

**HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING
NOVEMBER 18, 2024
MINUTES**

The Executive Board of the High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG) met November 18, 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, Timmy Evans, Kelly Melang, Otis Church, Bill Wheeler, Jeff Whitson, Larry Fontaine, Chandler Reece, Harley Masters, Teresa McCoy, Rocky Buchanan, Tom Hartman, and Dennis Aldridge. The following staff and guests were present at the meeting: Sharlene Abbott, William Hain, Andrew Cutler, Ed Ellis, Jeff Hedrick, Caroline Briggs, Chris Grubb, Zack Green, Cory Osborne, and Victoria Oxentine.

CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION

Vice Chairman Aldridge called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. Vice Chairman Aldridge noted that Chairman Matheson had shoulder replacement surgery recently and could not attend. Jeff Whitson led the Pledge of Allegiance and Otis Church offered the invocation.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES

Todd McNeill moved to accept the minutes of the October 21, 2024 meeting, seconded by Charles E. Vines. Motion carried.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Financial Highlights

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented the Financial Highlights as of October 31, 2024 (Attachment A) and discussed revenues versus expenditures. Charles E. Vines made a motion to approve the Financial Highlights as of October 31, 2024. Otis Church seconded the motion. Motion carried.

HUD & FEMA STATE RECOVERY PLAN

Sharlene Abbott, Senior CPD Representative for HUD presented a few talking points to the Executive Board regarding disaster relief needs in the wake of Hurricane Helene. Ms. Abbott said that she was there to listen to the Executive Board member's needs. Executive Board members discussed current needs/obstacles including bridge/road repair, emergency communications, data regarding FEMA Individual Assistance, FEMA Housing, cold weather/housing concerns, a better understanding of resources, and too many duplicated efforts by smaller organizations. William Hain and Ed Ellis from FEMA also joined in on discussion points. Mrs. Abbott will work on finding resources and getting answers for Executive Board members regarding housing recovery.

DIGITAL NAVIGATOR UPDATE

Zack Green, Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Director introduced Fred Wilson, the new Digital Navigator. Mr. Wilson is a Watauga County native with years of experience in the digital realm and will be working on the Digital Navigator program on a one-year grant through the Division of Aging. Mr. Green noted that Mr. Wilson has already hit the ground running and has had 75 iPads donated to HCCOG in the wake of Hurricane Helene to assist with disaster recovery applications. Mr. Green also noted that the AAA staff has been working tirelessly in the wake of

Hurricane Helene with older adult supplies, volunteering, etc. Mr. Green announced another 2-year grant the AAA recently received which is \$132,000 for home safety/repair and modification for older adults.

CEDS ANNUAL REPORT RESOLUTION

Chris Grubb, Planning & Development Director gave an overview of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) which is a 5-year document that was last adopted by the HCCOG Executive Board in 2022. Mr. Grubb presented the CEDS Annual Report (Attachment B) and the CEDS Annual Report Resolution (Attachment B1) for the Executive Board to consider. Mr. Grubb noted that most of the priorities in the current CEDS will stay the same in the wake of Hurricane Helene but some could shift. Brenda Lyerly made a motion to approve the CEDS Annual Report Resolution. Kelly Melang seconded the motion. Motion carried.

REPORT FROM THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Julie Wiggins, Executive Director discussed the 2024 Legislative Priorities list (Attachment C) and noted that the process has begun to start a 2025 priorities list. Ms. Wiggins announced that the Advisory Committee has proposed to have a longer meeting in December and invite State and Federal representatives for a roundtable discussion on disaster relief recovery. We will plan to have dinner 5:30-6:00 PM and the meeting will run from 6:00-8:00 PM. Ms. Wiggins also announced that the 49th Annual Banquet has been rescheduled for Friday, March 7th. We will also have the 50th Annual Banquet in October 2025. Ms. Wiggins handed it over to Cory Osborne, Economic Recovery & Resilience Director for an announcement. Mr. Osborne noted that his department of two has pivoted almost completely to assisting towns/counties with FEMA Public Assistance.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Todd McNeill congratulated Dennis Aldridge, Jeff Whitson, and Harley Masters for their reelection in early November. Otis Church announced an upcoming festive event in downtown North Wilkesboro.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Vice Chairman Aldridge discussed disaster relief concerns and lessons learned along with the compassion he has seen.

OTHER BUSINESS

Victoria Oxentime, Communications Manager noted that if anyone needs their monthly reimbursement checks mailed to a different address to please let her know. Mrs. Oxentime also asked the board if getting back to the 7:00 PM meeting time was ok for everyone, Chairman Matheson wanted to be sure everyone could arrive and get home safely in the coming months.

Executive Board members agreed that the 7:00 PM meeting time is fine. Mrs. Oxentine will email the complete list of disaster relief needs (Attachment D) the Executive Board submitted to her in October.

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 7:54 pm.



Chairman, Doug Matheson



Clerk to the Board, Victoria Oxentine

Date 12/16/24