

**HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS  
EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING  
APRIL 17, 2023  
MINUTES**

The Executive Board of the High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG) met April 17, 2023, 7:00pm, at the Blue Ridge Energy Office in Boone. The following members were present at the meeting: Charles E. Vines, Brenda Lyerly, Stoney Greene, Jeff Whitson, Mike Inscore, Timmy Evans, Otis Church, Bill Wheeler, Dennis Aldridge, Larry Fontaine, Steve Pitman, Jim Blevins, Rocky Buchanan, Wes Brinegar, Tom Hartman, Tim Futrelle, Larry Turnbow, Paul Robinson Jr., Doug Matheson, and Todd McNeill. The following staff and guests were present at the meeting: Jeff Hedrick, Julie Wiggins, Phil Trew, Zack Green, Misty Bishop-Price, Cory Osborne, and Victoria Oxentine. The following staff and guests were present via Zoom: Julie Page.

**CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION**

Chairman McNeill welcomed everyone to the High Country Council of Governments April Executive Board meeting. Chairman McNeill called on Charles E. Vines to lead the invocation and Chairman McNeill led the board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES**

Tim Futrelle made a motion to approve the February 20, 2023 Executive Board minutes. Tom Hartman seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**FINANCIAL MATTERS**

**Financial Highlights**

Finance Officer, Julie Page presented the Financial Highlights as of March 31, 2023 (Attachment A) and reviewed year to date revenues versus expenditures and balances. Wes Brinegar made a motion to approve the Financial Highlights as of March 31, 2023. Stoney Greene seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE UPDATE**

Cory Osborne, Economic Recovery and Resilience Director reviewed his department handout (Attachment B). Mr. Osborne noted that HCCOG received close to \$300,000 from the General Assembly via NCARCOG to boost disaster recovery capacity and resilience. Most of the funding has been for technical assistance in each county for emergency services/operations. Mr. Osborne and his staff are also assisting communities with ARPA funded infrastructure projects compliance. Mr. Osborne also discussed Local Assistance for Stormwater Infrastructure Investments (LASII) grants that the towns of Boone and Spruce Pine received. Mr. Osborne also noted that he and his staff are working on broadband and GREAT grants in Avery County.

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

Misty Bishop-Price, Workforce Development Director gave an overview of recent events, programs, and funding. Mrs. Bishop-Price noted that the NCWorks Career Centers have been busy hosting monthly hiring events on site, attending career fairs and pathway learning sessions in local high schools. Mrs. Bishop-Price also discussed the ARPA funding the department received in the amount of \$700,000 for small employers for work-based learning along with

recovery and substance abuse barriers. Mrs. Bishop-Price lastly discussed that she is working with counties in the region to fill vacancies on the board.

#### **PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

Phil Trew, Planning and Development Director discussed many grants the planning department has worked on recently, including three (towns of Sparta, Beech Mountain, and Jefferson) that were submitted today for the Appalachian Regional Commission. Mr. Trew announced that the towns of Boone, Burnsville, and Sparta have received CDBG funding. Mr. Trew noted that his staff is currently working on Rural Transformation Grants for the towns of Burnsville and Jefferson, those applications are due May 3. Mr. Trew also noted that his staff is working on Land Use Plans for the towns of Jefferson and Spruce Pine.

#### **REPORT FROM THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Julie Wiggins, Executive Director noted that the HCCOG is in full FY24 budget preparation mode and it will be presented to the Executive Board in May. Ms. Wiggins announced that the Advisory Committee has recommended a version of the pay study that was completed in 2022 and a 2% COLA beginning in July 2023. The pay study will enable HCCOG to have a formal pay scale. The dues/match will stay the same (based on population) even with the pay study implementation. The Advisory Committee has also recommended a one-time, 2% bonus for HCCOG staff this fiscal year. Ms. Wiggins is working with Finance Officer, Julie Page to make sure this works with our existing budget. Ms. Wiggins noted that she has been pleased with the office restoration and that the operation has been seamless with Dolbier. Insurance covers everything except the carpet replacement in three offices in the rental space.

#### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Charles E. Vines gave an update on his wife's health since her injury last November and thanked the board for their support. Larry Fontaine thanked all the department heads for their hard work and noted that their work impacts a lot of lives in the region. Dennis Aldridge noted that a reentry facility has opened in Avery County called Freedom Life. Doug Matheson announced that the Town of Blowing Rock is seeking a Town Manager. Mike Inscore announced that Merlefest in Wilkesboro is coming up April 27-30. Wes Brinegar announced the Fried Apple Pie Festival in Sparta will be on May 6. Stoney Greene announced that the NASCAR All-Star Race will be in North Wilkesboro May 19-21.

#### **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

Todd McNeill, Executive Board Chairman encouraged Executive Board members to advocate occupancy tax to their Legislators.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Victoria Oxentine, Communications Manager announced that the May 15, 2023 Executive Board meeting will be held in the conference room downstairs at the Watauga County Agricultural Center located at 252 Poplar Grove Road in Boone.

**ADJOURNMENT**

As there were no other comments or business, Otis Church made a motion to adjourn. Jeff Whitson seconded the motion. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:59 pm.

Doug Matheson  
Chairman, Todd McNeill  
Vice-Chairman, Doug Matheson

Victoria Oxentine  
Clerk to the Board, Victoria Oxentine

Date 5/15/23