



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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APPROVED MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, February 4, 2021

Virtual Meeting as allowed by Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker's Executive Order dated July 16, 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: 4:01 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

John Duval, Vice Chair

Sheila Irvin, Clerk

Malcolm Fick, Treasurer

Roger Bolton, Environmental Review Committee Chair

CJ Hoss, Regional Issues Committee Chair

Rene Wood, Commission Development Committee Chair

Others Present: CTSBTV.org; Nancy Socha, BRPC Stockbridge Delegate; Christine Rasmussen, Stockbridge Planning Board

Staff Present: Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director; Marianne Sniezek, Office Manager; Kate Hill Tapia, Office Administrator

A. Approval of Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting on January 7, 2021

Sheila Irvin moved to approve the minutes of the January 7, 2021 meeting, which was seconded by Malcolm Fick and approved by roll call vote from John Duval, Roger Bolton, Malcolm Fick, Sheila Irvin, CJ Hoss, and Kyle Hanlon.

II. Financial Reports

A. January Expenditures Report

The Dunn & Bradstreet expenditure was explained as a subscription to a database of businesses used for economic development work. Roger Bolton motioned to approve the report and Malcolm Fick seconded. The report was approved by roll call vote from John Duval, Roger Bolton, Malcolm Fick, Sheila Irvin, CJ Hoss, and Kyle Hanlon.

B. Accounts Receivable Report & Assessments

There was no discussion on this item.

C. Line of Credit Report

The BRPC Treasurer authorized Tom Matuszko, on behalf of the Commission, as Executive Director to borrow \$125,000 against the BRPC Line of Credit. This need was entirely related to a cash flow issue predominantly related to a few projects. With one project, the Berkshire Adaptation fund, we received a ½ advance payment of \$125,000. In our efforts to distribute COVID related response funds to businesses and non-profits as quickly as possible, we have disbursed significantly more. According to our contract, we are not due the remaining funds (\$125,000) until the end of June. The other projects are CDBG housing rehab related. The reimbursement process to receive funds from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) CDBG program is laborious and cumbersome. Basically, the contractors are required to bill us. We then must request the funds from DHCD. It takes several weeks for DHCD to release those funds, which are deposited into an account in the lead community. That community must place that spending item on a Select Board warrant and then the town must cut the check. The entire process takes many weeks. Overall, with the housing rehab program, it has been challenging to get and retain contractors who want to work in this program. We have decided not to hold off payment to the contractors until we receive payment from the town. Instead, we pay the contractors promptly after receiving their bill. It did not seem fair to them and we did not want to lose them. The consequence is that we are out of that money. We have generally been able to modulate that difference with advance funds from other projects. Over the last several years we have received a hefty advance payment from the DLTA program that has carried us in the beginning part of the year. This year, the DLTA program is late. It will still be several weeks before we can expect that payment. We disbursed over \$100,000 related to the housing rehab program which we need payment for.

D. FY20 Audit Update

We continue to provide documentation and testing samples to the accountant for the FY20 Audit. The accountant started reviewing documents this past week with the expectation of completing it in a couple of weeks. Due to the pandemic everything takes longer and is backed up.

III. Delegate & Alternate Issues

There was agreement about the productivity and value of the last Commission meeting and a suggestion to continue that kind of meeting where there was a lot of discussion. Tom suggested the new One Stop Growth grant application process as possible topic for March Commission meeting.

IV. Items Requiring Action

A. Approval (after the fact) to Submit Grant Applications to the

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Regionalization Grant Program *

Approval was requested (after the fact) for the Executive Director to submit a grant application, on behalf of the Berkshire County Education Task Force (BCETF), to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Regionalization Grant Program and to approve any resulting contracts and agreements. This grant application seeks funds to enable the BCETF to continue research and planning activities to support greater regionalization and sub-regional efforts in Berkshire County, the year focusing on financial and legal topics. The grant amount is \$200,000. No match is required.

Sheila Irvin moved to approve the Executive Director (after the fact) to submit a grant application on behalf of the Berkshire County Education Task Force (BCETF), to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Regionalization Grant Program. Roger Bolton seconded the motion. It was approved by roll call vote from John Duval, Roger Bolton, Malcolm Fick, Sheila Irvin, CJ Hoss, and Kyle Hanlon.

B. Other - NONE

V. Committee Reports

A. Regional Issues Committee

The Regional Issues Committee met January 27, 2021. The main agenda item was a discussion of the Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2030 leading up to a submission of comments. The committee will meet February 17 to finalize comments. Tom reported that the comments deadline has been moved from February 22 to March 22, 2021 so approval of the comments can go to the full Commission meeting on March 18.

B. Environmental Review Committee

We have received two ENFs. One is for a marijuana facility in Hinsdale. This is undergoing MEPA review only because it is in an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). It was decided that the Environmental Review Committee should not submit comments on this ENF. Discussion followed about BRPC's role. Caution was expressed about not "taking sides" about the merits of marijuana. BRPC may be able to offer technical advice on certain topics. Communities may ask for help especially about odor concerns and future MEPA reviews might warrant comment. Since there is no odor expertise on staff, a presentation to the Regional Issues Committee on cannabis odor may be helpful. CJ noted that Pittsfield had a hard time finding someone with that expertise.

The other ENF has not been noticed in the Environmental Monitor yet.

VI. Executive Director's Report

A. New Grants and Contracts received / initiated 1/1/2021 to 1/31/2021

- Dept Public Health Covid-19 - \$87,910
- Berkshire County Sheriff's Office – Opioid Prevention - \$25,000
- Lanesborough – Public Health Inspection Services - \$25,000
- Otis – Complete Streets - \$21,320.78
- Becket – Pavement Management Survey - \$5,450.00

Grants and Contracts not received

We are not aware of any grants and contracts not received in this period.

B. Berkshires Tomorrow Inc. (BTI) Update

Below is an update of BTI activities from 1/1/2021 through 1/28/2021.

- Approved to accept a \$15,000 donation from Berkshires Taconic Community Foundation for Berkshire Opioids work in the Northern Berkshire region.

C. Staff Update

- Housing Specialist William Thornton Jr was hired to work in the CDBG housing rehab program.
- Office Administrator Kate Hill Tapia was hired to support the daily operations of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and Berkshires Tomorrow Inc.
- We still have an opening for a Senior Environmental Planner position.

D. Rural Policy Advisory Commission Update

The Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) met on January 14, 2021. The focus of the meeting was setting legislative priorities for the upcoming legislative session. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 14, 2021. The intended discussion topic is to finalize legislative priorities.

E. East-West Rail Update

The final report for the East-West Passenger Rail Study was released in early January. There has been no further activity that we are aware of. The Transportation Bond bill did include the following language, "not less than \$50,000,000 shall be used for transportation planning, design, permitting and engineering, acquisition of interests in land, vehicle procurement, construction, construction of stations and right-of-way acquisition for the East-West passenger rail project, which includes Pittsfield to Boston service via Springfield, Palmer, and Worcester." The Berkshire Flyer, the northern passenger rail route and the Housatonic line were also included in the Transportation Bond Bill.

F. DLTA Update

Applications for the 2021 DLTA Program were sent to municipalities this week, with responses due by February 25, 2021. Application material may be accessed at [DLTA Applications Now Available - Berkshire Regional Planning Commission \(berkshireplanning.org\)](https://www.berkshireregionalplanning.org/dlta). The Governor's budget for FY 22, H1, included DLTA at the same funding level as FY 21.

G. Berkshire County COVID-19 Adaptation Fund

Using the \$250,000 earmark funds secured by Senator Hinds, we have dispersed or allocated \$180,000 to 33 small businesses or non-profit organizations. We will soon be making \$15,000 awards to two organizations to provide technical assistance related to COVID-19. Demand has far exceeded our financial ability to provide awards. There are about 65 additional unfunded applicants, representing about \$460,000 in asks. There is some interest to try to secure more revenue for the fund, but those efforts have been unsuccessful thus far.

H. Community One Stop for Growth Application Process

As announced at the Full Commission meeting, the Community One Stop grant program is a fundamentally different way how the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development will be issuing grants in the future for many important grant programs. It is a single application portal and collaborative review process of community development grant programs that will make targeted investments based on a [Development Continuum](#). The following grant program will be included, [MassWorks](#), [Urban Agenda](#), [43D Expedited Permitting](#), [Housing Choice Community Capital Grants](#), [Massachusetts Downtown Initiative](#), (NEW) [Community Planning Grants](#), (NEW) [Rural Development Fund](#), [Brownfields](#), [Site Readiness](#), and (NEW) [Underutilized Properties](#). An introductory webinar was presented on January 28th. A recording of the webinar as well as the meeting materials can be found [here](#). Beginning February 8th through April 2nd an optional but recommended part of the application process is for communities to submit "Expressions of Interest" for up to 5 community development priorities. Tom believes this to be an important step for a community to receive grant funds.

I. Water and Sewer Funding Workshop

Along with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), BRPC is sponsoring an information session & discussion about state funding available for water and wastewater infrastructure focusing primarily on the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program, MassWorks Infrastructure Program, and the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) programs. Wednesday, February 24, 6-8 p.m. See attached flyer.

The presentation & discussion will:

- provide an overview of existing State grant programs available to small towns for water and wastewater infrastructure
- discuss the impact of the new Community One Stop for Growth (a new single application portal and collaborative review process) on existing grant resources and previously established application processes
- provide a forum for municipal leaders to discuss funding priorities in their communities with granting agencies

Register at <https://bit.ly/3pdE1Ga>. There is no cost for this workshop. Contact Amanda Doster: adoster@frcog.org or (413) 774-3167 x120.

VII. Old Business

A. Legislative Priorities

Tom outlined how BRPC currently addresses legislation and the state budget and how we might become more proactive. It was agreed that a focus be made on the budget, since that effects existing projects. Proposed legislation also needs to be monitored for its impact on costs for our communities. Given BRPC's expertise, the legislators should be asking for input. Tom will try to connect with all or a subset of our state legislators to identify relevant items for the next budget and legislatives rounds.

B. Other

VIII. New Business

A. March Full Commission Meeting (Virtual) March 18, 2021

Agenda will be finalized at next Executive Committee meeting March 4.
Potential topics:

- Electric vehicles charging stations
- Introduction to Jose Delgado, who has been appointed the Director of the Governor's Western Massachusetts Office in Springfield.
- Meeting time
- One Stop Growth grant application process

B. Other

- C.** René complimented BRPC on the recent Common Ground newsletter and gratitude for the amount and depth of BRPC's work. Tom noted that Laura Brennan deserves the credit for the quality of the newsletter.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 pm by a motion made by Sheila Irvin and seconded by CJ Hoss. It was approved by roll call vote from René Wood, John Duval, Roger Bolton, Malcolm Fick, Sheila Irvin, CJ Hoss, and Kyle Hanlon.

Attachments:

- Unapproved Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting of January 7, 2021
- Line of Credit Report
- Memo – Executive Committee Agenda Items
- Resume – K. Hill Tapia
- Letter of Interest – W. Thornton
- Flyer – Water and Sewer Funding Workshop
- December Technical Assistance