline through the RPO has been delayed for about 4 months. High Country RPO will rank and submit projects to DOT in August of 2021. The Planning and Development Department worked on three Appalachian Regional Commission Pre-Applications for: Town of West Jefferson downtown Wi-Fi project, Avery County broadband expansion project, and Ashe County Industrial Park grading, road and utilities work. The Planning and Development Department recently finished up a Building Reuse project in Ashe County and have also provided Alleghany County with fire service tax information, resolutions and mapping. Mr. Trew also the availability of disaster relief funding through the NC Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) associated with storms Florence and Michael. Recent statute changes concerning planning and land use regulation has two components: all zoning ordinances have to be updated by January 1, 2021 and if local governments are exercising their zoning authority, they have to have a land use plan that supports that regulation by July 1, 2022. The Planning Department is happy to help with any Land Use Plans and Zoning Ordinance Updates.

AREA AGENCY ON AGING UPDATES

Nicole Hiegl, AAA Director thanked all the local leadership in the region during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mrs. Hiegl then gave an update on her department and programs. All long-term care facilities throughout the nation are closed for any visitation, which includes our Ombudsman, Stevie John. Ms. John has been handling cases and complaints from home, which has been challenging. Amber Chapman has been busy keeping up with the Family Caregiver Support Program making online calls and meetings while building emergency care plans, she has started a virtual support group and a few extra vouchers are coming in for respite care. Lifespan Respite Program is ebb and flowing, as some folks are still using the emergency respite care funds. Tim Price and Mrs. Hiegl have been busy communicating information from state and federal levels to AAA providers. The Older Americans Act has now passed, which is the root of most of the Aging funds. In addition, the Families First Act funding is coming and will be specific to nutrition programs including congregate and home delivered meals. Our region just got these allocations, receiving just over \$207,000; \$69,000 for congregate nutrition and \$138,000 for home delivered meals. There is some flexibility for these funds and how providers serve the meals. The CARES Act funding will be more significant than Families First Act and will come in the next month. Both the Families First and the CARES Act funding streams can carry forward into FY2021. Mrs. Hiegl also reported that all providers are doing an excellent job even with restrictions and challenges.

REPORT FROM THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Julie Wiggins, Executive Director thanked the COG staff for adjusting and continuing day to day tasks via telework. COG staff has been communicating as best as we can and getting information out to local leaders in a timely manner. Internally, our staff has regular conversations and virtual department head meetings. COG directors are meeting virtually every week as well. Ms. Wiggins has volunteered to be a part for the legislative subcommittee for the COG Association. Ms. Wiggins explained that within the CARES Act, 150 billion dollars will go to the states and within NC there are four local governments that will receive allocations first. 4 billion total funding for NC, 3.5 billion left for rest of state after the four local governments, with populations of 500,000 or more, receive funding. The state is waiting on final guidance from the treasury and then will announce how that money will be allocated. Ms. Wiggins gave an update on the renting Suite B transition which happened before the Stay at Home order took place. Things are running smoothly for the new tenant. Ms. Wiggins announced that we have secured a banquet sponsorship, but it remains to be seen if we will have the banquet as scheduled in September. Lastly, Ms. Wiggins discussed the FY2021 budget: amendments for new projects and funding for this current FY will be coming in soon, department heads will be meeting Thursday to discuss FY2021 budget further. The Advisory Committee discussed whether to do a COLA or not and voted to recommend to the Executive Board that we build in a 2.5% COLA increase into the FY2021 budget. The budget vote will occur in June 2020. Robert Johnson recommended that the full board think about the COLA before the next board meeting and discuss further then.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Andrew Soots thanked HCCOG staff for their technical assistance and patience.

CHAIRWOMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairwoman Jaynes thanked everyone for their patience and attending the virtual meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

As there were no other comments or business, Robert L. Johnson made a motion to adjourn. Brenda Lyerly seconded the motion. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 8:09 pm.

Chairwoman, Valerie Jaynes

Clerk to the Board, Victoria Potter

Date 05-18-2020