

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
1 FENN STREET, SUITE 201, PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS 01201
TELEPHONE (413) 442-1521 · FAX (413) 442-1523
Massachusetts Relay Service: TTY: 771 or 1-800-439-2370
www.berkshireplanning.org

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THOMAS MATUSZKO, A.I.C.P.
Executive Director

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Thursday, January 16, 2020
At: Berkshire Regional Planning
1 Fenn St. Suite 201, Pittsfield, MA 01201

I. Opening

A. The meeting was called to order at 7:14 pm.

Chair Kyle Hanlon reminded all that per the open meeting law, BRPC records all meetings. Others may record the meeting after informing the chair. Any documents presented must be left with the chair at the meeting.

B. Roll Call

The following Commission members were present:

Peter Traub – Cheshire Delegate
Pedro Pachano – Gt. Barrington Delegate
Buck Donovan – Lee Delegate
Kyle Hanlon – North Adams Delegate
Sheila Irvin – Pittsfield Delegate
Kate Fletcher – Stockbridge Delegate
Nina Ryan – Stockbridge Alternate
Sarah Hudson – Tyringham Alternate
Alex Carlisle – Williamstown Delegate
John Garcia – Windsor Delegate

Others Present:

Miles Moffatt - Visitor

Staff Present:

Thomas Matuszko – Executive Director
Marianne Sniezek – Office Manager
Mark Maloy – GIS, Data and IT Manager

C. Approval of Minutes of November 21, 2019 Meeting

Sheila Irvin moved to approve the minutes of the September 19, 2019 meeting which was seconded by Buck Donovan. The motion was unanimously approved with 2 abstentions.

Comments from the Public – None

II. Delegate & Alternate Issues

Nina from Stockbridge asked about the Housatonic River Cleanup. Tom explained BRPC provides staff support for posting the public agendas, minutes and is the fiduciary agent. Decisions are made by the community officials. Meetings are held in South County and are public meetings. Executive Session meetings are not public.

Pedro reported Gt. Barrington is in the process of updating the town's open space and recreation plan. Pedro invited all to participate in Gt. Barrington's community outreach survey.

III. Executive Committee Actions - January 2, 2020

There were no questions on the actions taken by the Executive Committee on January 2, 2020

IV. Berkshire County Survey Results

In 2015, BRPC conducted an extensive county-wide survey of the attitudes, preferences and needs of young adults. An updated expanded survey was conducted in 2019, in partnership with 1Berkshire and MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board to include all ages to gain greater insight about changing attitudes relative to living and working in the Berkshires. BRPC Program Manager Mark Maloy presented the results of the survey. Mark explained that both the 2015 and 2019 surveys were funded through the District Local Technical Assistant grants.

There were 1,550 responses from the 2019 survey. Responses were from people who were raised in the Berkshires, or who currently live in the Berkshires. Also, determined in the survey was the age of respondents and their education level. Older respondents were less likely to work or have worked or grew up in the area. The younger respondents were more likely to have grown up in the area. As people age, they like smaller towns while the younger adults prefer the city of Pittsfield or larger towns. The higher the education level the more likely the respondents grew up outside of the area.

Mark reported on some of the reasons that respondents live in Berkshire County and stay here. Younger adults live here for jobs, college and family. Older adults live here for the cultural activities, different seasons and low crime. Respondents with higher education live here for jobs and culture.

The results showed the differences between native and non-natives for their reasons for moving to the area or staying in Berkshire County. The reasons for living in or why people stay in Berkshire County from the original survey in 2015 to the survey in 2019 was also discussed.

The survey asked, what are you looking for in a community? The top items or issues from the respondents where quality of housing that they can afford, a job that meets their interests and pays well, the cost of living, culture, the natural scenic beauty, family and crime rate.

Respondents were asked why they would most likely leave the area. The top responses were better paying jobs, lack of things to do, and not liking the cold and snow. Mark pointed out the differences from natives versus non-natives and their reasons for leaving Berkshire County. The interesting difference was natives' responses to high crime versus non-natives.

Mark explained the comparison from the Young Adult 2015 to the 2019 Survey for the respondent's reasons for leaving.

The survey suggested improvements that could be done, higher paying jobs, rail access to the major urban areas, better quality housing that is affordable, more opportunities for career advancement and lower crime rates and drug use. What employers should focus on versus what the employer does focus on including non-salary benefits.

The conclusion from the Berkshire County Survey:

- People enjoy living in the Berkshires
- Importance of family
- Employment opportunities
- Natural scenic beauty
- Quality housing that is affordable
- Cultural options
- Attitudes have not changed drastically since 2015. There has been movement, but similar reasons and magnitudes match the 2015 survey.

Mark concluded that the responses were tracked by location.

V. Partnerships for Growth

Tom gave a brief presentation about the state's economic development plan which is called *Partnerships for Growth*: A plan to enable the Commonwealth's regions to build, connect and lead. The state's plan is what the state wants to do not how they will do it. Tom asked the group to think about what the high priorities for Berkshire County would be.

Tom reviewed the 2019 Economic Development Plan goals and the milestones to date. The Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development held sessions across the state to engage a broad spectrum of participants. The deep dive sessions included sixteen topics to gather input across the state. The economic development plan pillars will focus on the housing crisis and clustered development around transit, building vibrant communities, support business competitiveness with a focus on small businesses, and train a skilled workforce through education pathways to college or jobs.

The plan principles include a regional strategy instead of a one-size-fits all strategy! Rural areas were recognized in the state's plan. The principles also include creating an accessible government where residents & businesses can easily access state programs and funding, prepare our communities for climate change, create equitable opportunities for all, make investments in local and regional infrastructure.

Tom pointed out the following in the plan:

- The housing crisis and the need for Housing Rehab in Berkshire County.
- One strength in Berkshire County is the growth of small businesses.

- The state to provide capacity and assistance to communities to support municipal and regional planning efforts.
- Transit to allow workers to get to work or training.

VI. Economy Section of the Massachusetts Rural Plan

Tom gave a more in-depth review of the economy section of the *Rural Policy Plan*. Tom reviewed the goals, challenges, existing programs, recommendations for each goal for the economic development, land use and working lands, population trends, and workforce. Tom then explained the top recommendations for the economy section.

Economic Development: Goal

“Expand programming and resources to strengthen the economic vitality of rural Massachusetts through small business technical support, sector-specific initiatives, and municipal infrastructure and long-term capacity building.”

Land Use & Working Lands: Goal

“Empower rural areas with policies and programs to make proactive land use decisions that support resilient development, maintain working lands and recognize their value, and manage the interconnectedness of rural, urban, and suburban lands.”

Population Trends: Goal

“As a Commonwealth, we should encourage more balanced, sustainable, population growth across the State, especially reversing stagnant and declining population trends by working to retain and attract a younger and more diverse population in rural areas of Massachusetts.”

Workforce: Goal

“Massachusetts should better address the unique needs of employers and current and prospective employees in rural areas through education and workforce system support that reduces barriers to employment.”

BRPC seeks funding through grants, the state budget and legislation. Tom would like to see housing funds for refurbishment to avoid properties being torn down. Pedro informed the group of a radio program that talks about “what affordable housing means.” They talk with second homeowners and landlords. Area Median Income (AMI) must be 80%.

Funding for affordable housing doesn’t meet the needs of rural areas. Good maintenance and energy efficiency are an issue in older homes. CDBG Housing Rehab is income eligible. HUD is federal money to the state. There are limited contractors who want to deal with all the paperwork involved. There is about a six-week delay in payments from DHCD to BRPC. The goal is to pay the contractors timely. The homeowner has a lien placed on their property. There is a high need for housing rehab in all of Berkshire County.

The Community Section – Education, Housing and Public Health, was handed out and will be presented at the March Commission meeting.

The top recommendations:

1. Expand the PILOT program for ecosystem value of land.
2. Target economic development strategies to rural sub-regions and sectors.
3. Foster greater collaboration among public education and training institutions.
4. Fund revisions to smart growth and low impact development in local zoning bylaws.
5. Increase the MA Growth Capital Corporation's Small Business Technical Assistance budget.

To see the Massachusetts Rural Policy Plan and presentations go to BRPC's website under initiatives: <http://berkshireplanning.org/initiatives/massachusetts-rural-policy-plan>

VII. Approval of Community Assessments for FY2021

The Finance Committee has proposed a 2.5% increase in community assessments for FY 2021. By law the municipalities must be notified of their assessments no later than February each year so that they may be included in city/town budgets.

Sarah Hudson moved to approve the 2.5% increase in community assessments for FY2021 which was seconded by Pedro Pachano. The motion was unanimously approved.

VIII. Executive Director's Report

A. FY19 Audit

Tom reported that on January 9th, the Finance Committee received a presentation by our Auditors, Adelson and Company, about the FY19 Audit. The main element of the audit was the management letter (included), which stated we had a "clean" audit in that there were, "No significant financial reporting control problems noted during the current year's audit examination." The Finance Committee accepted the results of the Audit.

B. January 30, 2020 "Fifth Thursday" Dinner

The next 5th Thursday dinner is scheduled for January 30, 2020 at Mazzeo's Restaurant. The presentation will be about Electric Cars and Charging Stations. Pre-registration is required at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/5th-thursday-electric-cars-and-charging-stations-tickets-86332628215>

C. DLTA applications received

The District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) solicitation for 2020 was due on January 10, 2020. We received twenty-seven applications. Many of the applications were housing related requests. Tom reported we haven't received our signed contract. Once the contract is received staff can begin work. Contact Tom at tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org 413-442-1521 ext. 34 for any questions.

D. Topics for the April 30, 2020 "Fifth Thursday" dinner

BRPC's Fifth Thursday dinners are intended to be a way for people to network in a relaxed atmosphere while at the same time learn about some current topic. The Commission Development Committee is interested in learning what topics Delegates and Alternates would be interested in. Attached is a short survey. Please complete and bring to the meeting. It will also be posted on our website - www.berkshireplanning.org.

E. Other – None

IX. Adjournment

Sheila Irvin made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Sarah Hudson. Unanimously approved. Adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Materials distributed or presented during this meeting:

Meeting Agenda

Draft Meeting Minutes from November 21, 2019

Executive Committee Actions Memo January 7, 2020

Berkshire Survey 2019

Berkshire County Survey Results & Power Point

Massachusetts Rural Plan - Economic Development Chapter

Partnership for Growth – Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Director's Memorandum

Proposed FY 2021 Community Assessments Worksheet

Executive Director's Memorandum

BRPC Management Letter FY2019 Audit

5th Thursday Dinner – Electric Cars and Charging Stations Flyer

Fifth Thursday Dinner Topic Survey

Community Chapter – Education, Housing and Public Health