

RRRC History & Today

The Evolving Role & Priorities of Regional Commissions

February 28, 2024



Purpose & Goals

- Why: Orient New & Returning Commissioners as to RRRC's evolution and roles across program areas
- What: Brief History of RRRC and Planning Districts in Virginia; Review RRRC's current Focus Areas
- How: Review RRRC's Primary Funding Sources and Challenges
- Discussion & Decision Points
 - Facilitated Session proposed for April – Less than ½ day in conjunction with shortened business meeting
 - Is there a desire for a sub-committee to work with Facilitator beforehand?
 - April Meeting date - Proposed Facilitator unavailable for April 24
 - Options: Week of April 15-19; Week of April 29-May 3

Regional Commissions in Virginia

- 1968: Metropolitan Areas Study Commission (*Hahn Commission*)
 - Recommendations included state entity to oversee administrative process for resolving local boundary disputes, state assistance for regional planning & regional service district creation
 - Strong legislative resistance to most recommendations
- One recommendation implemented immediately via the Virginia Area Development Act (VADA) was the creation of a system of planning district commissions throughout the state

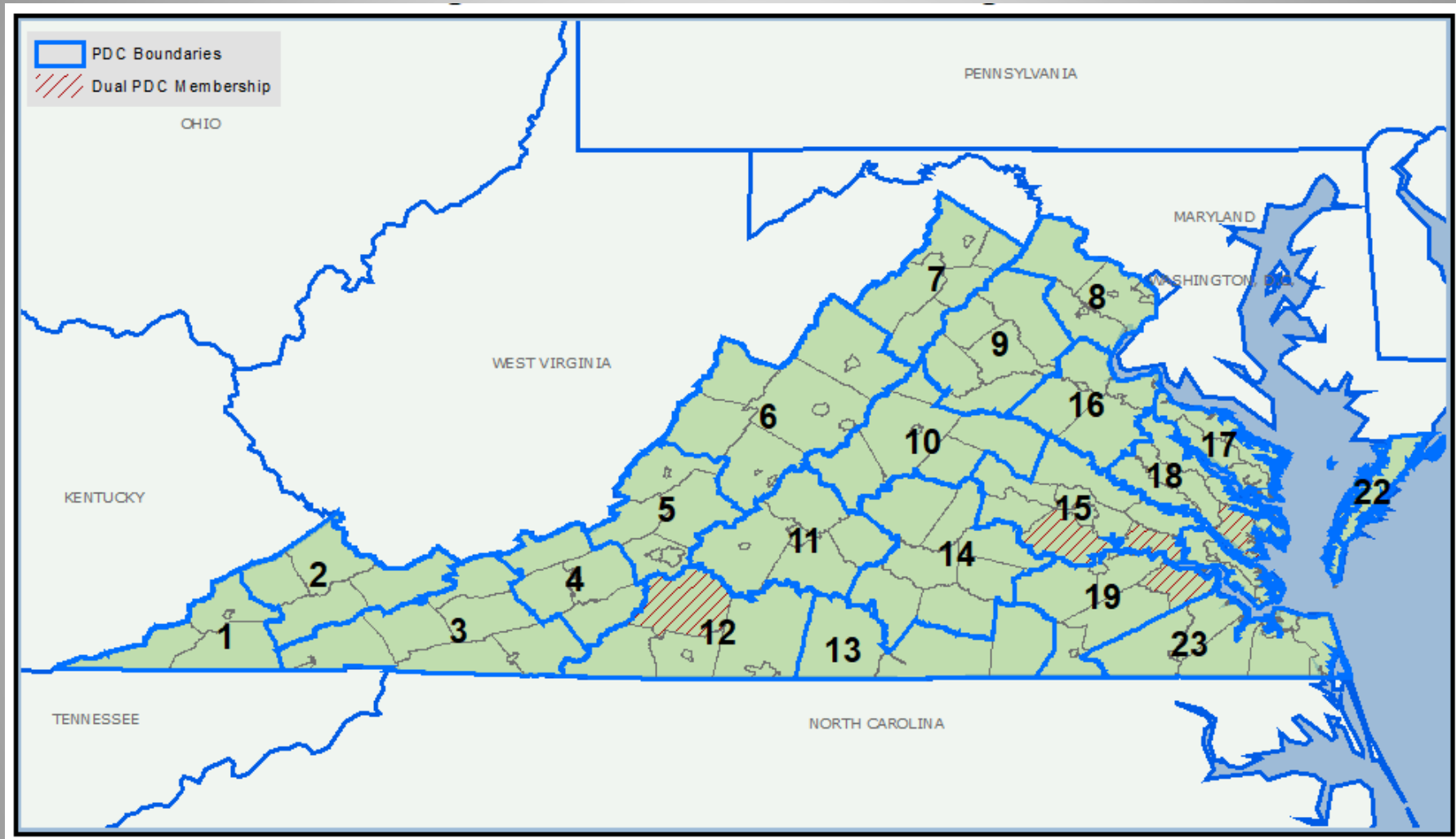
Virginia Area Development Act (VADA)

- Established Planning District Commissions as voluntary regional organizations
- “It shall be the purpose of the planning district commission to promote the orderly and efficient development of the physical, social and economic elements of the district by planning, encouraging and assisting governmental subdivisions to plan for the future.” (§ 15.2-4207)
- Authority for defining PDC regions was given to?

Regional Commissions in Virginia

- The Director of the Division of State Planning and Community Affairs (DSPCA) was given final authority for defining PDC boundaries
- 1969: Final PDC Delineations announced
- 1969-1972: PDC Charters enacted in all regions
- 1976: DSPCA Dissolved; PDCs placed under Department of Housing & Community Development oversight at state level
- How many PDCs based on original regions? How many today?

Regional Commissions in Virginia (2024)



The Role of PDCs

- Convene: At its core, the PDC should be a convener of regional leaders in an effort to promote discussion and identify common ground in pursuit of greater efficiency and stewardship of public resources
- Foster Collaboration: Active incorporation of stakeholders into the planning process
- Identify Opportunity for Multijurisdictional partnership: Value is produced by actions or consideration of issues relevant across political boundaries
- Implementation: The Hahn Commission and VADA initially envisioned PDCs evolving into “Service District Commissions.” That never formally happened, but the line between planning and implementation is blurry

Regional Commissions in Virginia

- First major review/revision of PDC enabling legislation occurred in 1995 following a JLARC Report on PDCs requested by General Assembly
- Findings included:
 - PDCs placed less emphasis on regional planning, primarily due to funding limitations
 - Federal funding provided an initial boost for regional plan development; With decreased federal funding, emphasis shifted to local planning
 - Satisfaction from local officials regarding PDC services and performance

Regional Cooperation Act (1995)

- “It is the purpose of the planning district commission to encourage and facilitate local government cooperation and state-local cooperation in addressing on a regional basis problems of greater than local significance.” (§ 15.2-4207)
- Identified Functional Areas for Regional Cooperation, not limited to:
 - Economic/Physical Infrastructure Development
 - Solid Waste/Water Supply/Environmental Management
 - Transportation
 - Criminal Justice
 - Emergency Management
 - Human Services
 - Recreation

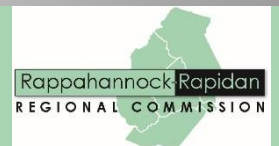
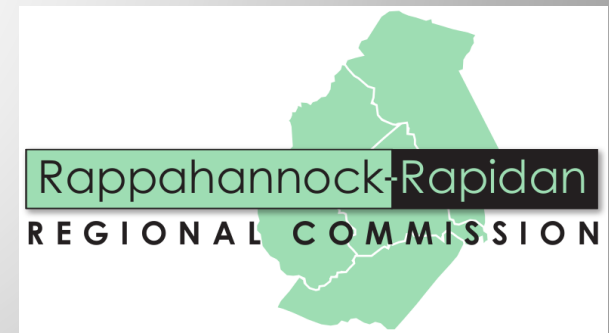
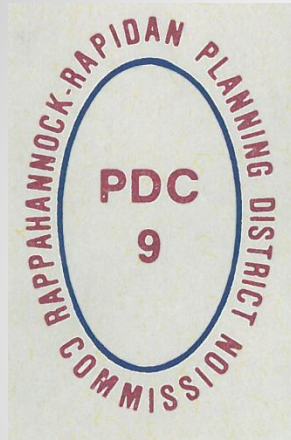
Regional Cooperation Act (1995)

- Specifically outlines duties of PDCs:
 - Conduct studies on issues and problems of regional significance;
 - Identify and study potential opportunities for cost savings and staffing efficiencies through coordinated local government efforts;
 - Identify mechanisms for the coordination of local interests on a regional basis;
 - Implement services upon the request of member local governments;
 - Provide technical assistance to local governments;
 - To serve as a liaison between local governments and state agencies as requested;
 - Review local government aid applications as required by applicable state and federal law and regulation;
 - Develop regional functional area plans as deemed necessary by the commission or as requested by member local governments;
 - Assist state agencies, as requested, in the development of sub-state plans;
 - Participate in a statewide geographic information system, the Virginia Geographic Information Network, as directed by the Department of Planning and Budget; and
 - Collect and maintain demographic, economic, and other data concerning the region and member local governments and act as a state data center affiliate in cooperation with the Virginia Employment Commission.
 - Prepare and adopt regional strategic plan, and review/update every 5 years

Regional Commissions in Virginia

- Little legislative activity regarding PDCs since Regional Cooperation Act (1995)
- Evidence that state and federal agencies recognize value of PDC for project/policy coordination
 - DHCD Grant programs with regional focus
 - VDOT & DEQ annual contracts for most PDCs
 - Virginia Housing PDC Housing Development Program
 - Smart Scale & VTrans Planning
 - Department of Rail & Public Transportation for multiple programs (5310, Commuter Assistance, MPO funding, etc.)
 - Department of Conservation & Recreation – Virginia Outdoors Plan, Resiliency Planning
 - FEMA and VDEM – Hazard Mitigation

Brief History of RRRC



Brief History of RRRC

- Charter was effective on December 8, 1970
- Four original members
 - Fauquier County
 - Orange County
 - Rappahannock County
 - Town of Warrenton



Brief History of RRRC

- First Meeting: January 16, 1973 at Culpeper Town Hall
- September 1973: First Executive Director Hired
- Office Space Leased for \$85/month at 702 South Main Street, Culpeper



RRRC Activities through the Decades

- 1970's: Largely driven by Federal funding programs
 - Focus on Physical Planning – Local Infrastructure Needs
 - Criminal Justice Planning
 - Manpower (Workforce)
 - Development of Regional Comprehensive Plan (VADA requirement)
 - Regional Community Development Plans (Land Use, Housing)
- 1980's: Shift toward local
 - Comprehensive Plans
 - Zoning & Subdivision ordinance development
 - Transportation: Route 29 Corridor Study in Madison County
 - Development of Ridesharing / Commuter Program (1982-83)
 - Tourism activities and coordination
 - Community Development Block Grant administration (primarily water, wastewater infrastructure)

RRRC Activities through the decades

- 1990's: Continued focus on CDBG & Transportation Planning
 - Rural Transportation Technical Assistance program initiated
 - Environmental and Infrastructure – Septic System surveys throughout the region
 - Regional Cooperation Act (1995) generated opportunities in economic development, small business development support and tourism
- 2000's: Environmental & Community Development
 - Total Maximum Daily Load Planning – RRRC on the front end with planning coordination led to significant implementation funding that continues to the present
 - Initial Hazard Mitigation Plan completed in 2005 under mandate from FEMA and Department of Homeland Security
 - Regional transportation planning with VDOT for Long Range Transportation and DRPT for Human Services transportation
 - Living Towns Planning Workshop series (2002-2013)

RRRC Activities through the decades

- 2010's and 2020's: Regional opportunities and local supports
 - Identifying regional approaches to open funding streams
 - Farm & Food System Planning and RRRC Food Council
 - Evolution of Foothills Area Mobility System to Regional Transportation Collaborative
 - Regional Housing Study and the lead-in to the PDC Housing Development Program
 - Accepting role as Foothills Housing Network Lead Agency and providing support to local service providers
 - Active Transportation Plan and exploring co-benefits for Recreation and Quality of life
 - Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
 - Regional Resiliency Planning

Brief History of RRRC

- RRRC's history reflects the reality of Planning District Commissions
 - State Code enables PDCs, but the State has provided limited base funding and support for PDCs (JLARC, 1995)
 - Local government provide the means for PDC base funding, which are critical for leveraging non-local funding sources, thus the tendency of PDCs to focus on local project in addition to multi-jurisdictional projects
 - Enhanced local capacity also affects RRRC programming and work plan (ex. CDBG projects, Local administration of projects)
 - Highly reliant on grant funding, most of which is Federal funding through state agencies (VDOT, DRPT, DEQ, DHCD)

RRRC Guiding Documents

- Key Regional Plans
 - Long Range Transportation Plan (2022)
 - Active Transportation Plan (2020; update pending)
 - Commuter Services Strategic Plan (ongoing)
 - Regional Transportation Collaborative Strategies (annual updates via RTC partners)
 - Regional Housing Study (2021)
 - Foothills Housing Network 10-Year Plan (update pending)
 - Farm & Food System Plan (2015; Priorities updated 2023)
 - Chesapeake Bay Watershed Improvement Plan Phase III (2018; ongoing updates)
 - Hazard Mitigation / Resiliency Plan (2018; update ongoing)
 - Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (ongoing)

RRRC Focus Areas

- Community Development
 - Hazard Mitigation & Resiliency
 - Local Committee facilitation/support
 - GIS program
- Environmental & Agricultural Development
 - Chesapeake Bay Watershed Planning & Coordination
 - Rappahannock-Rapidan Food Council
 - Farm to School Capacity
 - Purely Piedmont Local Food brand
- Economic Development & Tourism
 - Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)
 - GO Virginia / Central Virginia Partnership representation
 - Purely Piedmont Agritourism brand (previous Tween Rivers Trail)
 - VA 250 Regional coordination

RRRC Focus Areas

- Housing & Homeless Services Coordination
 - PDC Housing Development Grant program
 - Foothills Housing Network Lead Agency
- Regional Coordination & Technical Assistance
 - Catch-all for everything else – Legislative,
 - Grantwriting and Grant administration
- Transportation
 - Rural Transportation Planning
 - Regional Transportation Collaborative / Mobility Management
 - Commuter Services Program

RRRC Focus Areas

- Regional Vision (2001)
 - Land Use & Growth Management – *Places of Character*
 - Natural Resource Protection – *Places of Beauty*
 - Schools & Recreation – *Places of Learning*
 - Utilities & Transportation – *Places of Service*
 - Economic & Housing Opportunity – *Places of Opportunity*
 - Local Powers & Authority – *Places of Empowerment*
- Strategic Planning Retreat Priorities (2007)
 - 10 key priorities identified by Board Members/Staff
 - Provided the basis for annual RRRC Work Plan in the interim 15+ years
- Time to revisit, revise and reconfirm those priorities

Regional Commissions in Virginia

- “Each PDC is challenged to tailor its services to meet the diverse needs of its member localities.” (DHCD Biennial Report on PDCs)
- Annual state funding for PDCs comes from General Assembly via DHCD contract (~\$90,000 for most; ~\$165K for NOVA, HRPDC, ~\$130K for PlanRVA)
- Other funding varies widely by PDC
 - Local Contributions
 - Federal and State grants
 - Private and Foundation grants

Questions for Today

- Discussion & Decision Points
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 - Options: Week of April 15-19; Week of April 29-May 3
 - Between now and April, Commissioners and key stakeholders will likely be asked to complete survey on RRRC and the current focus areas
 - What other information do you need from staff, now or in the future?