



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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APPROVED EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Thursday, December 2, 2021

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. Call to Order & Open Meeting Law Statement

A. The meeting was called to order at 4:01 p.m.

Chair John Duval called the meeting to order and stated that 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:

Read by Office Administrator Kate Hill Tapia:

John Duval, Chair, Adams Alternate

Malcolm Fick, Vice Chair, Great Barrington Alternate

Buck Donovan, Treasurer, Lee Delegate

Sheila Irvin, Clerk, Pittsfield Delegate

René Wood, Commission Development Chair, Sheffield Alternate

Roger Bolton, Environmental Review Committee Chair, Williamstown Alternate

CJ Hoss, Regional Issues Committee Chair, Pittsfield Alternate

Sam Haupt, Peru Delegate; At-Large

Others Present: Brittany Polito, iBerkshires; Barb Davis-Hassan, Lanesboro Alternate; Christine Rasmussen Stockbridge Alternate near the end of the meeting

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

II. Approval Executive Committee Meeting November 4, 2021 Minutes

CJ Hoss moved to approve the minutes of the November 4, 2021 meeting.

The motion was seconded by Malcolm Fick and approved by roll call vote from John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Sam Haupt, Sheila Irvin, CJ Hoss, René Wood, and Roger Bolton. Kyle Hanlon abstained.

III. Financial Reports

A. November Expenditures Report

Line items 15633 and 15628 have a typo. Overdose was spelled incorrectly.

René Wood moved to approve the November Expenditures report, and CJ Hoss seconded the motion. The report was approved by roll call vote from John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Kyle Hanlon, Sam Haupt, Sheila

Irvin, CJ Hoss, René Wood, and Roger Bolton.

B. Accounts Receivable Report & Assessments

Tom noted that the \$34,561 payment from the Executive Office of Energy & Environment was received.

C. Line of Credit Report

There has been no need to tap the line of credit.

D. BRPC Checking Account Fraud

BRPC's TD Bank primary checking account had three fraudulent checks written and cashed by a woman in South Carolina within three days: \$7500, \$24,000, and \$5000. She had printed checks with BRPC's routing and account numbers. The checks were out of sequence and caught by BRPC staff within 48 hours. The funds are being reinstated, and a new verification system set up whereby BRPC will submit a list of checks as they are issued. BRPC will not be liable for the checks or any fees. Committee members commented that this type of fraud is not unusual.

IV. Delegate & Alternate Issues

Roger Bolton stated that the November Commission meeting was "extraordinarily valuable," especially input from newer delegates which is a very good development.

V. Items Requiring Action

A. Approval to Submit Grant Application to MIIA Health Benefits Trust Wellness Grant

Approval was requested for the Executive Director to submit a grant application to the Massachusetts MIIA Health Benefits Trust Wellness Grant and approve any resulting contracts and agreements. This grant provides resources for creating and maintaining a healthy work culture, such as exercise equipment and adjustable desks. The grant budget is up to \$5000. There is no local match required. The staff lead on this application is Marianne Sniezek, msniezek@berkshireplanning.org.

Sam Haupt moved to approve that the Executive Director submits a grant application to the Massachusetts MIIA Health Benefits Trust Wellness Grant and approve any resulting contracts and agreements. This grant would provide resources to promote a healthy work culture, such as exercise equipment and adjustable desks. The grant budget is up to \$5000. There is no local match required. René Wood seconded the motion. It was approved by roll call vote from John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Kyle Hanlon, Sam Haupt, Sheila Irvin, CJ Hoss, René Wood, and Roger Bolton.

B. Approval to Submit Grant Application to the Economic Development Administration (EDA), U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC)

Approval was requested for the Executive Director to submit a grant application to the Planning and Local Technical Assistance Program, Economic Development Administration (EDA), U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), and approve any resulting contracts and agreements. This grant would allow BRPC to prepare a five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The current CEDS expires at the end of this year. The requested amount is likely to be \$30,000. A match is required and would be provided through the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program. Staff lead is Economic Development Program Manager Laura Brennan, lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org.

René Wood moved to approve that the Executive Director submits a grant application to the Planning and Local Technical Assistance Program, Economic Development Administration (EDA), U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), and approve any resulting contracts and agreements. This grant would allow BRPC to prepare a five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The current CEDS expires at the end of this year. The requested amount is likely to be \$30,000. A match is required and would be provided through the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program. Sam Haupt seconded the motion. It was approved by roll call vote from John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Kyle Hanlon, Sam Haupt, Sheila Irvin, CJ Hoss, René Wood, and Roger Bolton.

C. Approval to Submit a Grant Application to the Rural Health Equity Program

Approval was requested for the Executive Director to submit a grant application to the Rural Health Equity Grant program through the New England Rural Health Association and approve any resulting contracts and agreements. The BRPC Public Health Program is submitting an up to \$75,000/year, three-year Rural Health Equity Grant for the small towns in the Central Berkshire Rural Health Equity Cluster, including the Towns of Becket, Dalton, Hancock, Hinsdale, Lanesborough, Peru, Richmond, Washington, and Windsor. This grant will include hiring a part-time person to manage the COVID response, including mitigation efforts such as vaccination, education, and other mitigation strategies. It will also work with communities and other partners to identify sustainable structural changes that will improve health outcomes in the long term in rural communities. There is no match requirement. Staff lead is Senior Planner Allison Egan aegan@berkshireplanning.org.

Roger Bolton moved to approve that the Executive Director submits a grant application to the Rural Health Equity Grant program through the New England Rural Health Association and approve any resulting contracts and agreements. The up to \$75,000/year, three-year Rural Health Equity Grant is for the Central Berkshire Rural Health Equity Cluster towns, including Becket, Dalton, Hancock, Hinsdale, Lanesborough, Peru, Richmond, Washington, and Windsor. This grant includes a part-time person to manage the COVID response, including mitigation efforts such as vaccination, education, and

other mitigation strategies. It would also work with communities and other partners to identify sustainable structural changes to improve long-term health outcomes. There is no match requirement. René Wood seconded the motion. It was approved by roll call vote from John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Kyle Hanlon, Sam Haupt, Sheila Irvin, CJ Hoss, René Wood, and Roger Bolton.

D. Approval to Submit Grant Application to the Community Empowerment and Reinvestment Grant Program with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

BRPC has decided not to make this application.

E. Other - None

VI. Committee Reports

A. Metropolitan Planning Organization

The MPO met on Tuesday, November 23, 2021. The main agenda topic was to approve a TIP amendment for public comment related to BRTA and their preventive maintenance, operating expenses, bus replacement, and fare collection improvements. There is a thirty-day review period. (Draft unapproved minutes have not been prepared.)

B. Finance Committee

The Finance Committee will meet on December 9, 2021. The main agenda items are to recommend the FY2023 Community Assessments to the Commission and review the FY2021 BRPC Audit.

Tom stated that towns may request their recommended assessment for budget planning purposes. The Finance Committee's recommendations won't be approved until the January 20, 2022 Commission meeting. He also confirmed that census numbers are available. Census data was used for the recent redistricting.

C. Other - None

VII. Executive Director's Report

A. Report on New Contracts/Agreements

New Grants and Contracts received/initiated 12/01/2021 to 12/31/2021

- Clarksburg – Municipal Vulnerability Program - \$15,000
- Lenox - Municipal Vulnerability Program - \$295,190
- Mount Washington - Municipal Vulnerability Program - \$20,000
- Mount Washington – Hazard Mitigation - \$18,750
- Clarksburg – Green Communities Weatherization & Lighting Project - \$10,000
- Public Health Emergency Preparedness Planning - \$150,909

- CHAPA – Municipal Engagement Initiative – grant of services

The \$295,190 Municipal Vulnerability Program includes several towns and community organizations like the Housatonic Valley Association. Lenox is administering the grant, and BRPC receives a portion for staff support. The focus is on culvert assessments.

Grants and Contracts not received.

- ACT4All Grant Program for developing an E-bike incentive program for low-income community members.

B. Berkshires Tomorrow Inc. (BTI) Update

The BTI board authorized the President, John Duval, to sign an agreement with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and sign any other contracts to support the COVID-19 Pediatric Clinics not to exceed the amount of \$10,000, including a 2% administrative fee. Berkshires Tomorrow did not receive a grant from EPA's Environmental Justice Small Grant Program for \$75,000. It was a very competitive application.

C. West – East Rail

A next step recommended in MassDOT's East-West Passenger Rail Study was to understand the governance options for expanded passenger rail in Western Massachusetts. MassDOT recently released a white paper that provides background on issues that influence passenger rail operations in Western Massachusetts and provides specific recommendations on passenger rail operations and governance options for future services. Attached is the Executive Summary. For the complete white paper, go to: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-intercity-passenger-rail-governance-white-paper-0/download>

The advisory committee recommended that governance be addressed and a list of options considered. Tom is concerned that MassDOT seems to have already chosen one option. He will assess what needs to be done going forward and noted it is good that MassDOT is paying attention to this. Perhaps there will be funding to move it forward with ARPA and the infrastructure bill.

Roger Bolton shared that he thinks it is good that it wasn't assumed that MTA, an eastern-focused organization, would govern the West-East Rail.

The paper did not deal with the shared track issue, which prevents reliable, quick service since freight dominates. CSX's attempt to purchase the Pan Am Railways line is another issue. It is a national or at least subregional issue without a clear resolution.

D. Rural Policy Advisory Commission Update

The Rural Policy Advisory Commission did not meet in November. The next meeting is tentatively set for December 17, 2021.

E. CPTC Fall Training Schedule

Planning and zoning board members may still participate in virtual training events through the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC). The schedule of online sessions is attached.

F. Special Commission on Rural Schools

The Special Commission established by the legislature to examine rural school districts has been working over the past several months through various subcommittees. At its meeting on November 9, 2021, the subcommittees reported their initial recommendations (attached.) One additional subcommittee on school choice recommended that the entire school choice policy needs to be re-examined statewide, including an examination of the inequity it might be causing. The Special Commission will synthesize these recommendations into a final report/recommendation, proposed to be released early next year. A recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Burdens on small towns such as Chapter 766, aid to disabled children, are difficult because it is hard to plan budgets, not knowing if or when a child will need services. Tom said it was a balanced discussion, including rural transportation, condition of schools, and staffing. These are serious issues for rural schools, especially with declining enrollment. It is encouraging to see that these issues are being addressed.

G. Staff Update

Jennifer Kimball, a Principal Planner with the Public Health Program and leader of the Berkshire Opioid Addiction Prevention Collaborative, is resigning effective mid-December. Tom noted that Jennifer did a great job with the Collaborative, and it is an important position to fill.

VI. Old Business

A. Office Space

The building owner continues to concentrate work on the exterior of the building. The Roofing work is almost done. The overhangs along North and Fenn Streets will be re-roofed, which should prevent dripping on the sidewalk that freezes in the winter. The exterior masonry work is done for the season. A drain line extension will be constructed along the fire escape in the back parking lot to serve the downspouts on the back wall and alcove area. Gutters and downspouts will be replaced and connected to the new storm line that should help eliminate icing conditions in the parking lot. Work on the interior will not start in earnest until the first of the year.

Due to new hires, the office is at full capacity, so people may need to share if there is new staff.

B. Other - None

VII. New Business

A. January Commission Meeting

Tom suggested the agenda be determined at the January Executive Committee meeting and that the Commission Development Committee choose how to structure the housing topic.

In the early 2000s, BRPC produced four to six-page "planning toolbox" documents on various topics. These will be resurrected, starting with what communities can do about housing. There will be other topics such as master plans.

René Wood suggested the Commission Development Committee meet in December to delve into the topic. She will follow up with Tom to schedule that. The housing topic is pertinent as the regional housing working group will release its housing strategy soon. The CHAPA (Citizens Housing and Planning Association) municipal engagement project also starts soon.

Chris Brown, BRPC Community Planner, is working on a Housing Production Plan for Sheffield, and Great Barrington has completed a housing needs assessment. These can serve as examples for other communities.

The following item needs to be on the agenda:

- Approval of the assessment for FY23.

Other possible agenda items include:

- A report on the Commonwealth's ARPA spending plan
- Given the interest expressed at the Commission meeting, there will be a housing topic at the January meeting and as a "standing" agenda for future meetings.

B. Employee Handbook

Once BRPC reaches 50 employees, there are additional requirements. There are currently 47 individual employees, many part-time, so there are about 35 FTEs. This will be an opportunity to develop a complete employee handbook instead of numerous separate policies.

Tom asked for input on how to approach this. The separate policies were each approved by the Executive Committee, and clearly, any changes will need approval. Another regional planning organization has shared its updated policy that legal counsel has reviewed.

René Wood suggested someone with "fresh eyes" edit it to ensure it makes sense to a new employee. Roger Bolton recommends legal counsel at the onset to ensure that even draft versions are not considered "contractual commitments." Despite BRPC being different from a municipality, the document may serve as a template for towns. John Duval suggested a subcommittee could be formed to review and present a new handbook.

The handbook development will likely take several months, and there may be a need to develop individual policies in the meantime.

C. Adjournment

Malcolm Fick motioned to adjourn the meeting at 4:49 p.m., seconded by René Wood, unanimously approved.

Attachments:

- Unapproved Minutes of the November 4, 2021, Executive Committee Meeting
- November Expenditures Report
- November Receivables Report
- November Line of Credit Report
- MassDOT White Paper Executive Summary
- CPTC Training Schedule
- Special Commission on Rural Schools Subcommittee Reports
- Memo – October 2021 Technical Assistance