**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, January 28, 2025, 10:00 am

All Virtual Meeting

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| **FIRST** | **LAST** | **AFFILIATION** | **ATTENDED** |
| Devon | Anders | InterChange Group | V |
| Emily | Marlow Beck | Marlow Auto Group | V |
| Kim | Blosser | Laurel Ridge Community College |  |
| Eric | Bond | Augusta County Schools |  |
| Janet | Clarke | Clarke Consulting, LLC. | V |
| Ed | Daley | Interim County Administrator |  |
| Dottie | Day | Navy Federal Credit Union | V |
| Randy | Doyle | Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board | V |
| Ashley | Driver | AD Engineering, LLC | V |
| Tracy | Fitzsimmons | Shenandoah University | V |
| Mike | Goertzen | Serco, Inc. | V |
| John | Graves | Luray Caverns Corporation | V |
| Conrad | Helsley | NSVRC Board | V |
| Greg | Hitchin | Waynesboro Economic Development Director | V |
| Bobby | Hobbs | Senior VP, Cornerstone Bank | V |
| Lai | Lee | High Meadow Strategies | V |
| Tracey | Luellen | Senior HR Manager, Toray Plastics | V |
| Keith | May | Cottonwood Commercial | V |
| Mary | McDermott | Shenandoah Valley Angel Investors | V |
| Mark | Merrill | Retired Medical Professional | V |
| Kathy | Moore | Moore Public Relations | V |
| Doug | Moyer | Sentara RMH Medical Center | V |
| Cary | Nelson | President, H.N.Funkhouser & Co. | V |
| Yolanda | Shields | YesBuilds | V |
| Bruce | Simms | Virginia Regional Transit | V |
| Mike | Stolarz | UTS Systems | V |
| Anthony | Tongen | James Madison University | V |
| Dave | Urso | Blue Ridge Community College | V |

*Support staff attending included: Alison Varner-Denbigh (GoVaR8 Executive Director, Ann Cundy (CSPDC), Brandon Davis (NSVRC), Jay Langston (SVP) and Cody Anderson (DHCD).*

*Virtual guests included:* Sharon Johnson (SVWDB), Jeremy Crute (CSPDC), Shara Gibson (DHCD), Joseph Dennie (DHCD), and Nina Fox (Page County Economic Development).

**Call to Order and Welcome**

The January 28, 2025 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 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

Alison Varner-Denbigh called the Council roll, and a quorum was confirmed.

**Welcome to First Regional Council Meeting of 2025**

Chair Merril introduced Alison Varner-Denbigh as the newly contracted executive director of GO Virginia Region 8 who started cross-training with Deborah Flippo in November 2024 and only in her director role for 28 days. Merril spoke on how proud he is that during the last year, we’ve been able to repopulate the council members, created a list of potential candidates, completed the search for a new executive director, had a successful leadership transition, maximized the regional funding, and created a good pipeline of projects. Mark Merril expressed his gratitude and thanked the new members for serving.

**Consent Agenda**

Lai Lee motioned to approve the consent agenda item of October 22, 2024 meeting minutes, followed by a second from Conrad Helsley. The consent agenda item was approved by unanimous vote.

**Nominating Committee Report and Recommendations**

Chair Merrill explained that the Executive Committee acts as the Nominating Committee to propose new Council members, regional chair, and vice-chair positions for Council vote. The Executive Committee nominates Dr. Yolanda Shields as the incoming GO Virginia Region 8 Chair and Janet Clarke as Vice Chair for two-year term. Chair Merrill took the Nominating Committee’s recommendation as a motion to elect these two individuals to Council Leadership roles, seconded by Tracy Fitzsimmons. The Council voted unanimously to approve the new Chair and Vice Chair.

Executive Director Alison Varner-Denbigh delivered an appreciation gift to Mark Merril prior to the meeting to express our gratitude for his leadership as chair this past year and serving on the regional council since 2017. Mark received a Camelback Backpack along with a book on all the best hikes in the Shenandoah Valley. His fellow council members knew how much Mark enjoys the outdoors and hiking around our beautiful valley. Tracy Fitzsimmons spoke on behalf of the council, expressing our deepest gratitude for all his dedication, passion, and service the past 8 years.

**Executive Director’s Report**

Alison Varner-Denbigh introduced herself to the council as the new executive director that started only a few weeks ago in her new role. She explained that she is contracted through her 5 Clover Consulting, LLC company to NSVRC (who is the fiscal agent for GO Virginia Region 8) for her position. Alison thanked the executive committee for the opportunity and feels very confident she received excellent cross-training from Deborah Flippo (outgoing executive director). Alison listed all of the accomplishments that have occurred in the last three weeks which included finalizing two grants with DHCD (Clark County Camp 7 and SVP Blue Mountain projects), assisting Page County Meat Processing Project in application process, supported 1st executive committee meeting of the year, supported the grants review committee meeting, formed the Growth & Diversification Committee, Formed the Talent Pipeline Initiative Ad-hoc committee, updated spreadsheet identifying all members/committees/new leadership/terms, consolidated all potential project into the pipeline spreadsheet and completed website training. She said that it has been a bit of a whirlwind in addition to preparation for this council meeting but feels good about her new role. Alison spoke about her goals for the next 60 days and welcomed feedback. She is looking forward to working alongside each of the council members, getting to know them, and creating projects that will bring positive changes for the Shenandoah Valley for generations to come.

**Grant Review Committee Report**

Chair Shields thanked Grant Review Committee Chair Tracy Fitzsimmons for the committee’s work on the grant application being submitted for approval today. Tracy noted her appreciation for the work Deborah, Alison and DHCD did in the application process.

Page County Meat Processing Cooperative

Tracy explained this application is requesting $87,450 funds to support the creation of a Meat Processing Cooperative to help solve the local producers bottleneck in the aging, storing, and fabrication stages of beef production. $37,000 funds will be used to create legal frameworks for partnerships, especially for processing steps not covered by the facility itself, such as live receiving and harvesting. Additionally, funds will be used to develop legal agreements supporting the Public-Private Partnership, which includes drafting the legal documents that formalize the public-private partnership between the localities, producers, and the other stakeholders. $27,375 funds will be used to develop generic design of cold storage and shipping areas that will ensure the facility can efficiently handle and store processed products for distribution. $17,325 funds will go towards the design plan for the carcass receiving area and cooling systems to ensure that the facility adheres to processing requirements.

Nina Fox of Page County (the applicant), explained more about the bottleneck of beef processing for local farmers and surrounding areas. Farmers are having to ship their beef out west or up north which cut into the profits plus doesn’t allow Virginia to realize the final product revenues. The facility and cooperative will bring benefit to the entire Mid-Atlantic Region. Other State and Federal organizations are in support of this project and will be funding other elements of the project. GRC Chair Fitzsimmons noted that this is a GO Virginia Planning Grant under the threshold of $100,000 which means it will not go to the State Board for approval but reviewed by GO Virginia Administration for approval in March 2025.

GRC Chair Fitzsimmons made a motion on behalf of the GRC Recommendation to support the Page County Meat Processing Cooperative for $87,450, seconded by Mark Merril. The roll call vote to approve was unanimous. Fitzsimmons noted this will be her last grant as chair of the grants committee with her end term date approaching in April. She stated this will be a memorable grant for her as she is a vegetarian. GRC Vice Chair Ashley Driver expressed appreciation on behalf of the regional council and the community for her leadership as GRC chair for the last eight years. Her shoes will be difficult to fill!

**Project Status Updates**

Executive Director Alison Varner-Denbigh stated that the internal Closed Report and Open Project Report do not tie to the Financial Status Reports of Brandon Davis. She stated that only being in the role a few weeks, was unable to identify and/or correct the discrepancy. Alison will have it corrected by next quarter and report her findings. Alison did provide the Closed Projects and Open Projects Reports for review. She opened the floor for questions about the 10 open projects, no questions were asked. Alison presented the updated Project Pipeline Spreadsheet, noting there were a few projects with no point-of-contacts listed for her to assist in the research and development of these projects. The regional council identified some of the contacts for Alison to use. She will continue her efforts to assist in the progression of the project ideas.

**Financial Status Report**

Brandon Davis of the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission stated there is $609,705 in the Per-Capita Fund minus the tentative Page County Meat Processing Grant awaiting state approval of $87,450 equating to a balance of $522,252 remaining for FY25 year.

Mr. Davis stated that GO Virginia Region 8 made a good decision to hire Alison Varner-Denbigh as the new executive-director and looking forward to working alongside her. He stated that he will help to resolve the discrepancy between the Region 8 internal reports and the fiscal DHCD financial reports that match CAMS. He feels confident that this will be resolved by the next regional council meeting. He welcomed questions from the regional council, but no questions were presented.

**Talent Pathways Initiative Update**

Sharon Johnson, the executive director of the Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board (SVWDB) and the administrator on the TPI $250,000 Grant Project for Region 8, gave a presentation on the TPI status and updates. She provided a PowerPoint Slide of the top three high-level takeaways thus far. The three takeaways are 1) Establish and Convene Sector-Based Partnerships, 2) Increase Flexible Work-Based Learning Opportunities, and 3) Work with employers to develop career pathways and defined job roles. Sharon went into depth on the data collection process, interviews with stakeholders, and ongoing efforts for the July projected completion date. An Ad-Hoc committee has been formed to participate in monthly meetings with Sharon to assist in evaluation of the data used, reviewing the analysis, identifying any potential gaps, review status reports, and offer support overall.

**Growth & Diversification Plan Update**

Ann Cundy of the Central Shenandoah District Planning Commission gave a presentation on the DHCD request for a thorough analysis of region 8’s economic development needs in relation to GO Virginia’s areas of focus. Ann spoke on the process of the project which includes the creation of a G&D steering committee, stakeholder engagement feedback via an online survey and assisting with targeted industry sector focus groups, use JobsEQ and VOEE data to evaluate the performance of the region’s economy, complete a targeted industry sector analysis, complete a targeted industry sectors skills gap analysis, develop goals and actionable strategies, and complete a SWOT analysis. Ms. Cundy will give an update of the G&D Plan at each regional quarterly meeting with a final report out at the October 2025 regional meeting for final approval. The updated G&D plan needs to be submitted to DHCD by October 31, 2025.

**DHCD Dashboard Introduction**

Cody Anderson of Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) presented the newly created GO Virginia statewide dashboard. The data can be viewed by each region, by targeted industry cluster type, and by framework allocations (dollars and by number of projects). Cody clarified that this just went live on January 1, 2025 and that it is still work-in-progress. The information will be updated quarterly at minimum. He encouraged everyone to check-it out. Link: [GOVA Dashboard | Tableau Public](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/virginiadhcd/viz/GOVADashboard_17345526597200/GOVADashboard)

**Council Chairman’s Report**

Chair Shields thanked the Regional Council for voting her for the role of GO Virginia Region 8 chair. She expressed her excitement and appreciation for being part of an amazing organization. She looks forward to the opportunities that this council can accomplish in our region.

**Public Comment**

No public comment was offered.

**Next Council Meeting**

April 22, 2025, starting at 10:00am, at the Winchester Regional Airport’s new terminal.

**Adjournment**

With no further business before the Council, Tracy Fitzsimmons motioned and Mark Merril’s seconded for close of the meeting. Chair Shields adjourned the meeting at 11:59 a.m.