WPPDC to Launch Regional Collaborative Initiative

The West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) has engaged the Richmond, Virginia based strategic planning firm DecideSmart to lead and facilitate its upcoming regional initiative aimed at bringing together key stakeholders from local government, education, economic development, workforce development, leading local employers, and others in an effort to spur regional dialogue and create an ongoing forum for regional collaboration. DecideSmart Managing Partner, William H. “Bill” Leighty is a highly respected and experienced professional in the area of Virginia government. Prior to founding DecideSmart, Mr. Leighty’s long career in state government included senior positions at VDOT, Director of the Virginia Retirement System and he served as Chief of Staff for Governors Mark Warner and Tim Kaine. Decide Smart has served numerous local governments, planning districts and other organizations providing meeting facilitation, strategic planning, and organizational efficiency studies. DecideSmart also currently serves as a consultant to the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions (VAPDC.)

WPPDC’s collaborative planning initiative will have an immediate aim toward building the capacity of the organization to better serve as a convener of regional stakeholders and serve as a facilitator of regional approaches. Further, the effort will identify a short list of critical projects potentially lending themselves to regional collaboration and as a result can be communicated to state/federal legislators and funding agencies. Finally, the process is envisioned as a springboard for the region in preparing to effectively participate in the Go Virginia regional initiative approved during the 2016 Session of the Virginia General Assembly.

Funding for this regional planning effort is being provided by a state grant obtained by WPPDC. In January 2016, Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe announced that the West Piedmont Planning District would be a recipient of a $25,000 Building Collaborative Communities (BCC) Grant from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. The application, written by Deputy Director Leah Manning, was submitted in July 2015.

The WPPDC anticipates launching its BCC planning effort and preparing the region for the Go Virginia process over the next four months. Anyone having questions or interest in this process may contact WPPDC Executive Director David Hoback.

WPPDC Grateful to Rawley for Years of Dedicated Service

The West Piedmont Planning District Commission would like to recognize Buddy Rawley, a past WPPDC Board Member, Board Chairman, and MPO Policy Board Member, for his dedication to our organization and the region. Mr. Rawley served on the WPPDC Board of Commissioners beginning in 2008, and became Chairman in 2012. He served as a member of the Danville MPO Policy Board since 2012. Mr. Rawley stepped down from both positions in 2016 at the end of his term on Danville City Council.

During his time serving on the WPPDC and MPO boards, Mr. Rawley brought with him professional experience from his participation serving on the Danville City Council as well as his career with Averett University. Mr. Rawley served on the City Council from 2002 to 2004 and then again from 2008 to 2016. He serves full time at Averett as Vice President for Institutional Advancement.

Again, the WPPDC and Danville MPO would like to thank Mr. Rawley for his dedicated service and wish him all the best in his future endeavors. Also, with Mr. Rawley’s departure, congratulations are extended to Jim Adams, Chairman of the Henry County Board of Supervisors, who is succeeding him as WPPDC Chairman.
“Smart Scale” Ushers in Changes to Former VA House Bill 2 Process in 2016

The year 2015 marked the first time the Commonwealth of Virginia based its transportation project funding decisions on an objective system to rank benefits of transportation investments, rather than formulating recommendations based on arbitrary factors. The legislation, formerly known as “Virginia House Bill 2” (HB 2) is now known as “Smart Scale.” The acronym “Smart” stands for “System Management and Allocation of Resources for Transportation.”

The West Piedmont Planning District Commission and Danville MPO will be available to assist applicants within our jurisdiction with the application process, as we were last year. Last year, the MPO submitted two applications for improvements to Berry Hill Road, just west of the City of Danville; one of those applications was funded, paving the way for improvements to the intersection of Berry Hill Road and U.S. Route 58 in Pittsylvania County.

The paradigm process has undergone some changes since 2015, and some of the more significant changes pertaining to the actual measures for scoring are summarized here. With regard to the Safety measure, all injuries on a road segment or at an intersection will now be taken into account this year, not just severe injuries as was the case last year; “equivalent property damage” has also been applied to highlight the societal impacts of fatalities and severe injuries. The Economic Development measure has been revised to provide points by development (building) square footage based on a transportation proposal’s tiered distance from the development site—one mile, three miles, or five miles. For the Environmental measure, the scoring process is now divided between non single-occupancy vehicle projects such as pedestrian and park & ride lot improvements and projects intended to enhance movement of freight. Other changes relating to the scoring of proposed projects are more modest.

The Smart Scale application webpage has undergone significant changes as well. The most noteworthy change is that the site will now be a “one-stop shop” for several types of applications including (in addition to Smart Scale) Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (previously TAP), Revenue Sharing, the Highway Safety Program, and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Program. Applications for Smart Scale will be accepted every other even year—2016, 2018, etc., while applications for all other grants will be accepted during odd years—2017, 2019, etc. Another upgrade to the site enables information from one application to automatically be entered into another application or from a previous year’s application into a current one. For example, a locality will now be able to enter information from a Smart Scale application to a Revenue Share application. The site will now enable correspondence between the applicants and VDOT and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) in the form of comments, notifications, and alerts to allow these parties to send and receive feedback in a very timely manner. Other changes include the ability of applicants to identify VTrans needs within the site, as well as upgrades to the mapping function through which applicants can now highlight road segments to visually identify the geographic bounds of a project.

As was the case last year, applicants have been encouraged to begin the application process early. In fact, in order for an applicant to be guaranteed technical assistance with their application, the application’s key fields, found within the “Notice of Intent to Apply” section of the application, must be completed by August 22nd. Another consideration for applicants is that approximately half of last year’s funding will be available this year, so only the most competitive applications are encouraged to be submitted. As noted above, the next Smart Scale application cycle will take place in 2018, enabling funding levels to be more closely aligned with the more robust levels of 2015.
**WPPDC Employee Profile—Tracy Meade**

Tracy Meade is the West Piedmont Planning District Commission’s Office Assistant and has served in this capacity with the WPPDC since October 1997. Tracy fulfills a vital role in our organization by providing support to staff and coordinating intra-organizational activities.

In terms of her main functions at the WPPDC, Tracy directs calls to the appropriate staff; maintains current information on the region’s localities, such as administrative contacts; organizes meetings and prepares meeting materials; and assists with the administrative functions of the organization. She also plays an important role in the annual update of the region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document and other materials by compiling a voluminous amount of newspaper articles each week which serve as information sources for local activities and developments which take place throughout the region. What Tracy enjoys most about her position is knowing that her work is helping to make a difference in the community and working with a great group of people while doing it.

Tracy graduated Magna Vista High School in 1992 and subsequently attended Patrick Henry Community College. From 1993 to 1995, Tracy worked for Westpack, which was a subsidiary of Sara Lee, where she administered the health insurance program for hundreds of employees. From 1995 to 1997, she provided office support for a local trucking company.

Tracy and her husband of 21 years have three daughters, with whom they spend a great deal of time and take part in many activities together. Some of the activities Tracy and her family enjoy include camping, as well as softball, which Tracy coaches. Other activities Tracy enjoys are drag racing and hunting. A civic function Tracy is proud of is serving as the PTA media coordinator at one of her daughter’s schools. Tracy is also involved in youth activities at her church.

**Local Development in the Region**

Various developments have been taking place throughout the region to improve the quality of life and promote investment in the region’s cities and towns. Improvements to spruce up Danville’s River District have been taking place, and enhancements to the Bassett and Fieldale communities are planned to occur in the near future.

Using a $700,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) awarded by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) last year, along with a $500,000 Appalachian Regional Commission grant, funding from Bassett Furniture and the Harvest Foundation, Henry County will fund façade improvements in Bassett as well as streetscape improvements and the creation of public spaces in both Bassett and Fieldale. Bassett Furniture has already made façade improvements to many of its buildings in the Town of Bassett. Additionally, a new roof has been installed on the historic Bassett Depot at which more renovations will take place, and work is underway on a former gas station in town which will involve its conversion into an outfitter for residents and tourists who wish to paddle the Smith River.

Improvements also continue in Danville’s River District. This summer, an extension to the Dan Riverwalk Trail over the Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial Bridge officially opened, which provides another means for bicyclists and pedestrians to easily access the Trail from the heart of the River District. Streetscape improvements are taking place on Craghead Street; such enhancements will also take place on part of Main Street and one block of Union Street in the near future. Additionally, wayfinding signage has been installed throughout the River District to direct visitors to popular destinations, and gateway signage has been installed on major roadways providing access to the District. A Danville MPO-funded study is now underway in the River District to recommend bicycle and pedestrian improvements in the area.
The table above, titled *Attainment of Work Readiness Goals for the Dan River Region Collaborative, January 1, 2012—July 31, 2016*, expresses current goals attained by each locality in the Dan River Region Collaborative footprint, with regard to achieving ACT Certified Work Ready Community status. Attainment of ACT Certified Work Readiness is important to the region because it certifies that a minimum number of the region’s residents are able to perform certain jobs. For instance, bronze certification, the lowest certification level, ensures that an individual can perform 16 percent of jobs; and platinum, the highest, ensures that an individual can perform 99 percent of jobs. The exam one would take to determine work ability evaluates skills in applied mathematics, reading for information, locating information, and “soft skills.” The table indicates goals set for each locality in the region as they pertain to accomplishment of work readiness certification status as well as the progress achieved for attaining those goals, expressed in both absolute numbers and percentages. Under the heading “Workforce Type,” Emerging workforce refers to high school juniors and seniors, college students, and recent graduates; the Current workforce refers to those individuals currently employed in either the public or private sector; the Transitioning workforce refers to those who are unemployed, are participating in an adult education or GED program, or have recently completed such a program; and Employers Supporting refers to businesses that have chosen to recognize, recommend, or prefer the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) in supporting their locality in becoming a certified work ready community.

Based on the most recent data, Henry, Pittsylvania, and Halifax counties have achieved 100% of their work readiness goals, with Henry County being the first to do so in October 2015. This means that a firm considering locating to or expanding in these counties can be assured that more than 1,400 potential employees across these counties possess a minimum skillset.

The City of Danville falls right behind Halifax, Henry, and Pittsylvania counties, with 94.7% of goals achieved; followed by the City of Martinsville, with 89.4%; and Patrick County, with 76.2%.

Communities must meet 100% of their work readiness goals by late 2016. At that time, the region will be Certified Work Ready if approximately 2,300 residents earn ACT Work Ready Certification. The Dan River Region Collaborative is serving as a pilot for this program in Virginia, as it was the first region in the Commonwealth to implement it.