**Region 8**

*Cities of: Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton, Waynesboro, & Winchester*

*Counties of: Augusta, Bath, Clarke, Frederick, Highland, Page, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, & Warren*

**GO VIRGINIA REGION 8 COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, October 22, 2024, 10:00 am to 11:36 am

James Madison University – Board of Visitors Meeting Room

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| **FIRST** | **LAST** | **AFFILIATION** | **ATTENDED** |
| Devon | Anders | InterChange Group |  |
| Emily | Marlow Beck | Marlow Auto Group | ✓ |
| Kim | Blosser | Laurel Ridge Community College | ✓ |
| Eric | Bond | Augusta County Schools |  |
| Janet | Clarke | Clarke Consulting, LLC. | ✓ |
| Dottie | Day | Navy Federal Credit Union |  |
| Randy | Doyle | Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board | ✓ |
| Ashley | Driver | AD Engineering, LLC | ✓ |
| Tracy | Fitzsimmons | Shenandoah University | V |
| Mike | Goertzen | Serco, Inc. | ✓ |
| John | Graves | Luray Caverns Corporation | ✓ |
| Conrad | Helsley | NSVRC Board | ✓ |
| Lai | Lee | High Meadow Strategies | ✓ |
| Keith | May | Cottonwood Commercial | ✓ |
| Mary | McDermott | Shenandoah Valley Angel Investors | ✓ |
| Mark | Merrill | Retired Medical Professional | ✓ |
| Kathy | Moore | Moore Public Relations |  |
| Doug | Moyer | Sentara RMH Medical Center | ✓ |
| Yolanda | Shields\* | YesBuilds | ✓ |
| Bruce | Simms | Virginia Regional Transit |  |
| Mike | Stolarz | UTS Systems | ✓ |
| Anthony | Tongen | James Madison University | ✓ |
| Dave | Urso | Blue Ridge Community College | V |

*Support staff attending included: Ann Cundy (CSPDC), Brandon Davis (NSVRC), Deborah Flippo (Region 8 Executive Director), and Jay Langston (SVP).*

*In person guests included: Cody Anderson (DHCD), Chris Boies and Michelle Ridings (Clarke Co.), Alison Denbigh (Staunton Innovation Hub), Rebecca Hess and Keith Holland (JMU), Mary Sullivan and Dhanshree Atre (JMU VIEW Coordinator and Intern, respectively).*

*Virtual guests included: Edwin Daley (Warren Co.), Amanda DiMeo (City of Staunton), Brandy Flint (Rockbridge County), Greg Hitchin (Waynesboro), Jen Weaver (Shenandoah Valley Partnership)*

**Call to Order and Welcome**

The October 22, 2024 Council meeting for GO Virginia Region 8 was called to order by Chair Mark Merrill at 10:00 a.m. Chair Merrill asked those in attendance virtually and in person to introduce themselves. Chair Merrill reminded the attendees about the public nature of the meeting and the need to follow state laws and regulations.

# Roll Call

Deborah Flippo called the Council roll, and a quorum was confirmed.

**Welcome to James Madison University**

Chair Merril introduced Dr. Anthony Tongen, Vice President of JMU’s Office of Research, Economic Development and Innovation, or REDI. Anthony told the Council that REDI was moved about a year ago to the President’s office and is eager to partner on opportunities throughout the Shenandoah Valley – and he would like to meet over lunch with each Council member over the next year. He introduced Dr. Keith Holland, Associate VP of REDI, who is studying the three ways that universities can be most impactful to the region around them: Talent (student and faculty), building out capacity in the Innovation space, and Community Development opportunities. Keith highlighted two initiatives – last week’s JMU Regional Economic Summit, which had 150 attendees, and JMU’s coordination of the Region 8 Virginia Talent Opportunity Partnership (VTOP).

Mary Sullivan, JMU’s VTOP-VIEW Project Coordinator, gave a brief presentation on how VTOP benefits businesses with student interns, wage-matching funds programs. Nearly 40 internships have been created in the Shenandoah Valley since beginning about one year ago. VTOP’s aspirational target is now 70 staffing agency referrals to the Shenandoah Valley region.

Council members asked Mary about challenges encountered and where to find a schedule of upcoming events and the background of the ‘staffing agency’ procured by the Commonwealth.

Chair Merrill asked about the current enrollment at JMU; Anthony responded it is about 21,000 undergrad and 2,000 graduate students.

**Consent Agenda**

Mike Goertzen motioned to approve the consent agenda items, which included July 2024 meeting minutes and the Updated Electronic Participation Policy, followed by a second from Yolanda Shields. These consent agenda items were approved by unanimous vote.

Chair Merrill provided comments on the 2025 Region 8 Calendar included in the meeting packets, asking everyone to note and calendarize the four council meetings which are based on the State Board meetings to gain grant application approvals. He also noted that other meetings are to be determined, based on a new Regional Council Chair beginning in January 2025. Deborah added that the Calendar is always subject to and expected to change throughout the year.

**Nominating Committee Report and Recommendations**

Chair Merrill explained that the Executive Committee acts as the Nominating Committee to propose new Council members for Council votes, seeking to provide economic/industrial and geographical diversity. This has been a major focus of the Chair, as over 12 of the “original” Council members will be rotating off the Council in Spring 2025. The Executive Committee is nominating five individuals for Council service to begin in January 2025: Ed Daley, Greg Hitchin, Bobby Hobbs, Tracey Luellen and Cary Nelson. Chair Merrill took the Nominating Committee’s recommendation as a motion to elect these five people to Council, seconded by Conrad Helsley. The Council voted unanimously to approve the slate of new members. These new members will be on-boarded over the next few weeks.

Mike Goertzen asked when the ‘original’ Council members will have expired terms. Deborah answered their terms expire April 30, 2025, and explained those members will attend the April 2025 Council meeting. Those voted in will begin their terms at the January 28, 2025 Council meeting.

**Executive Director’s Report**

Deborah Flippo provided an update on Region 8’s 2025 fund balance. With no applications at the July Council meeting, the beginning allotment is $1,129,307. If today’s applications are approved by Council and the State Board at their December meeting, the fund balance will become $609,602. She reminded Council of the Competitive Fund, which Region 8 can pursue, but need to be strategic in spending funds for other applications, because if we pursue Competitive Funds, DHCD will require us to use our fund balance before that funding is provided. Chair Merrill reminded Council that they agreed in July to pursue Competitive Funds. Council discussed usage of planning funds, and Cody Anderson provided DHCD programmatic perspectives. He also clarified that planning grant application funding does not include site development planning applications.

Deborah provided a summary of her activities over the last few months. She attended the State Board Retreat in September and said that many legislative members of the State Board were there, and they are keyed on ROI questions. There was also discussion at that Retreat about GO Virginia 2.0, strengthening the program based on new BMPs and JLARC recommendations, and providing public relations for the program.

Deborah also discussed the new State-level Regional Council Committee, tasked with improving relations between State and Regions. Their first meeting will be at Blue Ridge Community College, and Yolanda will be the Region 8 representative, attending the meeting with Deborah.

Finally, Deborah will be focused over the next two months on training a new Executive Director, onboarding the five new Council members elected today, attending the VEDA Winter Membership Meeting and the December 10 State Board virtual meeting.

Deborah thanked the Council for being engaged. She has enjoyed the Executive Director position but knows it should be a full-time position. Region 8 has become something of a model region over the last two years – the only region which has had every application approved and has a Grant Review Committee. She thanked Keith May, who was on the committee who hired her, and the CSPDC Executive Directors for their continual support, and Mark Merrill for his leadership.

**Grant Review Committee Report**

Chair Merrill thanked Grant Review Committee Chair Tracy Fitzsimmons for the committee’s work on two grant applications. Tracey noted her appreciation for the work Deborah and DHCD do in the beginning of the application process. She noted there was a third application, which the GRC agreed needed more work and voted to defer. She explained the process the GRC follows and will ask the applicants to provide a very brief presentation on their project.

*Shenandoah Valley Partnership’s Blue Mountain Extended Due Diligence*

Tracy explained this application is requesting $332,000 to elevate the site’s readiness through due diligence. ROI is difficult to calculate on site development projects – but we must invest in our sites to bring them up to a higher tier. Blue Mountain is the largest site in the central area of Region 8. She asked Jay Langston, Shenandoah Valley Partnership’s Executive Director for comments. Jay explained this is the second phase of due diligence and a grading plan for Phase A on the site’s additional 297 acres will bring the entire site to Tier 4. This work will allow SVP to pursue VEDP’s Business Ready Sites Program funding for final engineering and construction. Tracy asked Jay to address some of the committee’s discussions, for the sake of full transparency. Because this is a privately-owned site, the Committee asked for reassurance that zoning is unlikely to change from manufacturing, based on a Performance Agreement with a “clawback” and the County’s desire for the Regional Industrial Facilities Authority’s development of covenants and restrictions. Chair Merrill asked about the funding to date through the previous two funded projects; Jay replied that previous projects were approximately $135,000 and $78,700 respectively, to total $500,000 when this work is complete.

Deborah provided a needed correction to the application. The total funding request for this project is $348,810, which includes the $16,610 grant administration fee in addition to Tracy’s original comment. Mark asked Brandon to discuss the Financial Report included in the packet. Deborah offered to correct the numbers in the SVP application, once approved. Council discussed the approximate timeline to complete this work; Jay estimated an 8-month schedule once the State Board approves and contract negotiations are completed in December/January. With VEDP funding success, it is likely the project will be Tier 5 in 2026 or 2027. Jay anticipates no additional requests for GO Virginia funding. Asked if the private property owner has invested in the site, Jay replied he is hoping the RIFA will guide investments in the future, and the likely RIFA localities have all been consulted on the RIFA development and this project and have provided positive feedback. A pre-established price of $55,000/acre is part of the current agreement’s long-term option.

GRC Chair Fitzsimmons made a motion on behalf of the GRC Recommendation to support the Blue Mountain implementation grant for $348,810, seconded by Kim Blosser. A roll call vote to approve was unanimous, with Dr. Anthony Tongen abstaining. Mike Goertzen thanked Jay for his work on improvements to the application while on vacation.

*Clarke Co. Double Tollgate Site Development Planning*

Committee Chair Fitzsimmons introduced Clarke County’s Double Tollgate (aka DinosaurLand) application requests $170,625 for site development planning. At Tracy’s request, Clarke County Administrator Chris Boies provided additional information about the property, including the assets to the site’s development, VEDP’s excitement about the site, and the $100,000 acquisition price for 40 acres. The County hopes to leverage the Council’s approval to push the VA Department of General Services to close on the agreed-upon acquisition. Asked about infrastructure, Mr. Boies explained the Frederick Water extension of water to the project, which included Clarke County’s contribution to the price. Deborah reminded the Committee of the contingency included in the GRC recommendation. When asked, Mr. Boies agreed there will likely be a future application for furthering the site through VEDP’s tier system.

GRC Chair Fitzsimmons made a motion on behalf of the GRC Recommendation to approve the Clarke County site development planning grant to fund due diligence and site assessment of the Camp 7 property, contingent upon the County acquiring the property before the funds are expended. Janet Clarke seconded the motion, and on a roll call vote, Council approved unanimously.

**Financial Status Report**

Brandon Davis of the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission felt he had provided updates to the documents included in the packets during the project application discussions. There were no further questions. Chair Mark felt Region 8 is in a good position, halfway through the fiscal year, and halfway through the fund allocation, assuming Board approval of the two applications.

Council asked for an update on the Page County application. Deborah provided a review of the discussions and needs of the application for improvement. Chair Merrill confirmed Council should expect to see that application in early 2025.

**Council Chairman’s Report**

Chair Merrill thanked the Executive Committee, by name, for working diligently to repopulate the Council, to find a new Executive Director, and to make sure projects move forward. We have a strong pool of individuals to fill the vacancies that will occur in May 2025. He recommends not filling all those positions at once, allowing for capacity for new recommendations. He reminded Council that, with a favorable vote, the current Vice Chair will become the Regional Chair at the January 2025 Council meeting.

Chair Merrill reported that the Executive Committee, GRC Chair Fitzsimmons, and Deborah and Brandon worked hard to interview two candidates for the Executive Director position – and are close to making an announcement but need to negotiate a contract first.

He also reported on the discussion he had with Chris Lloyd and Leah Fremouw, whose goal is to suggest policy to improve communication and collaboration between the State Board and Regional Councils. He suggested the desire for longer term realization of the results of GO Virginia funding. He also asked for regular updates on the successes other regions have enjoyed. Finally, he suggested a 2-page overview of GO Virginia to keep people up to date.

**Public Comment**

No public comment was offered.

**Next Council Meeting**

January 28, 2025, starting at 10:00am, by Zoom. With this being her last meeting as Region 8 Executive Director, the Council recognized Deborah Flippo for her service and leadership and provided a thank you gift.

**Adjournment**

With no further business before the Council and Janet Clarke’s motion and Keith May’s second, Chair Merrill adjourned the meeting at 11:36 a.m.