



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

JOHN DUVAL, Chair
MALCOLM FICK, Vice-Chair
SHEILA IRVIN, Clerk
BUCK DONOVAN, Treasurer
THOMAS MATUSZKO, A.I.C.P.
Executive Director

FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES APPROVED November 18, 2021

This was a virtual meeting as allowed by Ch. 20 of the Acts of 2021 suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20.

I. Opening

A. The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m.

Chair John Duval stated that per the open meeting law, BRPC records all meetings. Others may record the meeting after informing the chair. Any documents presented must be provided to the chair at the meeting. Pittsfield TV was recording.

B. Roll Call

The following Commission members were present:

John Duval – Adams Alternate
Al Blake – Becket Alternate (late)
Peter Traub – Cheshire Delegate
Pedro Pachano – Great Barrington Alternate (late)
Barbara Davis-Hassan – Lanesborough Delegate
Buck Donovan – Lee Delegate
James Lovejoy – Mt. Washington Alternate
Kyle Hanlon – North Adams Delegate
Sheila Irvin – Pittsfield Delegate
Fred Schubert – Richmond Alternate
Sarah Satterthwaite – Savoy Delegate
Christine Rasmussen – Stockbridge Alternate
Sarah Hudson – Tyringham Alternate
Don Gagnon – Washington Delegate
Roger Bolton – Williamstown Alternate
Doug McNally – Windsor Delegate

Staff Present:

Thomas Matuszko – Executive Director
Marianne Sniezek – Office Manager
Kate Hill Tapia – Office Administrator
Laura Brennan – Economic Development Program Manager
Wylie Goodman – Economic Development Planner

Others Present:

Joe Diver, Dalton Select Board Chair; Pittsfield Community Television; Nat Romano; Kent Lew, Washington Select Board Chair; Grant McGregor – Dalton Planner; Paul Mark – State Rep

C. Approval of Minutes of September 30, 2021, Meeting

Sheila Irvin moved to approve the draft minutes of the September 30, 2021 meeting. Roger Bolton seconded the motion. There were no comments or discussion. The minutes were approved with a roll call vote and four abstentions.

Yes:

John Duval – Adams Alternate
Peter Traub – Cheshire Delegate
Barbara Davis-Hassan – Lanesborough Delegate
James Lovejoy – Mt. Washington Alternate
Kyle Hanlon – North Adams Delegate
Sheila Irvin – Pittsfield Delegate
Christine Rasmussen – Stockbridge Alternate
Sarah Hudson – Tyringham Alternate
Don Gagnon – Washington Delegate
Roger Bolton – Williamstown Alternate

Abstained:

Buck Donovan – Lee Delegate
Fred Schubert – Richmond Alternate
Sarah Satterthwaite – Savoy Delegate

II. Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the public.

III. Delegate & Alternate Issues

There were no Delegate or Alternate issues.

IV. Executive Committee Actions

There were no questions or comments on Executive Committee actions at the November 4, 2021 meeting.

V. Massachusetts' American Rescue Plan (ARPA) Funding

Representative Paul Mark was invited to review Massachusetts' process and plan for spending ARPA funds and how Berkshire communities might access them. A summary of his update and the discussion follows.

The legislature is in informal session (no in-person roll call votes) until January but can still pass the ARPA spending bill and send it to the Governor. Representative Mark is confident it will pass by the end of January at the latest. The process is similar to the budget process.

The state has received \$5.3 billion, \$4.8 billion of that is in the Coronavirus Relief Fund. This is in addition to \$1 billion from the "rainy day fund" and the proposed federal *Infrastructure* Investment and Jobs Act of \$1.2 trillion.

The legislature may trim infrastructure projects from the COVID Relief Fund proposal since those could be funded from the federal infrastructure bill.

Representative Mark reviewed some items in the House Relief Fund proposal:

- \$78 million food infrastructure grants
- \$500 million bonus pay for workers who worked through pandemic shut down
- \$500 million to replenish the Unemployment Insurance trust fund
- \$600 million public housing
- \$265 million education (includes \$100 million for HVAC upgrades)
- \$720 million health care, public health boards, nursing homes +
- \$125 million Cultural Council grants
- \$350 million environmental infrastructure

The Senate version is similar but doesn't include everything. Both the House and Senate versions have earmarked projects for the Berkshires. Rep Mark did not share details since the conference committee won't meet for a few weeks.

COVID Relief Fund spending must be committed by the end of 2024 and spent by 2026. Rainy day funds (from FY21) must be spent by July 2022 (end of FY22).

It is unknown how much input Massachusetts will have on the specifics of the federal Infrastructure bill. Tom read that there would be large block grants that states could spend as they want. Representative Mark said "significant spending" is anticipated. Earmarks up to \$20 million (x 4 delegates = \$80 million) may be possible.

Commission members asked why Chapter 90 money is not in the COVID Relief Fund. Representative Mark thinks the best that can happen is via a "bonus" for small communities to make up for the large portion of funds going to communities with the most residents. Representatives from those communities will not vote to reduce their funding, but they may concede to a "bonus" for small communities.

Priority needs expressed by Commission members include:

- road repair
- last mile on-demand shared transportation
- broadband infrastructure (relates to ability to connect to transit)
- water & sewer infrastructure
- housing (of all types)

There was discussion about the need for creative solutions, borrowing from successful models, and using new technologies.

VI. Ratification of Committee Members

Delegates were asked to approve the revised list of committee members. Christine Rasmussen is joining the Regional Issues Committee, and a correction, that Rebecca Ferguson is still a member of the Brownfields Committee.

Jim Lovejoy motioned to approve the revised list of BRPC committee members. Kyle Hanlon seconded the motion. The motion passed with a roll call vote.

Yes:

John Duval – Adams Alternate
Peter Traub – Cheshire Delegate
Pedro Pachano – Great Barrington Alternate
Barbara Davis-Hassan – Lanesborough Delegate
Buck Donovan – Lee Delegate
James Lovejoy – Mt. Washington Alternate
Kyle Hanlon – North Adams Delegate
Christine Rasmussen – Stockbridge Alternate
Sarah Hudson – Tyringham Alternate
Don Gagnon – Washington Delegate
Roger Bolton – Williamstown Alternate
Doug McNally – Windsor Delegate

VII. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Annual Report 2021

Economic Development Program Manager Laura Brennan presented the draft CEDS Annual report for approval by the Commission.

The CEDS staff and committee monitor trends and track progress on goals agreed upon with regional partners. Many organizations carry out the economic development activities.

Berkshire county has seen a significant percentage decrease in workers; 2300 is the sharpest drop in a decade. Some are explained by workers reaching retirement age. The unemployment numbers are also concerning as they are higher than state and national numbers. Median income has increased but lags behind both the state and U.S.A. COVID relief programs have lessened the impact of the pandemic.

There are forty-five priority projects; eight were added this year. Laura highlighted one project from each priority area:

- **Talent & Workforce:** Berkshire Workforce Board secured \$225,000 to train 70 nursing assistants.
- **Entrepreneurship & Innovation:** Berkshire Innovation Center added metal 3D printing capabilities and launched a virtual and augmented reality simulations lab.
- **Infrastructure & Site Readiness:** MassDOT invested more than \$10M in road resurfacing and bridge work in 7 towns.

- **Collaboration:** berkshirebenchmarks.org will undergo a brand and website overhaul.
- **Industry / Occupational Clusters:** Berkshire Agricultural Ventures secured \$500K to support meat processing and agroforestry.
- **Economic Resiliency:** The Berkshire County COVID-19 Adaptation Fund provided grants up to \$12,000 to 40 applicants.

There was discussion about the correlation between housing availability and the decline in the labor force. It isn't easy to track that. Everyone has anecdotal evidence of the lack of housing's impact on hiring.

Economic Development Planner, Wylie Goodman, shared a link to a report on this topic by the Boston Fed.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/solve-the-labor-shortage-housing-crisis-hiring-recovery-home-prices-2021-10>

She noted that given the strong commitment to agriculture in the Berkshires, agrihoods (a type of planned community that integrates agriculture into a residential neighborhood) might be more acceptable. This development model has a percentage of below-market housing, much of which is for seniors. This a link for an example of agrihoods in Santa Clara, CA.

<http://www.agrihood-sc.com/>

Wylie suggested considering repurposing dilapidated hotels along major transportation routes into multi-family or higher-density housing. This would also improve eyesores. Many are near shopping and have water and sewer infrastructure.

Roger Bolton moved to approve the CEDS Annual Report. Doug McNally seconded the motion. The motion was approved with a roll call vote:

Yes:

John Duval – Adams Alternate
 Peter Traub – Cheshire Delegate
 Pedro Pachano – Great Barrington Alternate
 Barbara Davis-Hassan – Lanesborough Delegate
 Buck Donovan – Lee Delegate
 James Lovejoy – Mt. Washington Alternate
 Kyle Hanlon – North Adams Delegate
 Sheila Irvin – Pittsfield Delegate
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VIII. Housing Education Discussion

BRPC staff will develop informational material and other tools for municipalities to promote housing development. Commission members were asked what would be most useful.

There is a need for community education about Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) by-laws to reassure residents that these will not dramatically change the character of their towns. And suggestions for town officials on a process to implement them.

Commission members said it would be helpful to know how many Berkshire municipalities have ADU's and their impact. Pedro reported that in Great Barrington, there were two applications in eight years. Now that the Planning Board loosened requirements, there have been three applications in three years. He said having a needs assessment has been a big help. Housing is a complex issue as the economy needs second homeowners and houses year-round residents and employees can afford.

John Duval noted that it took years to educate Adams community members about 40R. Training started with the Select Board and town hall staff. BRPC helped with those.

Prejudice against low-income housing and the racism inherent in that is an issue. There was agreement that language such as "workforce housing" would clarify that not all public housing development is subsidized housing. Personal stories could educate the public about what "affordable" means.

Another issue is supporting aging in place (in their home or at least community) for seniors. This relates to transportation needs.

The pandemic has exacerbated housing issues:

- Increase in short-term rentals (housing that would have been for residents)
- Price gauging
- Cost of construction
- Hard to regulate ADU's that are short-term rentals
- How do building codes relate to ADU, especially for older homes?
- Title V regulations are archaic
- Frontage and subdividing rules too restrictive
- Too long since Berkshire county constructed senior housing – this could free up homes for purchase
- Pressure to sell one's home but nowhere to go
- Financing is the costliest part of housing development

Financing idea: towns could sell bonds and give low-interest loans. A menu of housing funding resources would be helpful.

Tom said BRPC would work on creating housing resources. The Regional Housing Working Group (formed by BRPC, 1Berkshire and Berkshire Regional Housing Authority) is evolving into a county-wide coalition and plans to present its findings and plans to the Berkshire legislative delegation soon.

IX. Executive Director's Report

A. District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA)

Tom added this topic to highlight that BRPC's DLTA assistance to towns could be housing-related. Applications will go out to municipalities soon. These are grants for BRPC staff services for towns and may also include zoning and economic development topics.

There was no discussion on the remainder of the Executive Director's report.

B. MARPA / DLS Annual Conference – Investing in Recovery

The annual Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA) and Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services (DLS) conference was held virtually on Wednesday, November 17. It highlighted best practices in municipal finance, management, and operations, focusing on recovery and the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

C. Special Commission on Rural School Districts

Tom summarized the work of the Special Commission on Rural School District's Regionalization and Shared Services subcommittee. The Commission will finalize its work over the next several months. They are still accepting input on rural school districts via the legislative aides for the co-chairs, Senator Hind (Kathryn Jason kathryn.jason@masenate.gov and Representative Blais (Corinne Coryat corinne.coryat@mahouse.gov). More information can be found at Special Commission on Rural School Districts (malegislature.gov) and below:

Section 22 of Chapter 132 of the Acts of 2019 created a Special Commission to study and make recommendations concerning the long-term fiscal health of rural school districts that are facing or may face declining student enrollment. The Commission was charged with making recommendations for: (i) improving and expanding the rural school aid grant program and feasibility of including a low and declining student enrollment factor within the existing rural school aid formula; (ii) establishing and including a low and declining student enrollment factor within the foundation budget; (iii) expanding the use of technology to deliver instruction; (iv) enabling operating efficiencies; (v) exploring the use of shared services; (vi) optimizing schools and school districts; (vii) encouraging improvement of fiscal health and educational outcomes; and (viii) other matters related to educational opportunities in rural areas.

D. Staff Update

Cara Farrell has been hired as a Community Planner. Her resume was distributed. Initially, she will be working on comprehensive planning and

zoning.

E. Other - none

X. Adjournment

John Duval thanked Representative Paul Mark and all for great discussions.

Pedro Pachano made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Roger Bolton and unanimously approved. Adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

Materials distributed or presented during this meeting:

- Agenda
- Draft Meeting Minutes September 30, 2021
- Executive Committee Actions Memo for November 2021
 - BRPC Committee Memberships FY22
 - Berkshire County 2017-2022 DRAFT Comprehensive Economic Development (CEDS) Annual Report FFY21
 - Executive Director's Report
 - MARPA-DLA Conference Investing in Recovery
 - Cara Farrell Resume

