



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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MINUTES OF THE REGIONAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

April 28, 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
Andrew Groff, Williamstown

Committee Members Absent

Sheila Irvin, Pittsfield
Eleanor Tillinghast, Mount Washington (non-Commission member)

BRPC Staff Present

Tom Matuszko, Executive Director
Laura Brennan, Community and Economic Development Senior Planner
Mark Maloy, GIS Data and IT Manager
Alexander Valentini, Economic Development Researcher

II. Approval of March 10, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Chris R. mentioned a typo on page 3 of the meeting minutes, which was corrected.

Chris R. moved to approve the March 10, 2021 meeting minutes. Kyle H. seconded the motion.

Roll Call

Andrew G. – Yes
CJ H. – Yes
Kyle H. – Yes
Chris R. – Yes

III. Proposed Changes to the 2020 Urban Area Criteria

Mark M. presented on potential changes to the urbanized area criteria for the 2020 census released by the Census Bureau. Such changes occur every 10 years between census data collection and release.

According to the current (2010) urbanized area criteria, Berkshire County contains the four following urbanized areas: the Pittsfield urbanized area; the North Adams-Williamstown-Pownal urban cluster; the Lee-Lenox-Stockbridge urban cluster; and the Great Barrington urban cluster.

Tom M. asked what the difference is between an urbanized area and urban cluster. Mark M. replied that urbanized areas have a population above 50,000 while urban clusters have a population between 2,500 and 50,000.

The first major change to the criteria is that the cores of urbanized areas will be defined as census blocks containing 385+ housing units. This differs from the 2010 criteria, which defined urban cores as blocks with a population of 1,000+.

The second and third major changes concern hops and jumps, which are methods used to include blocks that are not contiguous with the urban core, but meet certain housing density and impervious surface/compactness criteria. According to the 2010 criteria, a jump could be a maximum distance of 2.5 miles. Under the new criteria, this distance has been reduced to 1.5 miles. Additionally, under the 2010 criteria, the intervening blocks between urban cores and areas included via hops and jumps were included in the urbanized area. Under the new criteria, these intervening areas will no longer be included, meaning that urbanized areas will consist of an urban core and many incontiguous exclaves.

The fourth major change is that urbanized areas will no longer be smoothed. According to the 2010 criteria, blocks that did not meet urban criteria but were surrounded on at least 3 sides by an urbanized area were included in the urbanized area. Under the new criteria, such blocks will not be included.

The last major change is that the difference between an urban cluster and urbanized area has been eliminated. Instead, all urbanized areas must now have a population of 10,000+.

Based on the new criteria, Berkshire County will contain the following urbanized areas: Pittsfield (could jump down to Lee/Lenox/Stockbridge or up to Cheshire); North Adams (Will include parts of Williamstown, Adams, and Pownal). The Great Barrington and Lee-Lenox-Stockbridge urban clusters will likely no longer qualify as they do not have populations above 10,000. Note that Adams will no longer be part of the Pittsfield urbanized area as a result of the reduction in jump distance.

The minimum threshold for an MPO designation is an urbanized area with a population of 50,000+, but FHWA has informed BRPC that if the population of the Pittsfield urbanized area falls below 50,000, it is unlikely this designation will be removed. However, a decline in population will lower MPO financing by an estimated \$12,000.

Urban minor collectors are eligible for FHWA funds while rural minor collectors are not. If Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, and Stockbridge are no longer considered urbanized areas, 28 miles of roads within these municipalities will no longer be eligible for FHWA funding.

Funding for BRTA could potentially be reduced as rural and urban transportation authorities receive state and federal funds through different mechanisms. It is unlikely that BRTA will continue to receive \$2 million in annual funding.

If the Pittsfield urbanized area jumps down to include Lenox, Lee, and Stockbridge, those municipalities will have to comply with EPA MS4 regulations.

USDA, HRSA, and Federal education funding could be affected for the current urbanized areas and clusters as these agencies and funding mechanisms offer different funding to urban and rural areas.

The comment letter drafted by BRPC staff makes the following points:

- The change from a population criterion to a housing unit criterion is supported as it captures second homes in Berkshire County.

- The change to a 10,000+ population urbanized area threshold is not supported as it renders Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, and Stockbridge ineligible, all of which have downtown districts with genuine urban characteristics.
- The elimination of the distinction between urban clusters and urbanized areas is supported.
- The jump distance reduction is not supported.
- The exclusion of intervening blocks between urban cores and hops/jumps is not supported.
- The elimination of smoothing is not supported.

Laura B. suggested that the towns where the 28 miles of roads could be affected are listed in the letter.

CJ H. mentioned that it might be worth mentioning that the population of these towns has likely increased as a result of COVID-19 migration, and that this increase will not have been captured by the 2020 census.

Chris R. mentioned that the population of Great Barrington and the Lee-Lenox-Stockbridge urbanized clusters may indeed increase to above 10,000 during the summer months.

Chris R. moved to suggest that the letter be submitted to the Executive Committee for review. Kyle H. seconded the motion.

Roll Call

Andrew G. – Yes

CJ H. – Yes

Kyle H. – Yes

Chris R. – Yes

IV. Topics for Future Consideration

Tom M. suggested that the Census Bureau's new differential privacy policy, that is, the injection of statistical noise into census datasets for geographies below the state level to protect individual privacy, could be discussed.

Tom M. suggested that maximizing the use of COVID recovery funds for long-term growth and resilience rather than short-term goals could be discussed. Details on how such funds can be used will be released mid-May.

V. Next Committee Meeting Date – May 26th, 2021

VI. Adjournment

Kyle H. moved to adjourn. Chris R. seconded the motion. CJ H. adjourned the meeting at 4:57.