

**HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING
AUGUST 19, 2024
MINUTES**

The Executive Board of the High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG) met August 19, 2024, 7:00pm, in the HCCOG Board Room in Boone. The following members were present at the meeting: Charles E. Vines, Brenda Lyerly, Todd McNeill, Greg Minton, Dale Isom, Timmy Evans, Otis Church, Bill Wheeler, Jeff Whitson, Larry Fontaine, Harley Masters, Chandler Reece, Teresa McCoy, Rocky Buchanan, Ray Russell, Dennis Aldridge, and Doug Matheson. The following staff and guests were present at the meeting: Jeff Hedrick, Julie Wiggins, Caroline Briggs, Tatiana Magee, Chris Grubb, Cory Osborne, and Victoria Oxentine. The following guests were present via Zoom: Dr. Darlene Deberry and Stacy Guffey.

CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION

Chairman Matheson called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. Larry Fontaine led the Pledge of Allegiance and Dennis Aldridge offered the invocation.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES

Rocky Buchanan moved to accept the minutes of the July 15, 2024 meeting, seconded by Otis Church. Motion carried.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Financial Highlights

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented the Financial Highlights as of July 31, 2024 (Attachment A) and discussed revenues versus expenditures. Todd McNeill made a motion to approve the Financial Highlights as of July 31, 2024. Jeff Whitson seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Regional Economy Dogwood Grant Project Ordinance

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented a grant project ordinance for a Dogwood Health Trust Regional Market Project awarded to the Economic Recovery and Resilience department in the amount of \$75,000.00 (Attachment A1). This grant project ordinance will run through June 30, 2025. Charles E. Vines made a motion to approve the Regional Economy Dogwood Grant Project Ordinance. Brenda Lyerly seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Dogwood Health Trust: Workforce Development Grant

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented a grant project ordinance for a Dogwood Health Trust grant awarded to the Workforce Development department for Work-Based Learning services in the amount of \$310,000.00 (Attachment A2). This grant project ordinance will run through June 30, 2026. Charles E. Vines made a motion to approve the Dogwood Health Trust Workforce Development Grant. Otis Church seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Ageless Access Digital Navigator Program Grant Project Ordinance

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented a grant project ordinance for an Ageless Access Digital Navigator Program awarded to the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) department for a one-year position serving a 12-county region that includes the 7 High Country counties in the amount of \$98,058.00 (Attachment A3). This grant project ordinance will run through September 30, 2025.

The AAA is currently interviewing for this position. Charles E. Vines made a motion to approve the Ageless Access Digital Navigator Program. Todd McNeill seconded the motion. Motion carried.

RECESS OF HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS EXECUTIVE BOARD SESSION AND CONVENING OF REGION D DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION SESSION

Larry Fontaine made a motion to recess the High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG) Executive Board session and convene the Region D Development Corporation (RDDC) session. Jeff Whitson seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Julie Wiggins, Executive Director gave a brief overview of the RDDC and presented an updated list of Capital Bank and First Horizon signatories due to staff changes, that needs approval from the RDDC. The updated list of signatories includes Julie Wiggins, Chris Grubb who replaced Phil Trew, and Caroline Briggs who replaced Julie Page. This list was approved by the HCCOG Executive Board in June and now needs to be approved by the RDDC.

Brenda Lyerly made a motion to approve the Capital Bank and First Horizon signatories. Rocky Buchanan seconded the motion. Motion carried.

CLOSING OF REGION D DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION SESSION AND OPENING OF HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS EXECUTIVE BOARD SESSION

Charles E. Vines made a motion to close the RDDC session and open the HCCOG Executive Board session. Otis Church seconded the motion. Motion carried.

NCGROWTH PRESENTATION

Dr. Darlene Deberry and Stacy Guffey from NCGrowth joined the meeting via Zoom and presented a PowerPoint presentation (Attachment B) giving an overview of their organization and projects. NCGrowth is a national economic development center building an economy with opportunities for all to prosper. NCGrowth helps provide technical assistance to businesses and governments to create good jobs and new wealth in economically distressed communities. NCGrowth produces applied research and develops innovative policies that promote equitable development. They also host unique, cross-sector convenings and workshops to bring together diverse perspectives. Stacy Guffey works with Dogwood Health Trust in our region to cover the cost of projects.

DIGITAL CHAMPION GRANT UPDATE

Tatiana Magee, GIS Tech & Planner announced that HCCOG was awarded a Digital Champion Grant of \$800,000 from NCDIT. Four other COG's in the state were also awarded. This grant will create a new staff position that will be able to advance the Digital Inclusion Plan and about \$500,000 will be available for grant applications in the region. Ms. Magee will give an update to the board when more information from NCDIT regarding the funding details and rules comes through. Ms. Magee provided handouts about the Digital Champion Grant, a list of stakeholders

and needed connections, free and low-cost internet plans, and a full list of Digital Champion Grant awardees (Attachment C). Ms. Magee also announced that she received 200 free hotspots from Land of Sky Regional Council and has been distributing them throughout the region. She has 43 left and asked that anyone let her know if they or an organization in the region needs one.

REPORT FROM THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Julie Wiggins, Executive Director thanked Tatiana Magee for her work on the Digital Champion Grant and noted that digital inclusion is still a huge need in the region. Ms. Wiggins announced that the finance team have been submitting documents for the upcoming audit, she continues to visit the strategic plan goals, and we are currently getting quotes on a couple of building projects including exterior painting and updating AV equipment in the boardroom. Ms. Wiggins reminded everyone that the 49th Annual Banquet will be held on Friday, October 4th at the Grandview Ballroom on Appstate's campus. Ms. Wiggins also noted that the Advisory Committee recommends skipping the September Executive Board meeting in lieu of the banquet. Ms. Wiggins handed it over to Cory Osborne, Director of Economic Recovery & Resilience for an announcement. Mr. Osborne announced that the Stop-Gap Solutions program provides funding for areas unserved or underserved with broadband following investment from the GREAT grant program and the Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) program. Mr. Osborne needs the counties to help identify priority locations for service providers to apply for grant funding. He has emailed county managers about this program.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Dennis Aldridge congratulated Todd McNeill for being voted in as the 2nd Vice President for the NC Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) and noted that this was the first time a delegate from the High Country has held this position. Mr. Aldridge also congratulated Harley Masters for becoming the new NCACC District 14 Director and Dennis himself was nominated to serve as the Chairman of the Tax/Finance Subcommittee for the NCACC. Chandler Reece announced that he will not be running in the Ronda Town Commissioner election this year, so his last meeting will be in November. Mr. Reece thanked the Executive Board and noted that he appreciated his time serving.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

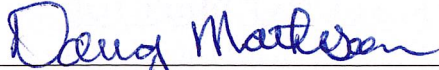
Chairman Matheson noted that it was great to see the High Country region getting attention and key positions at the state level.

OTHER BUSINESS

Victoria Oxentine, Communications Manager announced that 49th Annual Banquet invitations had been mailed to county/town offices and the deadline to RSVP is September 20, 2024.

ADJOURNMENT

As there were no other comments or business, Otis Church made a motion to adjourn. Todd McNeill seconded the motion. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 8:07 pm.



Chairman, Doug Matheson



Clerk to the Board, Victoria Oxentine

Date 10/21/24