

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
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KYLE HANLON, Chair
JOHN DUVAL, Vice-Chair
SHEILA IRVIN, Clerk
MALCOLM FICK, Treasurer

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

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, April 2, 2020

Virtual Meeting as allowed by Massachusetts Governor
Charlie Baker's Executive Order dated March 12, 2020
suspending certain provision of the Open Meeting Law,
G.L. c.30 sec.20.

I. Call to Order & Open Meeting Law Statement

A. The meeting was called to order at: 4:02 p.m.

Chair Kyle Hanlon started the meeting by reading a statement regarding 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 of the meeting.

B. Roll Call:

Kyle Hanlon, Chair
Sheila Irvin, Clerk
John Duval, Vice Chair
Malcolm Fick, Treasurer
CJ Hoss, Regional Issues Committee Chair
Roger Bolton, Environmental Review Committee Chair
Rene Wood, Commission Development Committee Chair
Sam Haupt, At-Large
Buck Donovan, At-Large

Others Present: Stephen Dravis, iBerkshires

Staff Present: Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director, Marianne Sniezek, Office Manager, Melissa Provencher, Environmental and Energy Program Manager

II. Approval of Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting on March 5, 2020.

Rene Wood moved to approve the minutes of the March 5, 2020 meeting which was seconded by Sheila Irvin and approved with three abstentions.

III. Financial Reports

A. March Expenditures Reports

Rene Wood moved to approve the March Expenditure Reports which was seconded by Sheila Irvin and unanimously approved.

B. Accounts Receivable Report & Assessments – BRPC is still waiting on the payment from the Town of Monterey. Malcolm Fick has been in contact with the Town in Monterey.

C. Line of Credit Report – The line of credit was not needed.

D. Other – Tom reported BRPC is moving towards electronic payments with the bank.

IV. Delegate & Alternate Issues - None

V. Items Requiring Action

A. Approval to Accept Funds from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis*

After the fact approval from the Executive Committee was requested to accept funds from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. The DPH has asked certain regional planning agencies across the state to act as a fiscal agent in response to the COVID-19 crisis. BRPC has received 2 contracts from DPH, one for \$50,000 and one for \$150,000. The primary purpose of the \$50,000 contract is to pay for additional Public Health nurses and reimburse BRPC for staff time managing the Public Health response to the crisis. The primary purpose of the \$150,000 is to reimburse costs that municipalities have incurred responding to the crisis. These funds were part of the initial \$15 million approved by the state legislature. BRPC has received these funds and in some cases has issued payments to municipalities. We have been told that additional funds will be forthcoming. In addition to after the fact approval for the funds already received, this request will also allow us to accept funds from DPH in the future.

Rene Wood moved to approve the acceptance of funds from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. This motion was seconded by Malcolm Fick and unanimously approved.

B. Approval of Merit Increase Range for FY 2021*

BRPC employees do not have automatic pay increases such as an automatic step increase or cost of living increase. MassDOT, which according to our contract with them, approves pay increases, will not allow straight Cost of Living increases. All pay increases, therefore, are based on performance as documented in written performance evaluations. As a minimum we try to make it such that employees not lose ground financially one year to the next. This year the Northeast Urban Cost of Living increased by .977% from February 2019 to February 2020. According to our previous practice this sets the base for a merit increase. Additionally, our health insurance costs, increased 4.7%.

Based on our policy regarding annual pay increases, the following are the proposed increases for FY 2021 based on performance ratings for the past year:

Exceptional -	3%
Exceeds Expectations -	2%
Meets Expectations -	1%
Needs Improvement -	0%
Unsatisfactory -	0%

Given the current financial and fiscal uncertainty, this recommendation should be considered an austerity recommendation in that in a typical year, many employees receive a *Meets Expectation* rating. Those employees would essentially remain whole. Those employees that excelled, and

there have been some, would be recognized and compensated modestly for their efforts. We tie the merit increases to the beginning of the fiscal year, July 1 (of course that might change this year.) We are requesting approval now because MassDOT needs to approve in advance of the fiscal year. Tom further recommended that the implementation of any pay increases be further reviewed by the Executive Committee closer to the July 1st date. It may be that full implementation would need to be deferred until later in the fiscal year depending of our financial position. Approving the range now allows us to attempt to secure MassDOT approval now.

Buck Donovan made a motion to approve the merit increase range for FY2021 and to review it again closer to July 1st date. This motion was seconded by Roger Bolton and unanimously approved.

- C. Other** – Tom spoke about the CARES Act – Paycheck Protection Program. BRPC could apply for a loan to pay for payroll, utilities and rent. The loan does not have to be paid back if employees are kept on the payroll per the program guidelines.

Rene Wood moved to approve a loan application for the Paycheck Protection Program and was seconded by Malcolm Fick and unanimously approved

VI. Committee Reports

A. Regional Issues Committee

The Regional Issues Committee March meeting was cancelled.

B. Commission Development Committee

The Commission Development Committee March meeting was canceled. The Commission Development Committee must meet to create the Nominating Committee to nominate a slate of officers for FY 2021 prior to the May 21, 2020 Commission meeting.

Rene Wood said that she will be in touch with committee members before the May 21st Full Commission meeting.

C. Environmental Review Committee

The Environmental Review Committee was not able to meet to review and comment on the Williamstown Bike Path ENF. Members were able to provide comments individually to staff. Comments are due March 31st. Those comments are attached. The MEPA analyst was informed of Thursday's Executive Committee and did allow revisions to be submitted on Friday if there were any changes. The Daley Transfer Station EIR was withdrawn by the proponent, hence there are no comments.

Roger Bolton thanked Melissa Provencher for all of the good work.

Roger Bolton moved to approve the comments on the Williamstown Bike Path ENF submitted by staff which was seconded by CJ Hoss and unanimously approved

D. Other - None

VII. Executive Director's Report

A. Report on New Contracts/Agreements

New Grants and Contracts received / initiated 2/29/2020 to 3/27/2020

- Mass Secretary of State – Complete Count - \$55,000

- Dalton – Open Space and Recreational Plan - \$10,000
- North Adams - Downtown Circulation Plan - \$75,000
- FRCOG - Recreational Tourism Inventory and Mapping - \$29,000
- DPH - COVID-19 Emergency Fund - Municipal Reimbursement - \$150,000
- DPH - COVID-19 Regional Public Health Nursing - \$50,000

Grants and Contracts Not received

B. Staff Update

- Linda Ludwig has been promoted to Principal Finance Administrator in recognition of her fine work and added responsibilities.
- Planner Matthew Dovell resigned. We advertised for a Senior Planner in the Community Planning Program to better meet the needs of the Program and have received resumes from a few strong candidates. We have, however, put filling that position on hold at the very least until we are able to work in the office again and possibly longer.
- The Finance Assistant position was advertised. We received resumes from several strong candidates and had good interviews. We have, however, put filling that position on hold at the very least until we are able to work in the office again and possibly longer.

A. COVID-19 Related

Listed below are some of the key items related to COVID-19.

- Prior to the Governor’s non-essential business closure order, the office was closed for public meetings and many staff were working remotely. Since the Governor’s order the office has been closed and all staff, with a very few exceptions have been prohibited from going into the office and are working remotely. Very few staff have gone into the office for essential services, such as IT services to support the Public Health staff and financial services.
- Operationally Tom reported that we have done okay. Most staff have been able to work remotely to complete at least some of their activities. There have been glitches with our remote access and remote access programs, but hopefully those issues have been resolved. Some staff are not fully equipped to work full scale remotely, i.e. do not have a printer nor camera, have an older computer, no high speed internet, etc. As the closure is extended maintaining full functionality will be a bigger problem.
- Contractually we are still a bit in limbo as we have not received official notice that contracts that were supposed to end on June 30th would be extended. Much of our work involves public process or working with committees. For the most part those activities have been curtailed. We need to adapt to remote processes for those projects. On the positive side, we have not learned of any contracts being canceled or rescinded.
- The Public Health staff have done an exceptional job responding to this crisis. In particular, I want to single out Public Health Program Manager Laura Kittross who has spent countless hours over the last 3+ weeks coordinating the local public health response to this crisis. Laura has been on countless calls with the DPH and was instrumental in getting DPH to provide at least some of the much needed resources for local Boards of Health, most notably more Public Health nurses. Through the Berkshire Public Health Alliance in tandem with the Tri-Town Health, the Berkshires were in a strong position to immediately respond.
 - Our Public Health nurse, Leslie Drager led the efforts supporting local Boards of Health to isolate those who are sick so they can be monitored until they can be released under CDC and DPH guidelines (i.e., they are recovered) and quarantine those who have been exposed, but are not sick for at least 14 days or until they show symptoms.

- Under Senior Planner Allison Egan's leadership, BRPC staff have been providing Technical Assistance to the Central Berkshire Covid-19 Coordinating Center (CBC19CC), headed by Pittsfield Police Chief, Michael Wynn, in the following areas: Trained United Way staff, the central agency for volunteers, to use the Spontaneous and Unaffiliated Volunteer Management System and developed a virtual volunteer reception center (VRC) for BUW. BRPC staff are part of the CBC19CC Core Team to provide regional public health updates, assist with community needs requests, PPE requests, provide coordination for managing case information for first responders across the entire County, and provide CBC19CC links to staffing and volunteers for CBC19CC command center in Pittsfield. BRPC's role continues to evolve with the CBC19CC as areas of need and gaps are identified.
- Senior Planner Sandra Martin has provided invaluable technical advice on volunteers.
- Wherever I could, I have re-programmed staff assignments and have made other staff available as the top priority to assist in response and recovery activities.
 - Senior Planner Laura Brennan has assisted the Berkshire United Way set up the weekend food distribution system for children needing lunches. She also provided information to businesses about support programs. Currently she is working with the EDA to secure funds from the CARES Act.
 - Senior Planner Caroline Massa has provided back-up to Allison Eagan on the CBC19CC and will be the lead staff with FEMA recovery activities.
 - Senior Planner Eammon Coughlin has also provided his expertise to the establishment of the CBC19CC.
 - Planner Peg McDonough, working with Planner Emily Kirby, is working with the Berkshire United Way to identify the needs of the elderly and other social service agencies.
 - Planner Phil Arnold has been keeping abreast of municipal functioning changes, such as changes to the Open Meeting Law and permitting requirements.
 - Community and Economic Development Program Manager Pat Mullins is researching changes to the CDBG program and possible new funding through that Program.
- In response to the COVID-19 crisis, I have at least temporarily suspended work on the 2020 DLTA projects. Wherever allowable and until and unless we get other funding, those funds will be re-directed to COVID-19 response and recovery activities.
- In response to the to COVID-19 crisis, I have restricted the use of BRPC's General Fund to grant writing activities, including those activities necessary to receive recovery funding.
- Most upcoming trainings and conference, including statewide and BRPC sponsored have been canceled.
- Other items I have been engaged in, such as the Rural Policy Advisory Commission and various rail projects have at least temporarily been put on hold.

Tom explained that he is working on a revised telecommuting policy. Most staff have full capability to work remotely and we would like to have everyone up to full operational ability soon.

B. Berkshires Tomorrow Inc. (BTI) Update

Below is a periodic update of BTI activities from 1/28/20 through 3/23/20.

- BTI is leasing BRPC software for 45 Subscriptions of Microsoft Office 365 for FY2020 totaling

\$3,374.

- BTI submitted a grant application to AARP Community Challenge Grant Program for \$3,000 to cover expenses for forums in the Spring, Summer and Fall on Coping with Stress and Loss.
- BTI submitted a grant application to The Dr. Robert C and Tina Sohn Foundation for \$3,000 to cover expenses for Spring, Summer and Fall forums on Coping with Stress and Loss.
- BTI received \$1,500 from AARP to allow Age Friendly Berkshires to set up a Community Conversation on May 8, 2020 on isolation and loneliness.
- BTI received \$25,000 from Berkshire United Way for the BUW/BTCF COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund to reimburse to restaurants who provide the meals to children in Berkshire County on the weekends.

VIII. Old Business

A. Building Lease and Space Update

We were all ready to work with our building owner to get additional space on the 2nd floor across the hall. We have put that effort on hold pending more clarity about the duration and economic impacts from the COVID-19 crisis. As you are aware, BRPC is heavily grant dependent. With all the state and federal dollars being re-directed towards COVID-19, discretionary grants could go away. On the other hand, BRPC is well positioned to respond to this crisis with our Public Health and Economic Planning staff. We may need to ramp up more than we had anticipated. Also, as we have set up the infrastructure for telecommuting we may evaluate increased use of that mode of work to reduce office space needs and costs.

B. Annual Meeting Update

The date for the Annual meeting is Thursday September 24th. BRPC and the Berkshire County Selectman's Association will do a joint meeting. The venue will be the Holiday Inn & Suites, 1 West Street, Pittsfield, MA. BRPC and the Berkshire County Selectman's Association are still securing a possible speaker. No new activity this past month. It was suggested the perhaps we should consider an epidemiologist as a speaker.

Susan will look into the Holiday Inn & Suites contract to see if we would receive a refund of the \$500 deposit if we needed to cancel and when we must notify them of a cancellation.

- C. **Other** – Microsoft Teams is a program that we are using now that allows communication between staff and makes it easy to share documents.

IX. New Business

A. Future Activities in Response to COVID 19

Tom would like to establish a working protocol with the Executive Committee whereby staff can respond to COVID-19 response and recovery funding opportunities and other related activities in a rapid manner. There is an intense need to address the cash flow needs of the small business owners immediately. Municipalities will need to be reimbursed as well. There are many socio-economic needs. From Tom's best understanding of the available funding it is intended to be distributed quickly. There will likely be some type of submission required such as an application or request for funding, that literally, like the DPH funds we just received, could be turned around in a couple of days. There are several options for your consideration to obtain your approval:

- More frequent Executive Committee meetings with shorter agendas to approve grant request submissions. As long as the Emergency Open Meeting Law provisions are in place and we are under a stay at home advisory, these virtual meetings would be

relatively easy to set up;

- Approval after the fact at the next monthly Executive Committee meeting
- Some type of initial “blanket” approval with a report back at the next Executive Committee/ Commission.

Rene Wood made a motion to allow BRPC to enter into contracts and grants and report to the Executive Committee at the next meeting. This motion was amended to add for a period of six months. Motion was seconded by Sheila Irvin. Motion passed unanimously after discussion.

B. May Commission Meeting

We have several possible topics for the May Commission meeting.

- Approval of the FY21 Agency Budget
- Report of the Nominating Committee
- Other - Topics we discussed for the future meetings
 - Topical presentations on the recently developed Massachusetts Rural Plan as developed by the Rural Policy Advisory Commission. The next topic would be “Community,” which includes Education, Housing and Public Health.
 - Open discussion about upcoming town meeting items
 - Report on the recently completed Outdoor Recreation Plan for the County.

Tom explained that the May Commission meeting could also be a virtual meeting as the program allows for up to 100 people.

- C. Other** – Rene Wood thanked Tom for rising to the challenge and would like the staff to know that the Executive Committee appreciates their work.

X. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 pm by a motion made by Buck Donovan and seconded by Malcolm Fick.

Attachments:

- Unapproved Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting of April 2, 2020
- April Expenditures Report
- April Accounts Receivable Report & Assessments
- Line of Credit Report
- Memo – Executive Committee Agenda Items
- Technical Assistance Memo – March 2020
- Environmental Review Report – Mohawk Bicycle Pedestrian Trail