



Approved Commission Development Committee

Minutes from January 13, 2022

The meeting was held via Zoom. Chair René Wood called the meeting to order at 4:31 p.m.

Roll call:

René Wood, Sheffield
Pedro Pachano, Great Barrington
Buck Donovan, Lee
Kyle Hanlon, North Adams
John Duval, Adams, Ex-officio

BRPC Staff: Tom Matuszko, Marianne Sniezek, Kate Hill Tapia, Chris Brown, Chris Skelly

I. Approval of Minutes from December 14, 2021

Kyle Hanlon moved to approve the December 14, 2021 minutes; René Wood seconded. Kyle Hanlon and René Wood approved the minutes. The following abstained: Pedro Pachano, Buck Donovan, and John Duval.

II. Determine how to collect preferences and priorities for housing education topics at the Commission meeting on January 20

Tom reviewed that this committee was asked to figure out how to approach the housing topic at this year's Commission meetings and create a broader discussion than the tool box items Chris and Chris are developing.

At the January 20 full Commission meeting, Tom will briefly present the Berkshire Regional Housing Strategy developed based on the assessment led with 1Berkshire, and incorporated stakeholders' input from across the county.

René asked, how do we find out what Commission members need to know about housing? Do they need to know about housing assessments? Where to find housing was mentioned as a basic question.

Tom suggested that the question is: How to get started in housing planning as a community? Steps are:

1. Assessment
2. Production Plan
3. Review Zoning

If town leaders mention rezoning, they need to be prepared for questions like: How will it change my neighborhood? Will we lose trees and or open space?

There are different issues and challenges even between the four towns represented in the meeting. Issues include: available land, the quantity of low-income housing, high real estate values, sub-standard older housing, some have done a housing assessment, some have 40R, and some are not eligible for it, etc. Most communities struggle to educate the public that “affordable housing” includes housing for working residents. There is a stigma against low-income people and a misunderstanding that government housing efforts would only benefit low-income people.

Some questions were raised:

- What tools do state and or federal governments offer for housing?
- What obstacles are in the way of addressing housing issues?
- What do developers need from towns? Should we invite some to a meeting?
- Could towns issue municipal bonds and offer low-interest funding to developers?
- How to educate the public on why housing is so important, and that “housing” doesn’t just mean “low-income housing”?
- Lack of housing limits economic development and recruiting efforts.
- Berkshire county has exciting success stories of market-rate housing diversifying housing stock in a non-threatening way.
- Is there data that shows what type of housing is needed where?
- What creative ways can the issues be addressed? E.g., tiny houses, \$1 / year leases on publicly owned property, etc.

It was concluded that after the Regional Housing Strategy presentation, a few case studies would be shared to highlight the effect of insufficient market-rate housing. Tom will share a BRPC staff example; John will talk about Adams and General Dynamics; Pedro will share Great Barrington’s accessory dwelling neighbor story. This should open up discussion.

Towns’ success stories can be shared at the March Commission meeting with breakdowns of what it took to create new housing.

III. Determine how to collect questions for state-wide candidates (Governor, Lt. Governor, Auditor) from communities and how to distribute responses

It was agreed to solicit questions from Commission members as part of the January 20 meeting packet. This committee will review the submissions, grouping them, and recommend a final list of ten or fewer questions to the Executive Committee.

IV. Other Business – None

V. Next Meeting – tentatively, along with the Nominating Subcommittee: 5:45 p.m., March 17, 2022, before the full Commission meeting

VI. **Adjournment** – Kyle Hanlon moved to adjourn the meeting; Pedro Pachano seconded, unanimously agreed. Meeting Adjourned at 5:26 p.m.