

**MINUTES
 BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
 UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
 DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
 430 HELIX ROAD
 GREENWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA
 MONDAY, June 28, 2021**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Buddy Agan, Diane Anderson, John Calhoun, John Carter, Jim Coleman, Otis Grier Jr., Charlie Henry, Charles Jennings, Milliken Matthews, Marian Miller, Matthew Miller, Willie Neal Norman, Ernie Segars, Albert Talbert.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jackie Brown, Edith Childs, Scott Cooper, Ken Durham, Amelia Herlong, Shirley Jenkins, Theo Lane, Sen. Shane Massey, Wes McAllister, Sen. Floyd Nicholson, Rep. Anne Parks, David Sawyer, Brandon Smith, Roy Smith Jr., Melissa Spencer, Jerry Strawbridge, Don Smoak, Faye Thomas and Sen. Danny Verdin.

STAFF PRESENT: Patricia Hartung, Sam Leaman, Ann Skinner, Rick Green, Melissa Phillips, Keith Smith, Sandra Moore, David Hays, Cason Wright, Shannon Hill

GUESTS PRESENT: Scott Neely, SCANA; James Hicks, Index-Journal; Erin Porter, Betsy McCall, Christina Lewis, Kevin McLaughlin, Clint Scoville, Renee Miller-Cotton and Tyke Redfearn, SCDOT

Call to Order	<p>Meeting was held via conference call and Zoom video conference due to COVID-19 social distancing. Ten Upper Savannah staff members attended the meeting in the USCOG Board room while Board members joined via conference call and Zoom. Chairman Willie Neal Norman was present in the Board room and called the meeting to order.</p> <p>The April 26, 2021, minutes were approved upon motion by Buddy Agan, seconded by Jim Coleman.</p>
Transportation	<p>Government Services Director Rick Green requested approval of the System Performance Amendment to the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan as e-mailed to Board members. The Amendment sets standards for safety, pavement, roads and bridge improvement, etc., to the long-range plan. The Amendment was approved upon motion by Jim Coleman, seconded by Charles Jennings.</p> <p>Green presented the SCDOT Public Transit 5310 Application Rankings to the Board. Regional rankings are submitted to the SCDOT Commission for final review and possible funding. Transit providers annually apply for van funding and Upper Savannah staff ranks their requests. McCormick Area Transit (MAT) has entered into an agreement with Greenwood County to provide public transportation within a 2.5-mile radius of the Greenwood County courthouse beginning July 1, 2021, and also hopes to provide transportation in Abbeville County pending federal funding from the Rural Transit Assistance Program. Therefore, MAT has applied for six vans, including two replacement vans for McCormick County Senior Center's current fleet, two vans to use for transit expansion into Greenwood County, and two for expansion into Abbeville County if funding is approved (announcement expected July 23, 2021).</p>

	<p>Piedmont Agency on Aging has applied for one replacement van.</p> <p>The rankings are, first, McCormick County Senior Center replacement vans; second, two MAT vans for use in Greenwood County; third, PAOA replacement van; fourth, two MAT vans for use in Abbeville County. The rankings were approved upon motion by Matthew Miller, seconded by Diane Anderson. The results of the rankings will be sent to the SCDOT Commission for approval.</p> <p>Green told Board members that road maintenance project lists by county for the upcoming SCDOT fiscal year starting Oct. 1, 2021, are available on the Upper Savannah and SCDOT web sites. Green said paper copies are also available upon request.</p> <p>Green updated the Board on a transportation safety concern in Laurens County. A portion of Whelon Road, a state-maintained road located just northwest of the City of Laurens, runs between two ponds but has no guardrails. The property owner has requested assistance with improving the safety of this portion of the road. Board member Jim Coleman of Laurens County said there is a lot of traffic on that road and nothing to prevent vehicles from accidentally driving into the ponds, with the lack of space between the shoulder of the road and the water. SCDOT District 2 Administrator Kevin McLaughlin said the project is beyond the scope of their routine maintenance capability and would be very expensive to complete. He said it would be a difficult challenge to put guardrails there due to lack of space between shoulders of the road and the ponds without water intrusion, and that property owners might consider draining the ponds. Green said the project may require SCDOT rural Guideshare dollars which might not become fully available until 2023.</p> <p>Green said Board members and administrators would be invited to attend a meeting with SCDOT planning and construction staff to discuss transportation projects in the Region in the near future whether it be in person or via conferencing. More details will be announced later.</p>
<p>Workforce Development Update</p>	<p>Workforce Development Director Ann Skinner gave update on the \$2.4 million Department of Labor rural healthcare grant jointly awarded to the Upper Savannah and Pee Dee COGs. The Upper Savannah portion of the grant is to fill an urgent healthcare need in the Region, which is to train emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics. The goal of the grant is to add 100 EMTs and paramedics throughout the Region over the next four years, she said. Currently, nine are enrolled in a Piedmont Technical College EMT program through the grant. EMT directors from Abbeville, Greenwood and Laurens counties have met with these students to discuss their hiring needs and opportunities. Skinner said Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding could be available for classroom and on-the-job training for EMTs and paramedics.</p> <p>Skinner said extended unemployment assistance ends in South Carolina June 30, 2021, and that approximately 5,000 Upper Savannah region residents will no longer receive assistance. Skinner said many of them will now be seeking jobs</p>

	<p>and will need assistance in their searches. Skinner said that many jobs are available and that a job fair is being planned for July at Piedmont Technical College.</p>
<p>CDBG-Coronavirus Funding Program</p>	<p>Economic Recovery Specialist Cason Wright updated the Board on the EDA CARES Act Planning Grant. Upper Savannah serves as a liaison in identifying resiliency, mitigation and economic recovery projects in heavily COVID impacted areas in the Region, she said.</p> <p>Wright said Upper Savannah has helped minority businesses, small businesses and nonprofits with CARES Act grants that became available last fall. The COG has also helped small businesses through the CARES Act Revolving Loan Fund.</p> <p>Upper Savannah has participated in several meetings and events as part of its outreach strategy, including the kick-off meeting of the Brew, which brings entrepreneurs and small business leaders from Greenwood and the surrounding areas together to discuss challenges, share ideas and support each other. The COG also attended a meeting with the VisionGreenwood Broadband Task Force, whose goal is to improve broadband connectivity throughout the area. USCOG has also participated in hazard mitigation meetings, Wright said.</p> <p>Upper Savannah has submitted two applications for CDBG-CV funding, she said. The COG serves as the liaison between local, state and federal partners to speed up recovery efforts. The COG has been working to implement locally-generated disaster recovery economic development projects that have been developed as part of the resiliency portion of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document. Also, Wright said she has worked on EDA project progress reports and environmental reviews for CDBG projects.</p>
<p>FY 2022 Budget and Annual Resolution on Select Operating Policies</p>	<p>Assistant Director Sam Leaman presented the FY 2022 Budget. The operating budget increased 2.9 percent, but the total budget decreased by 0.9 percent.</p> <p>Leaman reported that the sub-lease revenue and state aid to COGs remained the same while county dues increased slightly due to a small rise in population. The local technical assistance increased 10 percent due to the Upper Savannah staff assistance provided to USLT. The biggest change on the revenue side of the budget was Economic Development Administration going up from \$80,000 in FY 21 to \$270,000 in FY 22 due to the EDA CARES Act Planning Grant. Revolving Loan Fund revenues decreased \$60,000 due to loans being paid off early, reducing interest rates to help borrowers during the pandemic and a general expectation that some businesses may continue to struggle to recover. Workforce Development revenues decreased due to reduced funding, Aging revenues decreased slightly and Community Development funding increased by \$45,000 with several new projects.</p> <p>On the expense side of the budget, the salary line item increased 2.6 percent, fringe benefits went up five percent primarily due to state retirement system contributions, services rendered increased due to an employee moving to a contract arrangement, and maintenance and service agreements, travel and meetings, and office building, repairs and improvements all increased.</p>

	<p>Having been reviewed by the Executive Committee, the budget was approved by Charles Jennings, seconded by Jim Coleman and Albert Talbert.</p> <p>Leaman then presented the Annual Board Resolution of Select Operating Policies for July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022, noting that the reimbursement rates for travel, meals and mileage etc., would be unchanged from last fiscal year. The procurement level also remains the same from last fiscal year at \$2,500. The resolution was approved upon motion by Diane Anderson, seconded by Otis Grier Jr. and Marian Miller.</p>
Director's Report	<p>Executive Director Patricia Hartung recognized Cason Wright for her work with the EDA CARES Act Planning Grant and CDBG-Coronavirus Funding, getting funds distributed as best as possible, which was made especially challenging due to delayed information and program changes during the process.</p> <p>Hartung brought the Above and Beyond document that was included in the agenda package to the Board members attention. The document was created by the state's 10 COGs and summarizes the SC COGS' statewide state-wide efforts related to the COVID pandemic. The handout illustrates that the 10 COGs hosted 883 workforce events to assist people who found themselves suddenly unemployed due to the pandemic, assisted more than 8,000 job seekers statewide, and applied for a total of \$15.3 million in COVID relief funds. More than 1.3 million additional home-delivered meals were served with COVID funds during the pandemic throughout the state, 10,017 clients were added to the waiting list for senior services, and 1,179 seniors were removed from waiting lists to begin receiving services. The document shows how the state's 10 COGs pulled together and assisted local governments and partners through the difficult challenges of the pandemic.</p> <p>Hartung discussed with Board members her hope that they will be able to meet in person for the next meeting in August. Zoom conferencing would also be available. Hartung asked for feedback and there were no objections to meeting in person.</p> <p>Hartung discussed the recently-passed open carry law, indicating that the COG would restrict access to their buildings to anybody with a weapon whether concealed or otherwise. Signs will be placed on USCOG's entrances indicating a weapon-free facility. Upper Savannah has installed cameras and doorbells while keeping its doors locked to the general public for the foreseeable future. Staff will admit a person or people in the building when there is a purpose.</p>
Adjourn	Being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.



Patricia C. Hartung
Executive Director