



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

MEMORANDUM

TO: Executive Committee, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
FROM: Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director
DATE: March 2, 2022
SUBJ: Supplemental Material for the March 3, 2022, Executive Committee Meeting

The Agenda was revised to add another action item;

D. Approval to Submit Grant Application to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund Supplemental Funding*

The Executive Committee is requested to authorize the Executive Director to submit a grant application to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to recapitalize the Berkshire Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund and to sign any resulting contracts and agreements. With recent loan activity involving Hoosac Valley Coal & Grain in Adams, the former Sun Dry Cleaner in North Adams, and Cooks Garage in Great Barrington along with expected future requests from Blackinton Backwoods in North Adams, Ried Cleaners in Great Barrington, the Eagle Mill project in Lee and one or more sites in Adams, we need additional funds in the loan pool in order to keep these important redevelopment projects moving forward. There is no BRPC Match. Staff lead on this project is Environmental & Energy Program Manager Melissa Provencher, mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org.

Attached is a comment letter related to Action item C., Approval of Comments on the Stretch Code Straw Proposal Presented by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER).

Attached is a revised set of questions related to Old Business item B., State Election Candidate Questions,



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

1 Fenn Street, Suite 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201
T: (413) 442-1521 · F: (413) 442-1523
TTY: 771 or (800) 439-2370
berkshireplanning.org

MEETING NOTICE

(Revised & Posted 3/2/22, 5:30 pm)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

of the

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, March 03, 2022 at **4:00 p.m.**

This will be a **Virtual Meeting** as allowed by Ch. 22 of the Acts of 2022 suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20 until July 15, 2022.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3926128831>

Meeting ID: 392 612 8831

Phone: 646.558.8656, 301.715.8592, 312.626.6799, 669.900.9128, 253.215.8782, 346.248.7799

Meeting materials are posted on BRPC's website: www.berkshireplanning.org.

Click on the calendar of events, then the meeting name and follow link to materials.

AGENDA

- I. Call to Order & Open Meeting Law Statement (4:00)
- II. Approval of Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of February 3, 2022* (4:05)
- III. Financial Reports (4:10)
 - A. February Expenditures Report *
 - B. Accounts Receivable Report
 - C. Line of Credit Report
 - D. Other (For information only)
- IV. Delegate & Alternate Issues (4:15)
- V. Items Requiring Action* (4:20)
 - A. Approval to Submit Grant Application to the Grants for Arts Projects program within the National Endowment for the Arts*
 - B. Approval of Comments on the Stretch Code Straw Proposal Presented by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER)*
 - C. Approval of Salary Increases for FY 2023*
 - D. Approval to Submit Grant Application to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund Supplemental Funding*
 - E. Other (For information only)

City and Town Clerks: Please post this notice pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 39, Section 23B

Please Note:

For information regarding postponements or cancellations on the day of a scheduled meeting, please call Berkshire Regional Planning Commission at (413) 442-1521, x5

- VI. Committee Reports (4:30)
- A. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee
 - B. Municipal Planning Organization
 - C. Regional Issues Committee
 - D. Other (For information only)
- VII. Executive Director's Report (4:35)
- A. Report on New Contracts / Agreements
 - B. Berkshires Tomorrow Inc. (BTI) Update
 - C. Staff Updates
 - D. Proposed Legislation on Gravel Roads
 - E. Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) Update
 - F. The Massachusetts Statewide Climate Change Assessment
 - G. Other (For information only)
- VIII. Old Business (4:55)
- A. Office Space Update
 - B. State Election Candidate Questions
 - C. Other (For information only)
- IX. New Business (5:05)
- A. In-Person Meetings
 - B. March Commission Meeting
 - C. Other (For information only)
- X. Adjournment (5:10)

Attachments:

- Unapproved Minutes of February 3, 2021, Executive Committee Meeting
- February Expenditures Report
- February Receivables Report
- February Line of Credit Report
- Draft Unapproved Minutes of the February 16, 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee
- Draft Unapproved Minutes of the February 22, 2022 Transportation / MPO
- Resume – Morgan Ovitsky
- Resume – Erin Jones
- MBI Broadband status
- Draft – Questions for Candidates

* Items Requiring Action



March 1, 2022

Nina Mascarenhas
Department of Energy Resources
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 1020
Boston, MA 02114

Re: REQUEST FOR COMMENT ON STRETCH CODE STRAW PROPOSAL

Dear Ms. Mascarenhas:

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) is pleased to submit comments on the Stretch Code Straw Proposal presented by The Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER). BRPC appreciates DOER's efforts to improve upon the existing stretch code and further decarbonize the building sector. Buildings built in the next 10 years will make up a substantial portion of the building stock in 2050, so it is important to act swiftly and aggressively if we are going to meet the GHG reduction goals of the Massachusetts 2050 Decarbonization Roadmap. BRPC offers the following comments on the Stretch Code Straw Proposal:

Fossil Fuels

Continuing to allow and incentivize fossil fuel heated new construction is incongruous with the State's climate targets and jeopardizes our ability to meet them by 2030 and 2050. BRPC is fully supportive of these goals and recognizes the need to electrify our building stock, new and existing, as soon as possible. Unfortunately, in Berkshire County (like many other rural parts of the state) the electrical grid and existing technologies that enable building electrification and energy storage are not reliable or cost effective enough to justify a total shift away from fossil-fuels, especially for low- and-middle-income families.

The specialized opt-in code should be ambitious and set the stage for what must become ubiquitous statewide well before 2050: the widespread electrification of buildings and the elimination of fossil fuel reliance. Allowing communities the option to ban fossil fuel hookups in new construction will drive market change that will make it possible for other communities to follow suit more quickly and eventually make it unrealistic for anyone to keep building fossil fuel-heated buildings. This would be a no-regrets strategy to allow interested communities to more easily ban fossil-fuel use in new construction while retaining the option to rescind the code at any time. Without a more forward-looking option now, we will be locked into a future of fossil fuel reliance.

HERS Rating Requirements

BRPC appreciates the inclusion of more stringent HERS rating requirements into the updated stretch and specialized opt-in codes for both gas-heated and electric buildings. However, given the State's GHG reduction targets for 2030 and 2050 and the fact that the average Massachusetts home was built with a HERS rating of 51 in 2020, both codes should reduce the HERS ratings caps even further, especially for gas-heated homes.

The analysis conducted by DOER demonstrates significant construction and operational cost savings for electric HERS 42 homes. The stretch and municipal opt-in code should require electric homes to meet these requirements and maximize GHG reduction potential while continuing to incentivize this option to ensure that it remains cost effective. While this analysis shows a slight cost increase for gas-heated HERS 42 homes, this requirement should be stricter. A 27% decrease in GHG emissions between the base code requirements (gas-heated HERS 52) and proposed stretch code requirements (gas-heated HERS 42) in 2032 is not enough to meet the State's GHG reduction targets if a substantial percentage of new construction continues to be gas-heated over the next 10 years. Gas-heated homes should no longer be comparably cost-effective to electric and developers must be reliably deterred from building them.

Definition of Net Zero

While upgrading the grid to become net zero is critical, the specialized opt-in code should not rely on the grid to become net zero rather than require homes to be. The timeline for achieving a net zero grid is undetermined and unreliable. Requiring buildings to be net zero themselves under the specialized opt-in code will likely mean decades of GHG reductions that will be forfeited by waiting on the grid.

Not requiring onsite or offsite renewables is another missed opportunity to meet the State's short-term GHG reduction targets and to make buildings and entire neighborhoods across the state more resilient to power outages (which are already increasing due to climate change).

These comments were approved by the BRPC Executive Committee at its meeting on March 3, 2022.

Sincerely,

Thomas Matuszko, AICP
Executive Director

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES – VERSION 2 – 3.2.22

1. PASSENGER RAIL

1A. Establishing passenger rail service to Berkshire County is critical to the Berkshire economy. Such rail service must begin in Pittsfield, or ideally in both Pittsfield and North Adams.

Discuss your views on establishing a passenger rail service to connect the western part of the state, including Berkshire County, to the eastern part of the state, including your view of frequency, start/end of such service – daily and/or weekend, and costs? What would you do to immediately implement that service?

1B. Equally critical to Berkshire's economy (tourism), is north/south service to New York City.

What are your views on establishing passenger rail service between Pittsfield and New York City, initially as the Berkshire Flyer and long term via the Housatonic Line? What will you do to implement these passenger services? When will you do it?

2. INFRASTRUCTURE

2A. Auditor Bump recently released a detailed audit on the issues of Western Massachusetts infrastructure and state level funding inequities exacerbating these issues.

Are you familiar with that assessment and if so, what is your reaction to it? What are your two top priorities from this report and your plans to address identified funding inequities?

2B. The Auditor's report identified several possible actions including, updating the Chapter 90 funding formula to be based on road miles.

Do you support that change? What amount of funding would you annually commit to Chapter 90? What will you do to increase funding for local roads, small bridges, and culverts especially in small and rural towns?

2C. The Auditor's report also recommended the creation of a municipal and public safety building authority to assist community with renovation or replacement of public buildings.

What are your views on the establishment of a municipal and public safety building authority? Do you support its establishment and funding?

3. EDUCATION

Berkshire County K-12 schools have faced enrollment declines and are projected to continue to do so. This is a common problem in many of the 220 rural towns around the state and has been one of the key challenges identified in recent work on Rural Communities in Massachusetts.

What would you do to address educational opportunities and costs in Rural Massachusetts, including Berkshire County, to provide the full range of equal educational opportunities for our students?

4. PROTECTED LANDS

The Berkshires have a large amount of land permanently protected from development, in some cases 60% of the land area of a municipality. This land provides multiple public benefits, including recreational as well as carbon sequestration. However, this public benefit comes at a cost to a municipality, as that land is taken off the property tax roll. The Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program has not covered the cost of this loss to western Massachusetts communities and has been chronically underfunded. Like many funding formulas, this funding formula favors eastern Massachusetts communities.

What will you do to fully fund and make the PILOT program more equitable for small rural towns?

5. PUBLIC HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic magnified the importance of local public health departments. Many towns in Berkshire County are served by volunteer Public Health Board members. The Special Commission on Local and Regional Health outlined recommendations to standardize and professionalize public health services. The administration and legislature have strongly supported funding to improve local public health rather than making the implementation of such services a de facto unfunded mandate, subject to annual legislative appropriations.

What would you do to implement and fund the recommendations contained in the report prepared by the Special Commission on Local and Regional Health? If you do not support them, what are your proposals regarding Public Health improvements?

6. TRANSIT

Public transit in Berkshire County is fixed route bus transit service, serving 14 out of 32 communities; there is no Sunday service and service ends on most routes by 7:30 pm. Berkshire County has low population density and a large geographic area which provides insurmountable challenges to extending public transit service causing personal and economic hardship. Yet Berkshire County pays 1% sales tax (estimated to be \$30 million/year) to support the MBTA.

What will you do to improve public transit in rural areas such as Berkshire County? What will you do to provide for micro-transit, or other innovative service, in places like Berkshire County?

7. HOUSING

Berkshire County's housing crisis has similar characteristics with the housing crisis in eastern Massachusetts yet there are importance differences. The population in Berkshire County has been declining for decades and is older, with very little new housing development over that time. Thirty nine percent (39%) of the housing stock was built prior to 1940. The 2019 median household was \$59,230, significantly lower than the Massachusetts median household income of \$81,215.

How will you improve the housing crisis in rural and small towns and in Berkshire County? Will you support a widespread housing rehabilitation program focused on rural and small towns such as those in Berkshire County? What new housing development programs will you implement specific for rural and small towns?

8. CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

Many climate change mitigation measures require reducing vehicle emissions, greater energy efficiency in buildings and increased use of renewable energy. Implementation of these types of measures is difficult in Berkshire County where there is a limited transit system, travel times for employment and basic services are great, the building stock is old, incomes are relatively lower than the state and renewable energy systems can dramatically change land use patterns.

What will you do to ensure rural areas such as Berkshire County are equitably treated as climate change mitigation measures are implemented? What incentives will you provide for residents and municipalities in rural areas such as Berkshire County to implement climate change mitigation measures?

9. POPULATION DECLINE

The population of Berkshire County has been declining for decades, leaving it with an aging population, a shortage of younger residents, and a labor shortage.

What will you do to help stem this population decline?

10. REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCIES

10A. Regional Planning Agencies, such as the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, can be important partners with your Administration, serving as a conduit between state agencies and municipalities as well as providing technical services to those municipalities.

How will your administration work with Regional Planning Agencies?

10B. An important funding source to enable Regional Planning Agencies to assist municipalities has been the District Local Technical Assistance program.

Will you advocate for continued funding for the District Local Technical Assistance Program?
