

**HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS  
EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING  
FEBRUARY 17, 2025  
MINUTES**

The Executive Board of the High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG) met February 17, 2025, 7:00pm, in the HCCOG Board Room in Boone. The following members were present at the meeting: Charles E. Vines, Brenda Lyerly, Todd McNeill, Bill Osborne, Kelly Melang, Otis Church, Bill Wheeler, Jeff Whitson, Jeff Harding, Teresa McCoy, Rocky Buchanan, Tom Hartman, Tim Futrelle, Braxton Eggers, Paul Robinson Jr., Dennis Aldridge, and Doug Matheson. The following staff and guests were present at the meeting: Holly Jones, Julie Wiggins, Jeff Hedrick, Caroline Briggs, Zack Green, Cory Osborne, and Victoria Oxentine. The following staff and guests were present via Zoom: Liz Whiteman, Ret Boney, Chris Grubb, and Misty Bishop-Price.

**CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION**

Chairman Matheson called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. Rocky Buchanan led the Pledge of Allegiance and Charles E. Vines offered the invocation.

**CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES**

Tim Futrelle moved to accept the minutes of the December 16, 2024 meeting, seconded by Charles E. Vines. Motion carried.

**FINANCIAL MATTERS**

**Financial Highlights**

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented the Financial Highlights as of January 31, 2025 (Attachment A) and discussed revenues versus expenditures. Jeff Whitson made a motion to approve the Financial Highlights as of January 31, 2025. Todd McNeill seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**Budget Amendment #3**

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented Budget Amendment #3 (Attachment A1) which is an increase of \$207,668 for the total budget. This increase includes an additional \$200,000 for the Emergency Dislocated Worker Fund for the Workforce Development department and \$7,668 for Hurricane Helene relief funding for the Area Agency on Aging department. Mrs. Briggs also noted that there was a clerical error in Budget Amendment #2. The bottom-line number was incorrectly listed as \$6,483,205 and should have been \$6,599,217, but the overall amendment was correct and approved in December. Tom Hartman made a motion to approve Budget Amendment #3 with bottom-line number of \$6,599,217. Tim Futrelle seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**EDA Grant Project Ordinance**

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented a Grant Project Ordinance for EDA (Attachment A2) funding of \$500,000 over the course of 5 years allocated to the Planning and Development department for Disaster Relief. Kelly Melang made a motion to approve the EDA Grant Project Ordinance. Otis Church seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**NCARCOG Helene Grant Project Ordinance**

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented a Grant Project Ordinance for NC Association of Regional Council of Governments (NCARCOG) Helene Funding (Attachment A3) of \$665,000

for the COG to use in the disaster affected counties in the region. Todd McNeill made a motion to approve the NCARCOG Helene Grant Project Ordinance. Braxton Eggers seconded the motion. Motion carried.

#### **Amendment to Audit Contract**

Finance Officer, Caroline Briggs presented an amendment to the audit contract (Attachment A4), noting that there was no change in the price, just a change in the due date. We received an extension due to Hurricane Helene. Mrs. Briggs also noted that the audit is complete and there were no findings. The audit will be presented to the Executive Board in March. Jeff Whitson made a motion to approve the Amendment to Audit Contract. Charles E. Vines seconded the motion. Motion carried.

#### **RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT GRANT APPLICATION**

Kelly Coffey, Senior Planner presented a Resolution Authorizing Water Resources Development Grant (Attachment B) which entails stream bank restoration money from the Department of Environmental Equality. Blue Ridge Conservancy is working to restore a section of Aho Branch in Watauga County but could not apply on their own, they needed a local government applicant. Mr. Coffey explained that the HCCOG will only play a passive role in this application and will only provide minimal staff time for accounting work, Blue Ridge Conservancy will complete the majority of the work and meet the terms of the grant contract. Tom Hartman made a motion to approve the Resolution Authorizing Water Resources Development Grant Application. Todd McNeill seconded the motion. Motion carried.

#### **BLUE RIDGE WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE (BRWIA) UPDATE**

Liz Whiteman, BRWIA Executive Director joined the meeting via Zoom and presented a slideshow (Attachment C) overviewing BRWIA's current programs, data, and the High Country Food Hub. Ms. Whiteman noted that there has been 4.5 million dollars of local food sales since 2017. Ms. Whiteman also noted that the partnership with HCCOG has been instrumental over the years in expanding the High Country Food Hub.

#### **NC COMMUNITY FOUNDATION DISASTER RELIEF FUND**

Ret Boney, Interim Director, Community Investment - North Carolina Community Foundation joined the meeting via Zoom and presented a slideshow (Attachment D) overviewing the Foundation and a Disaster Relief Fund in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

#### **RECESS OF HCCOG EXECUTIVE BOARD SESSION AND CONVENING OF REGION D DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (RDDC)**

Chairman Matheson requested a motion to recess the Executive Board session and convene the Region D Development Corporation (RDDC) session. Todd McNeill moved to recess the HCCOG Executive Board session and convene the Region D Development Corporation session. Brenda

Lyerly seconded the motion. Motion carried. Julie Wiggins, Executive Director provided a brief overview of the RDDC for new board members and noted that this was the annual convening of the RDDC to adopt the previous year's minutes. Ms. Wiggins also pointed out that the RDDC met twice last year, once to discuss the Mountain Bizworks reinvestment and again to consider the previous year's minutes.

#### **Consideration of February 19, 2024 and March 19, 2024 Minutes**

Julie Wiggins, Executive Director presented the RDDC minutes from February 19, 2024 (Attachment E) and March 19, 2024 (Attachment E1). Tim Futrelle made a motion to approve the February 19, 2024 and March 19, 2024 RDDC Minutes. Charles E. Vines seconded the motion. Motion carried.

#### **CLOSING OF REGION D DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (RDDC) SESSION AND OPENING OF HCCOG EXECUTIVE BOARD SESSION**

As there was no other RDDC business, Brenda Lyerly made a motion to close the Region D Development Corporation session and open the HCCOG Executive Board session. Charles E. Vines seconded the motion. Motion carried.

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

Julie Wiggins, Executive Director announced that NC Commerce would be holding a CDBG Public Comment Session here at the HCCOG office on February 25<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM. Ms. Wiggins also announced that HCCOG was recently awarded an Urgent Repair Housing Grant in the amount of \$330,000.00 but we do not have the contract yet. Ms. Wiggins noted that the COG Association General Assembly Day in Raleigh is April 2, 2025 and the Rescheduled 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Banquet is coming up on March 7, 2025. Lastly, Ms. Wiggins discussed the FY2023-2024 Annual Report (Attachment F) and how it is a great snapshot of the work HCCOG does in the region.

#### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Dennis Aldridge announced that Avery County Manager, Phillip Barrier fell and broke his hip but came through surgery well and did not need a full replacement. Todd McNeill discussed mid-year budget review and property tax issues ahead due to Hurricane Helene.

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


Chairman Matheson welcomed back new Executive Board member, Bill Osborne, Alleghany County Commissioner Chair. Chairman Matheson also announced that Larry Fontaine, Mayor of Seven Devils and HCCOG Secretary recently had open heart surgery and will be absent for a while to recover. COG attorney, Jeff Hedrick suggested that the Executive Board appoint an Assistant Secretary in Mayor Fontaine's absence. Todd McNeill made a motion to appoint Braxton Eggers as Assistant Secretary. Brenda Lyerly seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Holly Jones, Director of NC Governor Stein's Western Office introduced herself and noted that Governor Stein's number one agenda item is recovery for Western NC.

**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 8:05 pm.



Chairman, Doug Matheson



Clerk to the Board, Victoria Oxentine

Date 3/17/25