



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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MINUTES OF THE REGIONAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

March 10, 2021

Meeting Held Via Zoom Video Communications

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 by CJ Hoss. The meeting was recorded.

Committee Members Present

CJ Hoss, Chair, Pittsfield

Kyle Hanlon, North Adams

Chris Rembold, Great Barrington

Sheila Irvin, Pittsfield

Andrew Groff, Williamstown

Eleanor Tillinghast, Mount Washington (non-Commission member)

Committee Members Absent

None

BRPC Staff Present

Tom Matuszko, Executive Director

Melissa Provencher, Environmental and Energy Program Manager

Laura Brennan, Community and Economic Development Senior Planner

Clete Kus, Transportation Program Manager

Emily Lange, Environmental and Energy Planner

Alexander Valentini, Economic Development Researcher

II. Approval of January 27th, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Eleanor T. commented regarding clarifying BRPC's stance on onshore wind and suggested that wording in page 3, paragraph 8 is changed from "BRPC believes" to "The initial staff recommendation was".

Kyle H. moved to approve the minutes of the January 27, 2021 meeting with that correction. Andrew G. seconded to the motion.

Roll Call

CJ H. – Yes

Kyle H. – Yes

Sheila I. – Yes

Andrew G. – Yes

Eleanor T. – Yes

Chris R. – Abstained (Absent from January 27th, 2021 meeting)

III. Continued discussion – Interim Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2030

Eleanor T. moved that Kyle H. be appointed temporary chair in the case that CJ H. needed to leave the meeting early. Chris R. seconded the motion.

Roll Call

CH H. – Yes

Kyle H. – yes

Sheila I. – Yes

Andrew G. – Yes

Eleanor T. – Yes

Chris R. – Yes

Melissa P. introduced the topic and said that BRPC staff had incorporated Committee comments from the January 27th, 2021 meeting into the draft comment letter regarding the Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2030 to be submitted before the deadline on March 22nd, 2021. BRPC staff would also be sending a previously submitted comment letter regarding the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) as reference. Clete K. drafted the comments pertaining to the transportation chapter and Emily L. drafted the comments pertaining to the other chapters.

CJ H. reminded the Committee that the objective of the meeting was to review and approve the comments.

Tom M. said that the Massachusetts Legislature would vote tomorrow (March 11th, 2021) on its version of the climate bill, and that there are likely to be differences between the Legislature's and Administration's proposed bills. This comment letter might need to reflect such differences and changes. Eleanor T. said that since the Administration's draft plan had already been released, the comment letter should focus exclusively on that plan. Tom M. said that in this case, the comments should clearly state that they refer to the Administration's plan, and not that of the Legislature.

Clete K. presented the comments regarding *Chapter 2. Transforming Our Transportation Systems*.

General comments on the chapter addressed the ambitious nature of the 45% emissions reduction goal and the need for vehicle manufacturers to expand production if this is to be met, the inequity created by a focus on light-duty vehicles and less of one on medium- and heavy-duty vehicles, the direct and indirect costs incurred by consumers as a result of the implementation of new technologies, and the need for coordination among state agencies.

Comments on Strategy T1 suggested that the low carbon fuel standard be implemented earlier than 2026.

Comments on Strategy T2 stressed the ambitiousness of the adoption of California light-duty vehicle standards and said that the requirement of only 30% of all new trucks and buses to be zero-emission vehicles exacerbates inequity for regions such as Berkshire County where residents disproportionately rely on light-duty vehicles.

Comments on Strategy T3 addressed the inadequacy of existing zero-emission vehicle purchase incentive programs and suggested that a more permanent source of funding be established. Additionally, it was suggested that funding for low- and mid-income family zero-emission vehicle purchases be expanded.

Comments on Strategy T4 addressed the fact that some charging of electric vehicles

will inevitably happen during peak hours and away from the home. Therefore, utility providers should be engaged in developing widespread public charging infrastructure.

Comments on Strategy T5 suggested that dedicated personnel be hired and assigned to different regions of the state to provide education and technical assistance to residents of those regions regarding zero-emission vehicles and transportation behaviors. Clete K. said that he has spoken with state agencies that are interested in establishing a greater presence in Berkshire County.

Comments on Strategy T6 addressed the targeted 15% reduction in light-duty vehicle miles travelled and stressed that the smart growth principles designed to reach this objective must consider rural circumstances in addition to urban ones.

Chris R. said that he thought the letter was strong and addressed the Committee's concerns well. Eleanor T., Kyle H., and CJ H. agreed.

Emily L. presented the comments on *Chapter 3. Transforming our Buildings*.

Comments on Strategy B1 suggested that given the limited amount of new construction in Berkshire County, more emphasis should be put on retrofitting existing homes and aging housing stock.

Comments on Strategy B2 addressed the lack of tradespeople in Berkshire County and the challenges this poses to the objective of upgrading 75% of the state's housing stock by 2050. It was suggested that the training and regulatory regimes for tradespeople within the state be reformed in order to incentivize more people to pursue these occupations.

Comments on Strategy B3 suggested that the zero up-front capital solutions for clean energy technologies for low-income and affordable housing residents should be extended to middle-income households. Chris R. mentioned that Great Barrington previously participated in a smart heat program and had no participating households – engaging the public is going to be a significant challenge.

Emily L. presented the comments on *Chapter 4. Transforming Our Energy Supply*.

Comments on Strategy E3 addressed the lack of standardization of metrics and terminology used throughout the plan.

Comments on Strategy E4 expressed BRPC's support for solar as a major component of the state's energy mix and appreciation for the recognition that this will conflict with existing land-use goals. As Berkshire County has been disproportionately affected by extant solar development due to land availability, it is suggested that equitable siting across the state is pursued, there is prioritization of built over natural environments, incentives are offered for readying aging housing stock for solar deployment and encouraging commercial structure solar deployment, and that local control is preserved.

Comments on Strategy E5 expressed approval of the deployment of offshore wind as a major component of the state's energy mix and suggested that local supply chains to support this industry are developed.

Eleanor T. mentioned that municipalities cannot outright ban solar development, so local control should be stressed, but without mentioning banning development. Kyle H. said that the carbon sequestration benefit of woodland preservation should be

mentioned – this was widely agreed upon by the Committee. Andrew G. said that the distribution of electricity generation across the state creates a more resilient power grid relative to generation concentrated in the West and consumption concentrated in the East.

Emily L. presented the comments on *Chapter 5. Mitigating Other Sources of Emissions*

Comments on Strategy N2 said that the 90% reduction in waste by 2050 seems unrealistic and municipalities are already burdened by waste management. It was suggested that the state should become more involved in this area to reduce dependence on commercial waste management.

Emily L. presented the comments on *Chapter 6. Protecting our Natural and Working Lands*

General comments on this chapter suggested that a state-wide land-use management plan be developed that, while maintaining a degree of local control, allows for greater coordination throughout the state on land-use goals.

Comments on Strategy L1 suggested that the goal of no net loss of farmland by 2030 should be expanded to include goals past 2030.

Andrew G. and Kyle H. said that the comprehensive land-use plan is important. Several members of the Committee asked how tracking of farmland and forest acres is accomplished. Chris R. and Eleanor T. said that the letter should include a comment regarding better land tracking. Chris R. suggested that “Develop tracking metrics to ensure the no-net loss goal is actually met” is inserted in the final comment. This was agreed to by the Committee.

Chris R. moved that the Committee recommend the comment letter for submission. Eleanor T. seconded the motion.

Roll Call

CH H. – Yes
Kyle H. – yes
Sheila I. – Yes
Andrew G. – Yes
Eleanor T. – Yes
Chris R. – Yes

IV. Topics for Future Consideration

Tom M. said that there has been a change in the designation of an urbanized area by the Census and this could affect Pittsfield’s guaranteed CDBG funding. Also, this would cause BRPC to change from an MPO to a TPO. The deadline for comments is in May.

V. Next Committee Meeting Date – April 28, 2021

The Committee decided to skip its regularly scheduled March meeting and have the next meeting on April 28th.

VI. Adjournment

Eleanor T. moved to adjourn. Sheila I. seconded the motion. The meeting ended at 5:07.