



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

MEETING NOTICE

There will be a meeting of the

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

on Thursday, March 16, 2023 at **7:00** p.m.

This will be a **Virtual** meeting as allowed by Ch. 107 of the Acts of 2022 extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20 until March 31, 2023.

To participate virtually join Zoom meeting at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3926128831>.
Meeting ID: 392 612 8831, Phone: 646.558.8656, 301.715.8592, 312.626.6799, 669.900.9128

Meeting Material: Written materials for the meeting are posted on BRPC's website: www.berkshireplanning.org. Click on the Calendar of Events for the meeting and available materials will be listed.

Agenda

(All times estimated)

I. Opening

(7:00-7:05)

A. Call to Order

B. Roll Call

C. Approval of Minutes of the January 10, 2023 meeting

II. Comments from the Public

(7:05-7:10)

Members of the public may offer comments regarding topics on the agenda or other matters they wish to bring to the Commission's attention. Comments are limited to no more than three minutes and are to be directed to the Commission. Commenters must state their names.

III. Delegate and Alternate Issues

(7:10-7:15)

Delegates and Alternates may bring up any issue not on the agenda for discussion.

IV. Senator Mark Presentation

(7:15-7:45)

Senator Mark will discuss his legislative priorities.

V. Executive Committee Actions

(7:45-7:50)

Executive Committee actions taken on the Commission's behalf at its February and March 2023 meetings are presented for discussion.

VI. Approval of Grant Application

(7:50 – 7:55)

Authorization is requested for the Executive Director to submit a grant application to the U.S. Department of Justice's Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Site-based Program RFR. BRPC's Berkshire Overdose Addiction Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC) will use this to extend and expand the Berkshire Post Overdose Program (BPOP), a new initiative that provides EMS and Behavioral Health co-response to those who have recently experienced an overdose or are otherwise at higher risk for overdose. This \$1,300,000 three-year grant will be a collaborative project between BRPC,

Northern Berkshire EMS, County Ambulance, Southern Berkshire Ambulance Squad, The Brien Center, Berkshire Harm Reduction, Rural Recovery Resources, and other involved community partners. There is no match required. Staff lead Andy Ottoson, aottoson@berkshireplanning.org, ex. 37.

VII. Ratification of Environmental Review Committee Comments (7:55-8:10)

Due to the submission deadline of March 10th, the BRPC Environmental Review Committee, as authorized by the Executive Committee, submitted comments (included) on behalf of BRPC to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) program on the New England Power (NEP) Company's Expanded Environmental Notification Form related to desired efforts to upgrade existing electrical utility infrastructure and construct improved roadways by which the transmission line can be accessed in Adams, North Adams, Florida and Monroe. These comments need to be ratified.

VIII. Urban Area Boundary Maps (8:10-8:20)

GIS, Data and IT Manager Mark Maloy, the BRPC will review the Census' Urban Area maps and changes from 2010 and 2020. See, [2020 Census Urban Areas FAQs](#) for more information.

IX. Executive Director's Report (8:20 – 8:30)

X. Adjournment (8:30)

Other interested citizens and officials are invited to attend.

All times listed are estimates of when specific agenda items may be discussed.

City and Town Clerks: Please post this notice



DRAFT FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES **January 19, 2023**

This was a virtual meeting as allowed by Ch. 107 of the Acts of 2022, extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20, until March 31, 2023.

I. Opening

A. The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm.

Vice Chair Malcolm Fick stated that per the open meeting law, BRPC records all meetings. Others may record the meeting after informing the meeting Chair. Any documents presented must be provided to the Chair at the meeting.

B. Roll Call

The following Commission members were present:

Shirley Mueller – Alford Alternate
Peter Traub – Cheshire Delegate
Caleb Darby – Dalton Delegate
Mary McGurn – Egremont Delegate
Pedro Pachano – Great Barrington Delegate
Malcolm Fick – Great Barrington Alternate
Richard Roussin – Hinsdale Delegate
Buck Donovan – Lee Delegate
Mark Smith – Lenox Alternate
Laura Mensi – Monterey
Sheila Irvin – Pittsfield Delegate
Mark Anthony – Otis Delegate
Rene Wood – Sheffield Alternate
Nancy Socha – Stockbridge Delegate
Christine Rasmussen – Stockbridge Alternate
Don Gagnon – Washington, Delegate
Kenneth Kuttner – Williamstown Delegate
Roger Bolton – Williamstown Alternate
Doug McNally – Windsor Delegate

Towns with Absent Delegates and no Alternate present:

Adams, Becket, Hancock, Lanesborough, Mt Washington,
New Ashford, New Marlborough, North Adams, Peru, Richmond,
Sandisfield, Savoy, Tyringham, West Stockbridge

Staff Present:

Thomas Matuszko – Executive Director
Marianne Sniezek – Administration Program Manager

Kate Hill Tapia –Office Administrator

Others Present:

Robert O'Connor, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

C. Approval of Minutes of November 17, 2022, Meeting

Rene Wood moved to approve the November 17, 2022, draft meeting minutes, and Doug McNally seconded the motion. The minutes were approved with a roll call vote.

Yes:

Shirley Mueller, Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Richard Roussin, Mark Smith, Laura Mensi, Mark Anthony, Nancy Socha, Don Gagnon, Kenneth Kuttner, Doug McNally

Abstained:

Caleb Darby, Buck Donovan, Sheila Irvin, Rene Wood

II. Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the public.

III. Delegate & Alternate Issues

Housing funding based on area median income (AMI) was raised by the Great Barrington Delegate. Pedro Pachano brought this up as an issue to be addressed with legislators. The AMI has no relationship to real estate values. Tom will monitor what state legislation is filed and consider what advocacy steps can be taken. Support for market-rate housing from the government is needed.

IV. Executive Committee Actions

There were no questions about the Executive Committee's actions from the December 2022 and January 2023 meetings.

V. Approval of Community Assessments for FY 2024

The Finance Committee proposed a 2.5% increase in community assessments for FY 2024. By law, BRPC must notify municipalities of their assessments no later than February to be included in city/town budgets.

Doug McNally made a motion to approve the FY 2024 Assessments with a 2.5% increase from FY 2023, seconded by Rene Wood, and approved by a roll call vote:

Shirley Mueller, Peter Traub, Caleb Darby, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Richard Roussin, Buck Donovan, Mark Smith, Laura Mensi, Mark Anthony, Sheila Irvin, Rene Wood, Nancy Socha, Don Gagnon, Kenneth Kuttner, Doug McNally

VI. Approval of BRPC Bylaw Amendments

The Commission Development Committee recommended amendments to the BRPC Bylaws. The proposed amendments were in the meeting materials. The changes include relieving the Chair of a voting membership in all subcommittees, defining the role of an Assistant Director, and improving wording. A correction was made in the open meeting law section to read: at **the** next full meeting.

Rene Wood made a motion to approve the recommended bylaw amendments as amended, seconded by Buck Donovan, and approved by a roll call vote:

Shirley Mueller, Peter Traub, Caleb Darby, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Richard Roussin, Buck Donovan, Mark Smith, Laura Mensi, Mark Anthony, Sheila Irvin, Rene Wood, Nancy Socha, Don Gagnon, Kenneth Kuttner, Doug McNally

VII. BRPC Recommendation to the Rural Policy Advisory Commission

Approval was requested to recommend to Governor Healey that Executive Director Thomas Matuszko be re-appointed as the BRPC representative to the Rural Policy Advisory Commission as established by MGL 23A Section 66.

Doug McNally made a motion to recommend to Governor Healy that Executive Director Thomas Matuszko be reappointed as BRPC's representative to the Rural Policy Advisory Commission, seconded by Rene Wood, and approved by a roll call vote:

Shirley Mueller, Peter Traub, Caleb Darby, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Richard Roussin, Buck Donovan, Mark Smith, Laura Mensi, Mark Anthony, Sheila Irvin, Rene Wood, Nancy Socha, Don Gagnon, Kenneth Kuttner, Doug McNally

VIII. Municipal Services

The Regional Issues Committee has been discussing how it is increasingly difficult for municipalities to attract and retain staff to provide essential services, such as Treasurer, Accountant, etc. Commission shared thoughts about the root of the problem and possible ways to address it.

IX. Resilient Land Initiative

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) released the [Resilient Lands Initiative Vision](#) on January 4. Bob O'Connor from EEA presented an overview. The Initiative will guide actions to conserve, restore and care for the land in a way that helps both nature and people. It is a powerful strategy to reduce the impacts of climate change on our most vulnerable populations.

X. Executive Director's Report

A. BRPC 2022 Audit

The Summary of the Auditor's Results and the Management Letter from the FY2022 Audit was distributed. There were no findings or questioned costs. The Commission is a low-risk auditee.

B. Staff Updates

Transportation Planner Justin Gilmore is resigning to take a position with MassDOT – District 1.

C. DLTA Program for 2023

Requests for assistance are due Friday, January 27. Additional funding enables BRPC to help municipalities or other local and regional public entities take advantage of federal, state, and other funding opportunities. Work can start in early February.

D. Rural Policy Advisory Commission Update

A draft list of rural legislative priorities was in the meeting materials.

E. Passenger Rail

- West-East Rail - The second public meeting of the Western MA Passenger Rail Commission will be on January 24 at 10:00 am at the Olver Transit Center in Greenfield. A hearing notice was in the materials.
- The Berkshire Flyer working group met. The Flyer is scheduled to run from Memorial Day through Columbus Day. Marketing will begin.
- Northern Tier Passenger Rail – A public workshop was held on January 11th, presenting a lower cost and higher cost alternative. The next step is to develop four other alternatives.

F. Healthy Soils Action Plan

On January 4, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) released the [Healthy Soils Action Plan](#). The Plan provides an assessment of the condition of soils and a blueprint for how to effectively conserve, protect, restore, and properly manage soils to improve the vitality of nature and residents' health and quality of life.

G. Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program

The Massachusetts Broadband Initiative (MBI) continues to accept applications to its [Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program](#). Several Berkshire municipalities have submitted applications. The process will result in strategic documents identifying needs, interests, and key assets and provide a framework to guide future municipal decision-making, potential investments, and activities to increase internet access and usage for those most impacted by the pandemic. It will also prepare municipalities to submit grant proposals to existing or future state or federal programs supporting digital equity activities.

H. Housing in the Berkshires Coalition

The Housing in the Berkshires Coalition is a group of concerned residents and community leaders working to identify and advocate for affordable housing

solutions in our communities. Anyone is welcome. The first meeting (virtual) is Tuesday, January 31, 5:30 – 7.

XI. Adjournment

Rene Wood motioned to adjourn, seconded by Sheila Irvin, and approved by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:34 pm.

Shirley Mueller, Peter Traub, Caleb Darby, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Richard Roussin, Buck Donovan, Mark Smith, Mark Anthony, Sheila Irvin, Rene Wood, Nancy Socha, Don Gagnon, Kenneth Kuttner, Doug McNally



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Delegates and Alternates, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
FROM: Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director
DATE: March 10, 2023
SUBJ: Executive Committee Actions for February and March 2023

Per the bylaws, actions taken by the Executive Committee on the Commission's behalf are reported and presented for discussion at the next Commission meeting. The Executive Committee took the following actions at the February and March 2023 meetings.

Executive Committee Actions on February 2, 2023

Approved the minutes of the January 5, 2023, BRPC Executive Committee

Approved the December 26, 2022, to January 26, 2023, Expenditures Report

Approved the Submission of a Grant Application to the National Council on Aging COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccine Uptake Initiative

Authorization was approved for the Executive Director, after the fact, to submit a grant application to the National Council on Aging COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccine Uptake Initiative and to sign any resulting contracts and agreements. BRPC's Sustaining a Collaboration with Partners to Increase Berkshire County Vaccinations project will help formalize outreach, education, and support systems with written protocols and plans to ensure everyone has the information and resources they need to get vaccinated. The amount requested is \$105,900 for a period of 15 months and there is no match required.

Executive Committee Actions on March 2, 2023

Approved the minutes of the February 2, 2023, BRPC Executive Committee

Approved the January 27 to February 23, 2023, Expenditures Report

Approved the Submission of a Grant Application to the Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program within the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Authorization was approved for the Executive Director to submit a grant application to the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) and to sign any resulting contracts and agreements. Partnering with food-related organizations this project will be a regional collaboration to assess the existing relationship between food insecurity programs and local food in Berkshire County, resulting in a plan for increasing community resilience through local food production and distribution. The total amount

requested will be between \$50,000-100,000 to provide stipends to project partners and allow BRPC staff to lead the assessment and write the plan. There is no match requirement.

Approved the Environmental Review Committee to submit comments on a MEPA Review for An Expanded Environmental Notification Form submitted by the New England Power Company (NEP)

The Executive Committee approved submission of comments on a MEPA review for an Expanded Environmental Notification Form submitted by the New England Power Company (NEP) for electrical pole replacements affecting Florida, North Adams and Adams since comments are due before the April Executive Committee meeting.



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Executive Director

March 10, 2023

Rebecca Tepper, Secretary
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Attn: Purvi Patel
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Re: New England Power Company E131 Asset Condition Refurbishment Project, EEA# 16663

Dear Secretary Tepper:

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) hereby submits comments on the Expanded ENF (EENF) for the New England Power Company (NEP) E131 Asset Condition Refurbishment Project (EEA# 16663). The proposed project spans four municipalities in Massachusetts: Adams, North Adams, Florida, and Monroe. The project's stated goals are to upgrade existing electrical utility infrastructure and construct improved roadways by which the transmission line can be accessed. These access roads will facilitate the proposed infrastructure improvements, as well as future maintenance activities and access by emergency personnel. The proposed project has met or exceeded MEPA review thresholds for a Mandatory Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and the proponent has requested a Single EIR.

The proposed project will have extensive impacts including 92 acres of permanently altered land, 102,971 sf of permanently altered Riverfront Area, and new steel structures 25ft higher than the current maximum height of 85ft. Impacts will primarily result from the replacement of structures, installation of new structures and the creation of both temporary and permanent access roads. The EENF states that permanent impacts are associated with the replacement and relocation of five structures to Bordering Vegetated Wetlands (BVW) via direct embed methods. The EENF further states that these areas were closely evaluated for alternatives but designs that relocated structures outside of BVW were deemed infeasible. However, this detail is absent within the alternatives analysis. The EENF presented an alternatives analysis that was limited to a No Build Alternative and options for selective/targeted maintenance and improvements. The EENF states "No new ROW is required for the Project and no new construction is proposed other than for access. Therefore, there are no route alternatives for this Project."

The standard which must be met to allow a Single Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) is the submission of an EENF which must include more extensive and detailed information that describes and analyzes a proposed project and its alternatives and assesses its potential environmental impacts and environmental mitigation measures. It is our opinion that the EENF does not include the level of extensive and detailed information that is warranted in order to grant a Single EIR. The EENF describes the proposed project, however weaknesses and deficiencies remain within the alternatives analysis and the assessment of the potential environmental impacts and environmental mitigation measures.

BRPC offers the following for consideration to be included within a Draft EIR:

1. Include an analysis of alternative methods such as tracked construction vehicles and/or the use of industrial-type helicopters to carry and install; equipment, concrete, piers and poles. BRPC shares the concerns raised by the Hoosic River Watershed Association (HoorWA). Such alternatives would significantly reduce tree cutting and impacts to resource areas.
2. Provide an alternatives analysis relative to the permanent impacts associated with the replacement and relocation of five structures to Bordering Vegetated Wetlands (BVW) via direct embed methods.

3. Provide greater clarification with regard to why permanent access roads that do not currently exist are necessary.
4. Provide clarification with regard to the selection of steel structures and/or an alternatives analysis comparing wooden versus steel structures. The current wooden structures, which are proposed to be replaced with steel structures were installed in 1925 and have withstood the test of time in standing for nearly 100 years.
5. Provide greater detail with regard to proposed mitigation measures including specific details related to wetland mitigation and replication.
6. Clarify what methods will be used to control invasive species if they are to become established within the ROW.

In addition, BRPC has concerns regarding the capacity of the electrical grid in relation to the Commonwealth's electrification goals. The EENF states that in addition to the refurbishment work, the existing circuits will be adapted to provide high speed communications between substations by replacing existing shield wire with fiber optic ground wire (OPGW). The EENF states that a strong and reliable electrical transmission and distribution system is vital to the region's safety, security, and economic prosperity and that benefits of the project include a strengthened transmission system in western New England that offers greater reliability and safety for customers. However, it is not clear whether the project will directly address the anticipated future demand or whether additional work would be needed in the future.

The BRPC Environmental Review Committee endorsed these comments at their meeting on March 9, 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Thomas Matuszko".

Thomas Matuszko, AICP
Executive Director

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Environmental Review Report

March 8, 2023

SUBJECT: E131 Asset Condition Refurbishment Project
EOEEA#: 16663
LOCATION: Adams, North Adams, Florida, and Monroe
REVIEW TYPE: Expanded ENF
PROPONENT: New England Power Company (NEP)
COMMENTS DUE: March 10, 2023

Project Description

The New England Power Company (NEP) E131 Asset Condition Refurbishment Project (the Project) spans four municipalities in Massachusetts: Adams, North Adams, Florida, and Monroe. The Project's stated goals are to upgrade existing electrical utility infrastructure and construct improved roadways by which the transmission line can be accessed. These access roads will facilitate the proposed infrastructure improvements, as well as future maintenance activities and access by emergency personnel.

The E131 transmission line easement rights range between 200 and 400 feet wide, with the existing line at the approximate center of the easement. The current maintained width ranges from approximately 100 feet to approximately 150 feet. The maintained ROW includes uplands, wetlands, perennial and intermittent streams, unimproved access routes, and improved gravel access roads. Approximately six miles of Line E131 passes through the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR)-owned Monroe, Florida, and Savoy Mountain State Forests. Line E131 traverses through mountainous terrain with steep slopes, rocky outcrops, cliffs, and large boulders. Although it passes through some rural residential areas in the Towns of Florida and Monroe the ROW, and surrounding areas are generally densely forested.

Line E131 was constructed in 1925. The existing wooden H-frame transmission structures are from its original construction. In 1971, reconductoring and shield wire installation updates were conducted throughout the line. In 2004, the line was refurbished with select replacement structures, replacement insulators, and improved grounding. Generally, the line is currently comprised of original wooden H-frame and steel lattice structures.

Based on the age of the infrastructure, a full refurbishment of the line is proposed to bring the utility into compliance with modern standards. The proposed Project will include the following:

- Replacement of 151 structures with new steel pole H-frame structures
- Replacement of 6 triple pole structures
- Replacement of three (3) existing steel lattice structures with new steel structures
- Removal of four (4) existing H-frame structures and one (1) lattice structure
- Installation of approximately 24 structures requiring concrete caisson foundations at locations which require greater structural reinforcement
- Installation of micropile foundations at approximately one (1) structure location which requires greater structural reinforcement
- Installation of three (3) new switch gear structures
- Replacement of existing shield wire with OPGW
- Replacement of all insulators and hardware
- Replacement of conductor in four (4) sections for constructability purposes

Due to the age of the line, the complex and varied terrain through which it traverses, and lack of recent broad-scale upgrades, access to and along the ROW is limited, and many portions of the line are currently inaccessible except by foot or utility terrain vehicles. Improvements to existing and construction of new access routes are required to facilitate the Project and its long-term maintenance. Given the mountainous topography over which the ROW extends, significant road improvements and construction of new roads are necessary to provide safe, reliable, and constructable access to structure locations and wire-pulling setups. This work will involve grading, tree removal, and gravel placement to safely navigate steep slopes. The proposed access road improvements will allow for future access for regular maintenance, including forestry management and overhead line work, or during emergency events such as storm responses.

Temporary access in the form of construction matting is proposed in sensitive areas including wetlands, stream spans, and rare species habitats. No permanent access roads are proposed within Bordering Vegetated Wetlands (BVW). However, due to the abundance of wetland resource areas along the ROW and the complexity of the terrain, the construction of new or improved access within Bordering Land Subject to Flooding (BLSF), Riverfront Area, and the 100-foot Buffer Zone is unavoidable. These impacts have been minimized to the extent feasible, while balancing safety and constructability.

Required Permits & MEPA Thresholds

The proposed project has meet or exceeded MEPA review thresholds for a Mandatory Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The proponent has requested a Single EIR.

ENF Review:

- Land 301 CMR 11.03(1)(b)(1) - Direct alteration of 25 or more acres of land, unless the Project is consistent with an approved conservation farm plan or forest cutting plan or other similar generally accepted agricultural or forestry practices
- Wetlands, Waterways and Tidelands 301 CMR 11.03(3)(b)(1)(d) - Alteration of 5,000 or more sf of bordering or isolated vegetated wetlands
- Wetlands, Waterways and Tidelands 301 CMR 11.03(3)(b)(1)(f) – Alteration of one half or more acres of any other wetlands

ENF and Mandatory EIR:

- 301 CMR 11.03(1)(a)(1) – Land: Direct alteration of 50 or more acres of land, unless the Project is consistent with an approved conservation farm plan or forest cutting plan or other similar generally accepted agricultural or forestry practices
- 301 CMR 11.03(3)(a)(1)(a) - Wetlands, Waterways and Tidelands: Alteration of one or more acres of salt marsh or bordering vegetating wetlands
- 301 CMR 11.06(7)(b) - Environmental Justice: The Secretary shall require an EIR for any Project that is located within a Designated Geographic Area around an Environmental Justice Population.

Required State Agency Permits:

- MassDEP Individual 401 Water Quality Certification
- MESA Conservation and Management Permit
- MassDCR Construction Access Permit
- MassDOT Access Permit

Resource Area Impacts Overview

The proposed Project will result in both temporary and permanent impacts to wetland resource areas including: Bank, Bordering Vegetated Wetlands (BVW), Land Under Water Bodies and Waterways (LUWW), Bordering Land Subject to Flooding (BLSF), Riverfront Area and the 100-foot Buffer Zone. Temporary impacts to BVW and BLSF are due to construction access, staging, and installation of structure foundations where vegetated wetlands and flood prone wetlands currently exist, and replacement structures cannot be sited outside their limits. Permanent impacts are associated with the installation of two culverts; a new switch structure; the installation of concrete caisson foundations for the replacement of four structures and the replacement and relocation of five structures to BVW via direct embed methods. The EENF states that these areas were closely evaluated for alternatives but designs that relocated structures outside of BVW were deemed infeasible. Modifications to existing access, construction of new access, establishment of laydown areas, and installation of work pads will result in temporary and permanent impacts to Riverfront Area and 100-foot Buffer Zone.

Temporary access comprised of construction matting is proposed in sensitive areas including wetlands, BLSF stream spans, and rare species habitats. No new permanent access roads are proposed within BVW, BLSF or within Land Under Water Bodies and Waterways. However, the construction of new or improved access is proposed within Riverfront Area and 100-foot Buffer Zone to BVW. According to the EENF, these impacts have been minimized to the extent practicable, while balancing safety and constructability.

Resource Area	Total Impact	Impact Type	
		Temporary	Permanent
New Acres of Land Altered	111 acres	19 acres	92 acres
Structures - Maximum height (feet)	110 ft	N/A	25 ft increase (85 ft to 110 ft)
Bank	64 linear feet (lf)	0	64 lf
Bordering Vegetated Wetland (BVW)	617,982 sf	617,322 sf	660 sf
Land Under Water	32 sf	0	32 sf
Bordering Land Subject to Flooding (BLSF)	146 sf	146 sf	0
Riverfront Area (RFA)	177,422 sf	74,451 sf	102,971 sf

Alternatives Analysis

The Project consists of repairs and improvements to existing assets. No new ROW is proposed for the Project and no new construction is proposed other than for access. The EENF presented an alternatives analysis that included a No Build Alternative and options for selective/targeted maintenance and improvements. No route alternatives were considered for this Project.

No Build Alternative: According to the EENF, the No Build alternative does not achieve the Project's goals and benefits. The Project consists of maintenance and improvements to existing assets. If no action is taken, deteriorating structures will pose a safety risk to NEP personnel and members of the public. In addition, if the E131 line is not refurbished, the existing system will remain at risk for failure. Given the asset condition of the existing E131 line and the need to improve high-speed communications between the substations this circuit serves, the No Build Alternative was not considered to be a feasible option.

Critical Asset Repair Alternative: NEP considered addressing only the most critical asset related issues. However, this would require returning to the E131 line repeatedly over the next several years to complete less critical maintenance and improvement activities and it would not accomplish all of the safety and reliability needs for the E131 line. Specifically, this alternative was not selected due to the following:

- Repeated construction with and impacts to DCR State Forest lands;
- Repeated impacts to BVW and other environmental resources and rare species habitat;
- Concerns with asset reliability;
- Increased cost and inefficiency of repeatedly revisiting the same ROW within a short timespan; and
- Failure to meet the need for improving the reliability of the existing communications between the substations served by the circuit.

Comprehensive Refurbishment (Proposed Preferred Alternative): The Preferred Alternative proposed presents a comprehensive refurbishment of the E131 line with the appropriate access, replacement of existing structures, and the replacement of the existing shield wire with OPGW. Providing an efficient means of addressing asset condition concerns and allowing high speed communications between substations addresses the need without repeated impacts to wetland resource areas, rare species habitat, and public open space. According to the EENF, this fullscale refurbishment meets all Project objectives and reduces long-term environmental impacts.

BRPC Staff Comments

An Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF) must be submitted when the Proponent is requesting that the Secretary allow a Single Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) or grant a Full Waiver from the requirement to file a Mandatory EIR. In addition to a completed ENF and the required attachments (e.g. a project description, supporting data detailing potential environmental impacts, etc.), an Expanded ENF (EENF) must include more extensive and detailed information that describes and analyzes a proposed project and its alternatives and assesses its potential environmental impacts and environmental mitigation measures.

The EENF does not include the level of extensive and detailed information that is warranted in order to grant a Single EIR. The EENF describes the proposed project, however weaknesses and deficiencies remain within the alternatives analysis and the assessment of the potential environmental impacts and environmental mitigation measures. The EENF states that permanent impacts are associated with the replacement and relocation of five structures to BVW via direct embed methods. The EENF states that these areas were closely evaluated for alternatives but designs that relocated structures outside of BVW were deemed infeasible. However, this detail is absent within the alternatives analysis. The EENF presented an alternatives analysis that was limited to a No Build Alternative and options for selective/targeted maintenance and improvements. The EENF states “No new ROW is required for the Project and no new construction is proposed other than for access. Therefore, there are no route alternatives for this Project.” In addition, there is no analysis of alternative methods such as tracked construction vehicles or the use of industrial-type helicopters to carry and install; equipment, concrete, piers and poles. Such alternatives would significantly reduce tree cutting and impacts to resource areas. It is understood that access is needed to conduct the work and meet the stated goals of the Project, it is further understood that access is necessary to conduct ongoing regular maintenance. However, it is unclear why new permanent access roads beyond those that currently exist are needed. Lastly, it is unclear why wooden structures are being replaced with steel structures when the existing wooden structures installed in 1925 have withstood the test of time in standing for nearly 100 years.

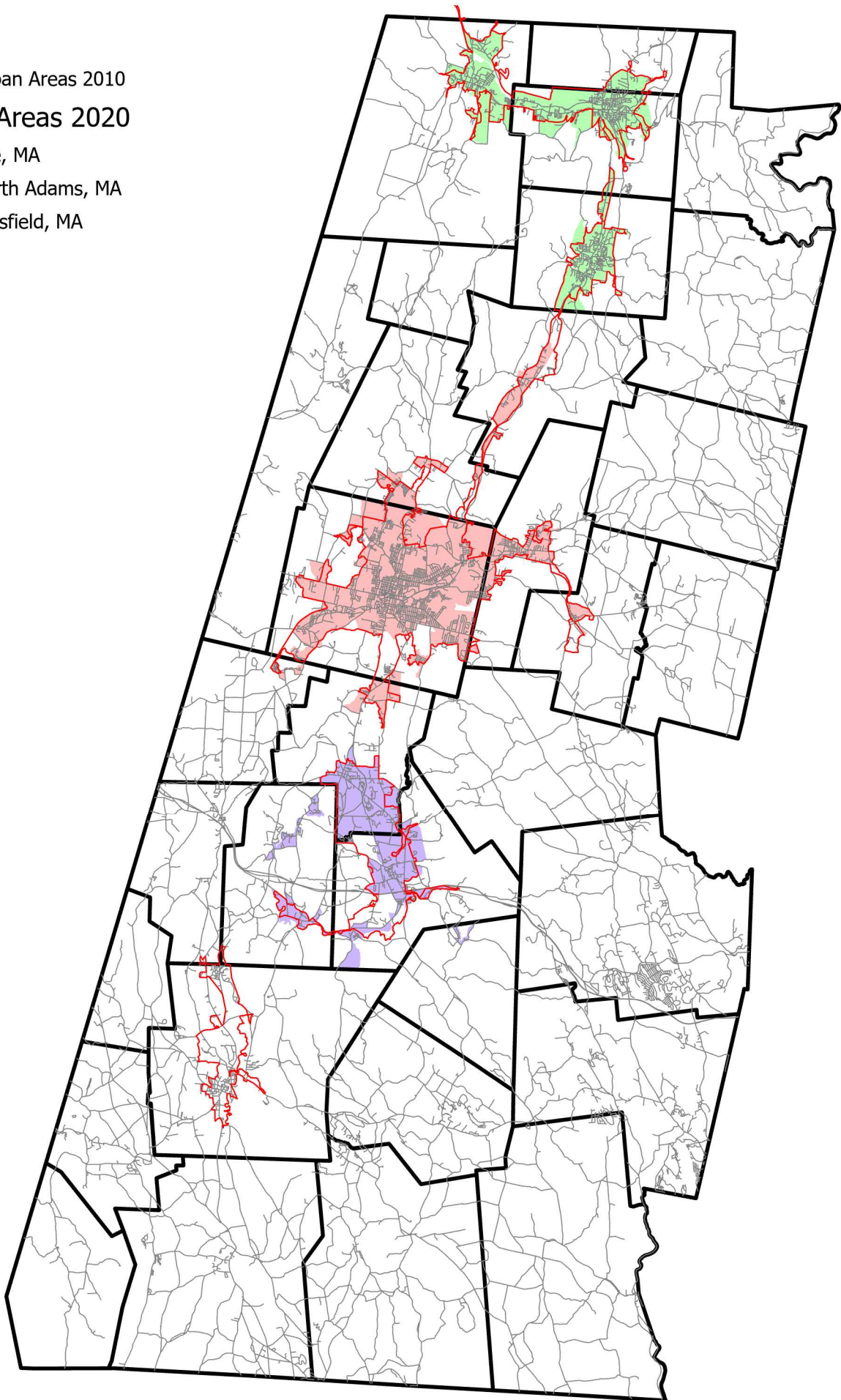
Urban Areas 2010

Urban Areas 2020

Lee, MA

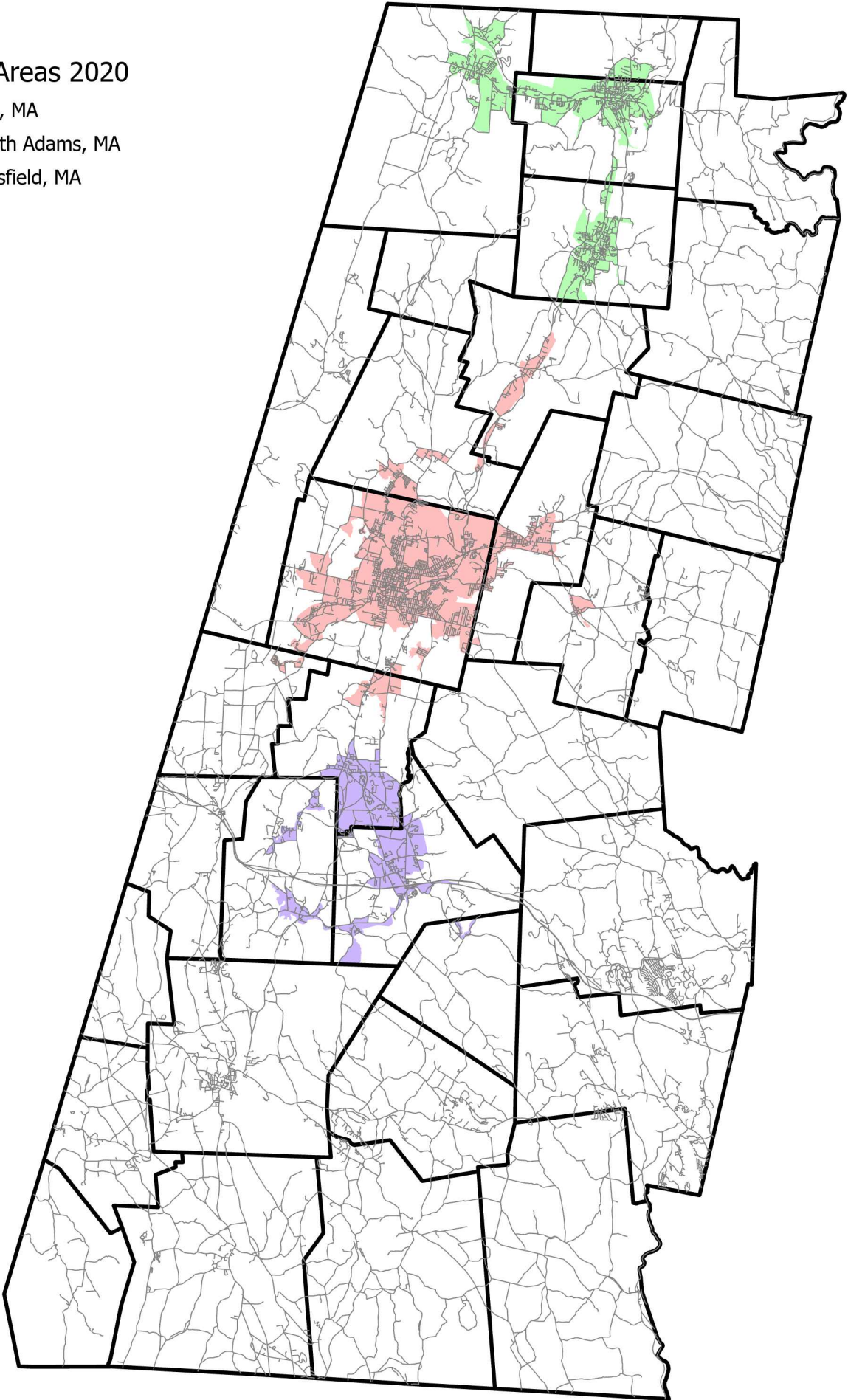
North Adams, MA

Pittsfield, MA



Urban Areas 2020

- Lee, MA
- North Adams, MA
- Pittsfield, MA





MEMORANDUM

TO: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Delegates & Alternates
FROM: Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director
DATE: March 10, 2023
SUBJ: March 16, 2023, Commission Meeting

A. Massachusetts Director of Rural Affairs

On March 10th Governor Healey announced the creation of a Director of Rural Affairs position to be created in the Executive Office of Economic Development. This position will be responsible for cultivating rural economic development and coordinating with secretariats and state agencies to ensure that state government is attuned to the unique needs of rural communities. This is something the Rural Policy Advisory Commission has long been advocating for.

B. Open Meeting Law

Both branches of the legislature have approved provisions to allow the continued use of remote public meetings until 2025 as part of the supplemental budget. Inasmuch as there were differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill, it is likely to go to conference committee before final approval. Hopefully, the differences can be worked out and the Governor is able to approve the bill prior to March 31st, when the current provisions expire.

C. Western & Rural Massachusetts Conference – April 1, 2023

An in-person conference is scheduled for Saturday morning, April 1, 2023, at the Delaney House, Holyoke to focus on issues facing Western and Rural Massachusetts communities. Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll will deliver a keynote address. State Auditor Diana DiZoglio will lead a session covering her office's priorities for rural communities. Registration is at [MSA Western Massachusetts Conference \(mma.org\)](https://mma.org).

D. Passenger Rail

- West-East Rail – The third and fourth public hearings of the Western MA Passenger Rail Commission will be held on March 21st. One will be held in Northampton at 1:00 pm and one in Springfield at 6:00 pm. Attached are hearing notices. The Governor's budget has proposed \$8.5 million for Pittsfield track improvements and \$650,000 for 5 staff positions to work on West-East rail.

PRESS RELEASE

Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll Announce Creation of Director of Rural Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

3/10/2023

Governor Maura Healey and Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll

Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

MEDIA CONTACT

Karissa Hand, Press Secretary

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617-725-4025 (tel:6177254025)

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DEERFIELD — Governor Maura T. Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kimberley Driscoll visited Franklin County today to announce the creation of a Director of Rural Affairs to ensure that Massachusetts' rural communities are better represented in state government.

Housed in the Executive Office of Economic Development, the Director of Rural Affairs will serve as a dedicated advocate and ombudsman for rural communities. They will be responsible for cultivating rural economic development and coordinating with secretariats and state agencies to ensure that state government is attuned to the unique needs of rural communities.

"Lieutenant Governor Driscoll and I want to lead an administration for all of Massachusetts, including our rural communities that contribute so much to our state. For the first time in state history, we will have

a dedicated staff member committed to coordinating across state government to support economic development in rural communities,” said Governor Healey. “We want to send a clear message to every single person who calls rural Massachusetts home – we see you, we value you, and we’re going to work every day to ensure you have the representation and support you deserve.”

“Governor Healey and I believe that a Director of Rural Affairs will bring the level of intentionality to our policy making that rural communities deserve. We’ve already gotten started on the work that needs to be done to support these communities, including proposing major funding boosts for Food Security Infrastructure Grants, rural school aid, PILOTs, and regional transit authorities and expanding the dairy tax credit cap,” said Lieutenant Governor Driscoll. “This is only the beginning – from budgeting to policy, we seem limitless potential to better serve our rural neighbors. We’re grateful for the work our partners in the legislature have done to support rural communities and look forward to partnering with them to build on these efforts.”

The Director of Rural Affairs will be tasked with conducting a review of all state grant opportunities to ensure that barriers for rural and small towns are mitigated. They will also be instructed to host dedicated office hours for rural towns to receive technical assistance to identify and explore grant opportunities. The Healey-Driscoll Administration also commits to maintaining and updating the Community Compact Connector Calendar so that small municipalities can find all state grants in one place and better coordinate their application efforts.

The Healey-Driscoll Administration's FY24 proposal also includes a number of provisions to support rural communities, including:

- \$25 M for Food Security Infrastructure Grants (FSIG) to aid farmers, fisherman, schools, nonprofits, and local producers and construct infrastructure to bolster the local food system. This creates a permanent funding source for these grants for the first time.
- \$7.5 million for rural school aid, a \$2 million (36%) increase over FY23. This program provides rural districts with additional funding for the fixed costs of running a school district and exploring strategies to improve longer-term operational efficiencies.
- Increased payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) for state-owned land to ensure full and equitable reimbursement. PILOT reflects property tax revenue forgone by cities and towns due to state ownership of certain land. H.1 funds PILOT at \$51.5 million, a \$6.5 million (14%) increase over FY23. This funding level reflects the most up-to-date property valuations while ensuring all municipalities will receive the same or higher payments in FY24.
- Expanding the dairy tax credit cap from \$6 million to \$8 million to better protect dairy farmers from fluctuations in wholesale milk prices.
- Expanding base funding for RTAs by nearly \$9 million. H.1 also adds \$19 million for new grant opportunities for transit providers, including RTAs, to enable providers to explore new service models that better meet the needs of their communities, expand service to additional hours and days, and improve paratransit infrastructure. At least 25% would go towards providers serving rural communities.
- Increasing by \$570,000 the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resource's MassGrown and Fresher branding campaign, agricultural fairs, farmers markets, and agricultural education initiatives.

- Funding three new staff positions to support and bolster the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program, facilitating farmland acquisition and protection.
- Expanding support for the Community One Stop for Growth by investing \$1 million into technical assistance to help municipalities identify ways to breathe life into underutilized parcels and committing \$600,000 for the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative to help further community development efforts in town centers and downtowns with planning support. These programs are included in an operating budget for the first time.

The administration's budget also proposes funding for MassDOT to continue to advance the exploration of next steps for West-East Passenger Rail. This includes \$650,000 for five full time employees, including the position of a West-East Rail Director. These individuals will collaborate on advancing a strategy to fund and implement service and infrastructure components needed for West-East Rail. The budget also recommends \$12.5 million for components of a future West-East Rail, including track improvements at the Pittsfield Station and the study and design of Palmer Station.

"I'm grateful to Gov. Healey and Lt. Gov. Driscoll for their foresight in creating a position within our office dedicated to the unique challenges rural communities face," said Secretary Yvonne Hao of the Office of Housing and Economic Development. "Our economy needs to work for everyone, including the 181 rural communities and small towns across our state. Through this role, rural and small towns will have an advocate in state government committed to helping their economies thrive."

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Media Contact

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Governor Maura Healey and Lt. Governor Kim

Driscoll (/orgs/governor-maura-healey-and-lt-governor-kim-driscoll)

Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll are committed to bringing people together and making Massachusetts a place where every worker, business and family can succeed.

More (/orgs/governor-maura-healey-and-lt-governor-kim-driscoll)

Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development [\(/orgs/executive-office-of-housing-and-economic-development\)](/orgs/executive-office-of-housing-and-economic-development)

The Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development promotes vibrant communities, growing businesses, and a strong middle class.

More [\(/orgs/executive-office-of-housing-and-economic-development\)](/orgs/executive-office-of-housing-and-economic-development)



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Subject:

FW: CORRECTION - Western and Rural Mass Conference April 1

Register: Western & Rural MA Conference April 1



You're Invited:
Western & Rural Massachusetts Conference

When: Saturday, April 1, 2023

Where: Delaney House, Holyoke



Register

The Massachusetts Select Board Association will host its third Western & Rural Massachusetts Conference on Saturday, April 1 in Holyoke. The conference is being co-sponsored by **the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commision, and Small Town Administrators of Massachusetts.**

This event will bring together regional stakeholders, including municipal officials, planning agencies and legislators from Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire counties, to

address challenges facing the region, with a specific focus on rural issues. Conference goals are to:

- promote sustainable cross-governmental partnerships across western Massachusetts
- share strategies for addressing challenges facing rural communities in the region
- improve rural advocacy efforts

The agenda is still in development, but a preview can be found below. The complete agenda will be available on the [MMA's website](#).

Agenda

8:00 - 8:25 Registration and Networking

A light breakfast will be served

8:25 - 8:30 Opening Remarks and Overview

8:30 - 9:30 Rural Policy Legislative Agenda - Part 1

Representative Natalie Blais and Senator Jo Comerford

9:30 - 10:15 Keynote Speaker

To be announced

10:15 - 10:30 Break

10:30- 11:30 Rural Priorities

State Auditor Diana DiZoglio

Ben Tafoya, Director of the Division of Local Mandates, Office of the State Auditor

11:30 - 12:30 Rural Policy Legislative Agenda - Part 2

Senator Paul Mark

12:30 - 1:30 Networking Lunch

The conference will be held at the Delaney House at 3 Country Club Rd, Holyoke. The cost is \$35. **The non-COVID related cancellation deadline is Friday, March 24.** To cancel your registration, please send an email to registrations@mma.org. After March, 24 refunds will only be considered for COVID related cancellations.

The MMA is advising in-person meeting attendees to keep up with the latest COVID vaccines for which they are eligible. We highly recommend that attendees take an at-home rapid antigen test prior to attending, and not attend if they have any COVID symptoms or if a

household member has tested positive for COVID. These protocols are subject to change based on the latest public health data and guidance.

Register



Questions? Contact MMA Senior Member Services Coordinator [Isabelle Jenkins](#)



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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Boston 02133
Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission

Rep. William M. Straus
House Chair

Sen. Brendan P. Crighton
Senate Chair

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

Date of Hearing: March 21, 2023

Time: 1 PM

Location: Northampton Senior Center

Address: 67 Conz Street, Northampton MA

Please be advised that Representative William Straus and Senator Brendan Crighton, co-chairs of the Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission, have announced the third of six public meetings of the Commission, which are being held pursuant to §60 of Chapter 176 of the Acts of 2022. The legislature established this commission to investigate and receive public testimony concerning potential public entities with the ability to design, permit, construct, operate and maintain passenger rail service proposals from the East-West Passenger Rail Study Final Report.

The meeting is scheduled for **March 21, 2023 at 1 p.m.** at the Northampton Senior Center in Northampton. A sign-in sheet at the hearing location will be made available for those persons who wish to address the Commission in-person.

Members of the public wishing to view and participate in the meeting remotely may do so by accessing a livestream of the meeting that will be made available on the [MassDOT website](#). Remote participants may click on the "raise hand" icon, which will signify to the Commission that they wish to be heard virtually, and they will be called on during the public comment period of the hearing. Please note that Zoom Webinar attendees will join in listen-only mode. They will be automatically muted and will not appear on video for the hearing. When a remote participant is called on to address the Commission, the meeting organizer will unmute them for the purpose of providing their testimony.

Additionally, you may submit written testimony by email to commission staff at: Siobhan.Morrissey@mahouse.gov.

MEETING AGENDA

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Open Floor for Discussion among Membership**
3. **Public Comment Period**

This agenda has been prepared in advance and does not necessarily include all matters which may be taken up at this meeting. You may contact commission staff with any questions via email at: Siobhan.Morrissey@mahouse.gov.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Boston 02133
Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission

Rep. William M. Straus
House Chair

Sen. Brendan P. Crighton
Senate Chair

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

Date of Hearing: March 21, 2023

Time: 6 PM

Location: Springfield Technical Community College (Scibelli Hall)

Address: 1 Armory Square, Springfield MA

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The meeting is scheduled for **March 21, 2023 at 6 p.m.** at the Top of Our City Conference Center in Scibelli Hall at Springfield Technical Community College. A sign-in sheet at the hearing location will be made available for those persons who wish to address the Commission in-person.

Members of the public wishing to view and participate in the meeting remotely may do so by accessing a livestream of the meeting that will be made available on the [MassDOT website](#). Remote participants may click on the "raise hand" icon, which will signify to the Commission that they wish to be heard virtually, and they will be called on during the public comment period of the hearing. Please note that Zoom Webinar attendees will join in listen-only mode. They will be automatically muted and will not appear on video for the hearing. When a remote participant is called on to address the Commission, the meeting organizer will unmute them for the purpose of providing their testimony.

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