

Code of Virginia

§ 15.2-4200. Short title.

This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Regional Cooperation Act."

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1400; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4201. Purpose of chapter.

This chapter is enacted:

1. To improve public health, safety, convenience and welfare, and to provide for the social, economic and physical development of communities and metropolitan areas of the Commonwealth on a sound and orderly basis, within a governmental framework and economic environment which will foster constructive growth and efficient administration.
2. To provide a means of coherent articulation of community needs, problems, and potential for service.
3. To foster planning for such development by encouraging the creation of effective regional planning agencies and providing the financial and professional assistance of the Commonwealth.
4. To provide a forum for state and local government on issues of a regional nature.
5. To encourage regional cooperation and coordination with the goals of improved services to citizens and increased cost-effectiveness of governmental activities.
6. To deter the fragmentation of governmental units and services.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1401; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4202. Definitions.

For the purposes of this chapter:

"Commission" means a planning district commission. Planning district commissions are composed of the duly appointed representatives of the localities which are parties to the charter agreement.

"Planning district" means a contiguous area within the boundaries established by the Department of Housing and Community Development.

"Population," unless a different census is clearly set forth, means the number of inhabitants according to the United States census latest preceding the time at which any provision dependent upon population is being applied, or the time as of which it is being construed, unless there is available an annual estimate of population prepared by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service of the University of Virginia, which has been filed with the Department of Housing and Community Development, in which event the estimate shall govern.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1402; 1976, c. 760; 1986, c. 164; 1990, c. 722; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4203. Organization of planning district commission.

A. At any time after the establishment of the geographic boundaries of a planning district, the localities embracing at least 45 percent of the population within the district acting by their governing bodies may organize a planning district commission by written agreement. Any locality not a party to such charter agreement shall continue as a part of the planning district but, until such time as such locality elects to become a part of the planning district commission as hereinafter provided, shall not be represented in the composition of the membership of the planning district commission. Whenever a planning district is created which contains only two counties, the governing body of either county may organize a planning district commission in accordance with the provisions of this chapter if the governing body of the other county does not agree to organize such a planning district commission.

B. The charter agreement shall set forth:

1. The name of the planning district. An entity organized as a planning district commission under this act may employ the name "regional council" or "regional commission" as a substitute for the name "planning district commission."
2. The locality in which its principal office shall be situated.
3. The effective date of the organization of the planning district commission.
4. The composition of the membership of the planning district commission. At least a majority of its members shall be elected officials of the governing bodies of the localities within the district, or members of the General Assembly, with each county, city and town of more than 3,500 population having at least one representative. In any planning district other than planning district number 23, a town of 3,500 or less population may petition the planning district commission to be represented thereon. The planning district commission may, in its discretion, grant representation to such town by a majority vote of the members of the commission. Other members shall be qualified voters and residents of the district. In planning districts number 4 and 14, the membership may also include representatives of higher education institutions. Should the charter agreement, as adopted, so provide, an alternate may serve in lieu of one of the elected officials of each of the governing bodies of the participating localities.
5. The term of office of the members, their method of selection or removal and the method for the selection and the term of office of a chairman.
6. The voting rights of members. Such voting rights need not be equal and may be weighed on the basis of the population of the locality represented by the member, the aggregation of the voting rights of members representing one locality, or otherwise.
7. The procedure for amendment, for addition of other localities within the planning district which are not parties to the original charter agreement, and the withdrawal from the charter agreement by localities within the planning district electing to do so.

C. The governing body of any locality which is a member of the planning district commission may provide for compensation to be paid by it for its commission members, except for any full-time salaried employees of the locality. The amount of such compensation shall not exceed the amount fixed by the planning district commission.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1403; 1970, cc. 303, 703; 1972, c. 595; 1973, c. 176; 1982, c. 660; 1989, c. 49; 1993, c. 838; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587; 1998, cc. 668, 686; 2000, c. 984; 2005, c. 819.)

§ 15.2-4204. Disposition of earnings and assets of planning district commissions.

No part of the net earnings of any planning district commission organized under the provisions of this chapter shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, any of its members, officers or other private persons, other than to its member localities as provided in this chapter. However, the commission may pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes of a planning district commission as set forth in this chapter and in its charter and bylaws. Upon the dissolution or termination of any planning district commission, it shall, after paying or making provisions for the payment of its liabilities, distribute its assets to its member localities, pro rata, based upon the formula used to determine local government dues to the commission.

(1989, c. 178, § 15.1-1403.1; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4205. Powers of commission generally.

A. Upon organization of a planning district commission, pursuant to charter agreement, it shall be a public body corporate and politic, the purposes of which shall be to perform the planning and other functions provided by this chapter, and it shall have the power to perform such functions and all other powers incidental thereto.

B. Without in any manner limiting or restricting the general powers conferred by this chapter, the planning district commission may:

1. Adopt and have a common seal and to alter the same at pleasure.

2. Sue and be sued.

3. Adopt bylaws and make rules and regulations for the conduct of its business; however, a planning district commission shall not amend its budget once adopted during the applicable fiscal year except pursuant to an affirmative vote of the same number of the entire membership of the planning district commission required to adopt the budget.

4. Make and enter into all contracts or agreements, as it may determine, which are necessary or incidental to the performance of its duties and to the execution of the powers granted under this chapter.

5. Apply for and accept, disburse and administer, for itself or for member localities so requesting, loans and grants of money or materials or property at any time from any private or charitable source or the United States of America or the Commonwealth, or any agency or instrumentality thereof.

6. Exercise any power usually possessed by private corporations, including the right to expend such funds as may be considered by it to be advisable or necessary in the performance of its duties and functions.

7. Employ engineers, attorneys, planners, such other professional experts and consultants and such general and clerical employees as may be deemed necessary, and prescribe their powers and duties and fix their compensation.

8. Do and perform any acts and things authorized by this chapter through or by means of its own officers, agents and employees, or by contracts with any persons.

9. Execute instruments and do and perform acts or things necessary, convenient or desirable for its purposes or to carry out the powers expressly given in this chapter.

10. Create an executive committee which may exercise the powers and authority of the planning district commission under this chapter. The chairman of the planning district commission shall serve as a member and as the chairman of the executive committee. The composition of the remaining membership of the executive committee, the term of office of its members and any alternate members, their method of selection or removal, the voting rights of members, procedures for the conduct of its meetings, and any limitations upon the general authority of the executive committee shall be established by the bylaws of the planning district commission. Any planning district commission may establish such other special and standing committees, advisory, technical, or otherwise, as it deems desirable for the transaction of its affairs.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1404; 1975, c. 83; 1986, c. 164; 1990, c. 722; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4206. Additional powers of planning district commissions.

Planning district commissions may, in addition to and not in limitation of all other powers granted by this chapter:

1. Acquire, lease, sell, exchange, donate and convey its projects, property or facilities in furtherance of the purposes of planning district commissions as set forth in this chapter;

2. Issue its bonds, notes or other evidences of indebtedness, whether payable solely out of the revenues and receipts derived or to be derived from the leasing, sale or other disposition or use of such projects, property or facilities or otherwise, for the purpose of carrying out any of its powers or purposes set forth in this chapter; and

3. As security for the payment of the principal of and premium, if any, and interest on any such bonds, notes or other evidences of indebtedness, mortgage and pledge its projects, property or facilities or any part or parts thereof and pledge the revenues therefrom or from any part thereof.

(1989, c. 178, § 15.1-1404.1; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4207. Purposes of commission.

A. 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. The cooperation resulting from this chapter is

intended to facilitate the recognition and analysis of regional opportunities and take account of regional influences in planning and implementing public policies and services. Functional areas warranting regional cooperation may include, but shall not be limited to: (i) economic and physical infrastructure development; (ii) solid waste, water supply and other environmental management; (iii) transportation; (iv) criminal justice; (v) emergency management; (vi) human services; and (vii) recreation.

Types of regional cooperative arrangements that commissions may pursue include but are not limited to (i) the facilitation of revenue sharing agreements; (ii) joint service delivery approaches; (iii) joint government purchasing of goods and services; (iv) regional data bases; and (v) regional plans.

B. The planning district commission shall also promote the orderly and efficient development of the physical, social and economic elements of the district by planning, and encouraging and assisting localities to plan, for the future. If requested by a member locality or group of member localities and to the extent the commission may elect to act, the commission may assist the localities by carrying out plans and programs for the improvement and utilization of their physical, social and economic elements. The commission shall not, however, have a legal obligation to perform the functions necessary to implement the plans and policies established by it or to furnish governmental services to the district. Additionally, Planning District Commissions 1, 2, and 13 shall be designated as economic development organizations within the Commonwealth.

C. The authority of the commission includes the power, to the extent the commission may from time to time determine, when requested to do so by a member locality or group of member localities, (i) to participate in the creation or organization of nonprofit corporations to perform functions or operate programs in furtherance of the purposes of this chapter; (ii) to perform such functions and to operate such programs itself; (iii) to contract with nonprofit entities, including localities, performing such functions or operating such programs to provide administrative, management, and staff support, accommodations in its offices, and financial assistance; and (iv) to provide financial assistance, including matching funds, to interdistrict entities which perform governmental or quasi-governmental functions directly benefiting the commission's district and which are organized under authority of the Commonwealth or of the federal government.

D. Nothing herein shall be construed to permit the commission to perform functions, operate programs, or provide services within and for a locality if the governing body of that jurisdiction opposes its doing so.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1405; 1972, c. 814; 1975, c. 381; 1984, c. 739; 1986, c. 164; 1991, c. 208; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587; 1998, cc. 668, 686; 2009, c. 863.)

§ 15.2-4208. General duties of planning district commissions.

Planning district commissions shall have the following duties and authority:

1. To conduct studies on issues and problems of regional significance;
2. To identify and study potential opportunities for state and local cost savings and staffing efficiencies through coordinated governmental efforts;
3. To identify mechanisms for the coordination of state and local interests on a regional basis;
4. To implement services upon request of member localities;
5. To provide technical assistance to state government and member localities;
6. To serve as a liaison between localities and state agencies as requested;
7. To review local government aid applications as required by § 15.2-4213 and other state or federal law or regulation;
8. To conduct strategic planning for the region as required by §§ 15.2-4209 through 15.2-4212;
9. To develop regional functional area plans as deemed necessary by the commission or as requested by member localities;
10. To assist state agencies, as requested, in the development of substate plans;

11. To participate in a statewide geographic information system, the Virginia Geographic Information Network, as directed by the Department of Planning and Budget; and

12. To collect and maintain demographic, economic and other data concerning the region and member localities, and act as a state data center affiliate in cooperation with the Virginia Employment Commission.

(1995, cc. 732, 796, § 15.1-1405.1; 1997, c. 587; 1998, cc. 668, 686.)

§ 15.2-4209. Preparation and adoption of regional strategic plan.

A. Except in planning districts in which regional planning is conducted by multi-state councils of government, each planning district commission shall prepare a regional strategic plan for the guidance of the district. The plan shall concern those elements which are of importance in more than one of the localities within the district, as distinguished from matters of only local importance. The plan shall include regional goals and objectives, strategies to meet those goals and objectives and mechanisms for measuring progress toward the goals and objectives. The strategic plan shall include those subjects necessary to promote the orderly and efficient development of the physical, social and economic elements of the district such as transportation, housing, economic development and environmental management. The plan may be divided into parts or sections as the planning district commission deems desirable. In developing the regional strategic plan, the planning district commission shall seek input from a wide range of organizations in the region, including local governing bodies, the business community and citizen organizations.

B. Before the strategic plan is adopted, it shall be submitted to the Department of Housing and Community Development and to the governing body of each locality within the district for a period of not less than thirty days prior to a hearing to be held by the planning district commission thereon, after notice as provided in § 15.2-2204. Each such local governing body shall make recommendations to the planning district commission on or before the date of the hearing with respect to the effect of the plan within its locality. The Department of Housing and Community Development shall notify the planning district commission prior to the hearing as to whether the proposed strategic plan conflicts with plans of adjacent planning districts.

C. Upon approval of the strategic plan by a planning district commission after a public hearing, it shall be submitted to the governing body of each locality (excluding towns of less than 3,500 population unless members of the commission) within the district for review and possible adoption. The plan shall become effective with respect to all action of a planning district commission upon approval by the planning district commission. The plan shall not become effective with respect to the action of the governing body of any locality within the district until adopted by the governing body of such locality.

D. The adopted strategic plan shall be submitted within thirty days of adoption to the Department of Housing and Community Development for information and coordination purposes.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1406; 1976, c. 760; 1981, c. 315; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587; 1998, cc. 668, 686.)

§ 15.2-4210. Commission to act only in conformity with regional strategic plan.

When the strategic plan becomes effective as the district plan, the planning district commission shall not, except as provided in the plan, establish any policies or take any action which, in its opinion, is not in conformity with the plan.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1407; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587; 1998, cc. 668, 686.)

§ 15.2-4211. Amendment of regional strategic plan.

The strategic plan may be amended in the same manner as provided for the original approval and adoption of the plan. However, if the planning district commission determines that a proposed amendment has less than districtwide significance, such amendment may be submitted only to the governing bodies of those localities which the planning district commission determines to be affected. The amended strategic plan shall be submitted within thirty days of amendment to the Department of Housing and Community Development.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1408; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4212. Review of regional strategic plan by commission.

At least once every five years the regional strategic plan shall be revised and formally approved by the planning district commission. The revised plan shall not become effective with respect to the action of the governing body of any locality within the district until adopted by the governing body of such locality.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1409; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4213. Commission to be informed of applications for state or federal aid by local governing bodies.

In each planning district in which a planning district commission has been organized, the governing body of each locality shall make available to the planning district commission a summary of applications to agencies of the state or federal government for loans or grants-in-aid for local projects. Submission of the summary of applications is for informational purposes only, unless otherwise directed by state or federal regulations or laws.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1410; 1972, c. 599; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4214. Cooperation and consultation with other agencies.

A planning district commission may cooperate with other planning district commissions, councils of governments, or the legislative and administrative bodies and officials of other districts or localities within or outside a district, so as to coordinate the planning, development and services of a district with the plans and services of other districts and localities and the Commonwealth. A planning district commission may appoint committees and adopt rules to effect such cooperation. A planning district commission shall also cooperate with the Department of Housing and Community Development and use advice and information furnished by such Department and by other state and federal officials, departments and agencies. Such Department and such officials, departments and agencies having information, maps and data pertinent to the planning and development of a district may make the material, together with services and funds, available for use of a planning district commission.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall notify the Department of Housing and Community Development prior to engaging in planning activities which will require planning district commission participation. State agencies are encouraged to consult with planning district commissions in the development of regional plans and services and for data collection.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1411; 1976, cc. 488, 760; 1977, c. 613; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4215. Annual report required.

Each planning district commission shall submit an annual report by September 1 to its member local governments and the Department of Housing and Community Development in accordance with a format prescribed by the Department. The annual report shall contain at a minimum a description of the activities conducted by the planning district commission during the preceding fiscal year, including how the commission met the provisions of this chapter, and information showing the sources and amounts of funding provided to the commission. The Department of Housing and Community Development shall summarize the annual reports in a report to be distributed in accordance with § 36-139.6.

(1995, cc. 732, 796, § 15.1-1411.1; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4216. State aid.

A. Upon the organization of a planning district commission, it shall be entitled to receive state financial support to assist it in carrying out its purposes. Such state aid shall be in an amount as provided in the general appropriations act. In order to be allocated such state aid, each planning district commission shall prepare and submit an annual report, as required in § 15.2-4215, which details its compliance with the provisions of this chapter, and an annual work program of activities proposed for the next fiscal year. The fiscal year of the planning district commission shall end June 30.

B. If two planning districts are merged pursuant to § 15.2-4221, the new district shall be entitled to receive the combined amount of aid to which the two districts it replaced separately would have been entitled for five years from the effective date of the merger.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1412; 1977, c. 613; 1985, c. 127; 1990, c. 722; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4217. Regional Cooperation Incentive Fund created; administration thereof.

A. There is hereby created a Regional Cooperation Incentive Fund for the purpose of encouraging inter-local strategic and functional area planning and other regional cooperative activities. The Fund shall be administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development. Fund availability is subject to the Appropriation Act.

B. From time to time the General Assembly and the Governor may designate specific functional areas or activities which are to be given highest priority for funding, including but not limited to economic development, criminal justice, solid waste management, water supply, emergency management and transportation.

C. Disbursements from the Regional Cooperation Incentive Fund shall be made on a matching grant basis to planning district commissions. The Department of Housing and Community Development shall promulgate regulations for the administration of the funds, including application forms, eligibility requirements and terms and duration of grants. In establishing regulations, the following criteria shall be met:

1. The planning district commission or member localities must provide, at a minimum, a twenty-five percent match to the grant; and
2. Any project for which a grant is sought shall use private initiative and enterprise insofar as feasible, and emphasize coordination of available governmental and private financial and technical resources.

D. The Department of Housing and Community Development shall require periodic reports from grant recipients concerning progress of the project and the use of funds.

(1995, cc. 732, 796, § 15.1-1412.1; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4217.1. Specialized Transportation Incentive Fund.

The Specialized Transportation Incentive Fund (the "Fund") is established and shall be used to assist participating planning districts in the development of coordinated specialized transportation plans and projects. In order to be eligible to receive monies from the Fund, a planning district commission or single locality shall establish, in consultation with its metropolitan planning organization if one exists, an advisory transportation coordination committee and shall submit to the Disability Commission a plan for cost-effective coordination of specialized transportation services in the planning district or in localities within the planning district. Single localities may appoint an advisory transportation coordinating committee independent of the planning district commission and receive specialized transportation incentive funds if the locality is located in a regional planning district in which all other localities are recipients of the federal funds and subject to the provisions of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Public Law 101-336 (42 U.S.C. § 12131 et seq.). The advisory transportation coordination committee shall guide planning for the coordination and administration of specialized transportation with human service agencies, participating public transportation systems and, where appropriate, with private for-profit and nonprofit transportation providers. Advisory transportation coordination committees shall be composed of, but not limited to, elderly and disabled persons, providers of specialized transportation systems, participating public transportation systems, and local private for-profit and nonprofit transportation providers. Localities and public transportation systems subject to Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Public Law 101-336 (42 U.S.C. § 12131 et seq.), shall not be required to participate in coordinated specialized transportation plans, but may participate at their option.

(2003, c. 454.)

§ 15.2-4218. Local governing bodies authorized to appropriate or lend funds.

The governing bodies of the localities within a planning district are authorized to appropriate or lend funds to the planning district commission.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1413; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4219. Exemption of commission from taxation.

The planning district commission shall not be required to pay any taxes or assessments upon any project or upon any property acquired or used by it or upon the income therefrom. For purposes of subdivision 4 of § 58.1-609.1, a planning district commission is deemed a "political subdivision of this Commonwealth" as the term is used in that section.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1415; 1993, c. 310; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4220. Dual membership authorized.

Any locality which is a member of a planning district commission may become a member of an additional planning district commission upon such terms and conditions as mutually agreed to by the locality and the additional planning district commission. The locality shall notify the Department of Housing and Community Development of its membership status in the additional planning district commission within thirty days of becoming a member. Whenever a state-directed activity is conducted by all the planning district commissions, the planning district boundaries identified by the Department of Housing and Community Development shall be used, unless alternative boundaries are agreed to by the localities and the planning district commissions affected. No additional state financial support shall be paid due to a locality becoming a member of an additional planning district commission.

(1985, c. 109, § 15.1-1416; 1988, c. 263; 1991, c. 35; 1993, c. 797; 1994, c. 650; 1995, cc. 732, 796; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4221. Merger of two planning district commissions.

The commissions of any two planning districts and a majority of the governing bodies of the localities comprising each district, upon finding that the community of interest, ease of communications and transportation, and geographic factors and natural boundaries among the localities of the two districts are such that the best interest of the localities would be served, may by resolutions concurrently adopted vote to merge into one district and request the Department of Housing and Community Development to declare the districts so merged. Upon such declaration, the commissions of the two districts shall be merged into one commission. The commission of the new district thereupon shall organize as provided in § 15.2-4203; however, nothing shall prevent the commissions of the two districts which are to be merged from agreeing to the terms of such organization prior to their vote to merge.

(1990, c. 722, § 15.1-1416.1; 1997, c. 587.)

§ 15.2-4222. Inconsistent laws inapplicable.

All other general or special laws inconsistent with any provisions of this chapter are hereby declared to be inapplicable to the provisions of this chapter.

(1968, c. 224, § 15.1-1452; 1997, c. 587.)
