



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Thursday, March 2, 2023

Hybrid 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 March 31, 2023.

I. Call to Order & Open Meeting Law Statement

A. The meeting was called to order at 4:04 pm.

Chair John Duval called the meeting to order and stated that BRPC is recording this meeting. 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, Gt Barrington Alternate

Buck Donovan, Treasurer, Lee Delegate

Sheila Irvin, Clerk, Pittsfield Delegate

Roger Bolton, Environmental Review Committee Chair, Williamstown Alternate

Rene Wood, Commission Development Committee Chair, Sheffield Alternate

Kyle Hanlon, At-large, North Adams Delegate

Sam Haupt, At-large, Peru Delegate

Others Present: Christine Rasmussen, Stockbridge; Leanne Yinger, Lanesborough; Brittany Polito, iBerkshires.

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

II. Approval of February 2, 2023 Minutes

Rene Wood moved to approve the February 2, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Malcolm Fick and approved by a roll call vote from John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Rene Wood, Sam Haupt, Roger Bolton, and Kyle Hanlon. Sheila Irvin abstained.

III. Financial Reports

A. January 27 to February 23, 2023 Expenditures Report

Sam Haupt moved to accept the report as presented, and Rene Wood seconded the motion. A roll vote approved it from John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Sheila Irvin, Sam Haupt, Rene Wood, and Roger Bolton.

B. Accounts Receivable Report/Assessments

Some payments were received.

C. Line of Credit Report

The cash balance is still good.

D. Line of Credit Increase

The line of credit increase is still in the works with the bank.

E. Other - none

IV. Delegate & Alternate Issues

Rene asked if BRPC members should be lobbying for one-touch legislation to increase broadband access and improve affordability. Tom will try to find someone to speak on this at the next Commission meeting on 3/16.

V. Items Requiring Action

A. Approval to Submit Grant Application to the Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program within the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

The Executive Committee was requested to authorize 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. This project would be a regional collaboration to assess the 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 was \$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.

Rene Wood motioned to approve the grant application submission and authorization for the Executive Director to sign any resulting contracts and agreements; Malcolm Fick seconded it. A roll call vote approved it from John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Sheila Irvin, Sam Haupt, Rene Wood, and Roger Bolton.

B. Other (for information only) - none

VI. Committee Reports

A. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

The CEDS Committee met on February 15, 2023 and discussed public rollout activities for the CEDS and the required Annual Progress Report. Draft unapproved meeting minutes were included.

B. Regional Issues Committee

The Regional Issues Committee met on February 22, 2023 and discussed how to address challenges to filling municipal positions. A recent survey of

Town Administrators and Managers collected twenty responses, confirming that most positions are open 90-120 days. Draft meeting minutes were not yet available.

C. Metropolitan Planning Organization

The MPO met on February 28, 2023. The agenda featured some TIP developments and amendment-related items, a presentation, discussion, and action on Safety Performance Measure Targets, and an update on the development of the Regional Transportation Plan.

D. Environmental Review Committee

Roger reported that the committee is working on a MEPA review of electrical transmission line replacements affecting Florida, North Adams, and Adams. He made a motion asking approval for the Environmental Review Committee to submit the comments which are due before the next Executive Committee meeting. Rene Wood seconded the motion, which was approved by a roll call vote from John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Sheila Irvin, Sam Haupt, Rene Wood, and Roger Bolton.

E. Commission Development Committee

This committee will try to meet before the full Commission meeting on 3/16 to nominate a slate of officers for FY24.

VII. Executive Director's Report

A. Report on New Contracts/Agreements

New Grants and Contracts received/initiated from 1/27/2023 to 2/23/2023

- Cheshire – ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan - \$25,000
- Lanesborough – ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan - \$25,000
- Department of Environmental Protection - 319 Regional Coordinator Amendment - \$100,000
- Washington – Procurement Assistance - \$2,000
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council – Municipal Cybersecurity Services Pilot - \$60,000
- Department of Housing and Community Development - District Local Technical Assistance 2023 - \$214,214
- Berkshire County Boards of Health Association - Support Services - \$11,000
- New England Rural Health Association - Rural Vaccine Equity Initiative - \$75,000
- New England Rural Health Association - Root Cause Solutions Exchange - \$18,445
- Department of Housing and Community Development - District Local Technical Assistance Augmentation Program - \$142,809
- National Council on Aging – Covid-19 and Influenza Vaccine Uptake Initiative - \$105,849.12

Grants and Contracts not received.

BRPC is not aware of any grants and contracts not received.

B. Berkshires Tomorrow Inc. (BTI) Update

The BTI board approved the January 5, 2023 minutes and an agreement with Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation and other contracts to support the Berkshire Cultural Asset Network (BCAN) and their Arts Build Community Initiative.

C. Staff Update

Andrew McKeever started on 2/16 as a Community Planner. Open positions include Community Planner, Transportation Planner, and Public Health Inspector/Trainer.

D. Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) Update

The RPAC met on February 10, 2023. The main agenda items were a presentation about the Resilient Lands Initiative, a discussion about legislative and budgetary priorities, and a discussion about updating the Rural Policy Plan. The legislative priorities were included in the attachments.

E. Passenger Rail

- West-East Rail - The Special Commission to address West-East Passenger Rail governance and operations did not meet in February. Very limited information is available at [East-West Rail Commission \(malegislature.gov\)](https://www.malegislature.gov/East-West-Rail-Commission). [More information is at East-West Rail in Massachusetts – Trains In The Valley.](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/east-west-rail-in-massachusetts-trains-in-the-valley)
- Berkshire Flyer - The Berkshire Flyer working group has been coordinating advertising efforts and trying to secure rental cars at the BRTA Intermodal system in anticipation of the Memorial Day start.
- Northern Tier Passenger Rail – No additional activity has occurred since the January 11, 2023 meeting. Limited information is available at [Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/northern-tier-passenger-rail-study).

F. Open Meeting Law

The law extending remote or hybrid public meetings expires on March 31, 2023. Without legislative action, all public meetings would need to be in person. The House supplemental budget includes an extension to 2025.

The Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA) prepared the following summary of proposed legislation:

Remote Meetings

Support - Rep. Driscoll (HD.911) and Sen. Gobi (SD.1247)

An Act relative to remote access for public bodies and town meetings would allow public bodies to continue conducting public meetings virtually without in-person attendance requirements and preserve these bodies' discretion over the format of their meetings (e.g., virtual, in-person, hybrid).

Oppose - Rep. Garlick (HD.3261) and Sen. Lewis (SD.2017)

An Act to modernize participation in public meetings. This bill would require that **all** public meetings be held in a hybrid format, except those granted a hardship waiver by the Office of the Attorney General. Elected public bodies would not be eligible for hardship waivers.

In addition, Senator Brownsberger filed Bill SD.2251 An Act relative to extending certain state of emergency accommodations, extending the current provisions until July 1, 2024.

G. CPTC Annual Conference March 18, 2023

The Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) Annual Conference will be held at the Hogan Campus Center, Holy Cross College, Worcester, MA, fully in person.

H. MassDOT Transportation Innovation Conference 2023

The annual MassDOT Transportation Innovation Conference will be on May 2-3 at the DCU Center 50 Foster Street, Worcester. This conference provides a forum for innovative transportation systems, management ideas, and initiatives focusing on MassDOT's infrastructure investment. Register at [MassDOTInnovation.com](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massdot-transportation-innovation-conference-2023). A limited virtual attendance option will be provided for some conference presentations and speakers.

I. Western & Rural Massachusetts SBA Conference April 1, 2023

Delaney House, Holyoke

J. Municipal Employment Opportunities

The Regional Issues Committee has been dealing with municipalities' hiring problems. BRPC has posted links to municipal pages under [Employment](#) on the website. Also, MMA has a series of webinars about recruitment and hiring practices.

K. Urbanized Area Designation

Previously we commented on the Census' change in urbanized areas designation delineations, concerned that those changes might result in Berkshire County losing designation and corresponding funding. Pittsfield retained that designation, although Adams was removed from the Pittsfield designation and included in the North Adams designation. Great Barrington lost the Urbanized Area designation due to population size. Two maps were in the materials, one of the 2020 Urban Areas and one comparing 2020 and 2010 Urban Areas. This will be a topic at the 3/16 Commission meeting.

L. Other (for information only) - none

VIII. Old Business

A. Employee Handbook

Tom asked for process guidance on sharing the compilation of employee policies into a consolidated handbook. The committee wants to review the draft after it goes to the attorney; a Word version with the ability to "flip" between the latest version and seeing the comments and edits.

B. Other (for information only) - none

IX. New Business

A. Staff Training Opportunities

Given the challenges of an extremely tight labor market, Tom asked for a discussion about creating a new education and training program for new employees with no planning experience. Rene will send the policy Sheffield has for new police officers. It includes a contract with a several-year commitment and extendable probation periods to guarantee a return on the town's training investment.

B. March Hybrid Commission Meeting March 16

Agenda topics:

- One-touch legislation as a means to increase broadband access and improve affordability
- Urbanized Area Designation
- Meet with state legislators or their aides one at a time

C. Other

X. Adjournment

Sheila Irvin motioned to adjourn the meeting at 5:10 pm, seconded by Malcolm Fick, and unanimously approved by a roll call vote: John Duval, Malcolm Fick, Rene Wood, Buck Donovan, Sheila Irvin, Roger Bolton, and Sam Haupt.

Attachments:

- Unapproved Minutes of the February 2, 2023, BRPC Executive Committee Meeting
- January 27 to February 23, 2023 Expenditures Report
- Accounts Receivable Report
- February Line of Credit Report
- Executive Director's Memorandum
- Resume – Andrew McKeever
- Rural Policy Advisory Commission Legislative Priorities
- Screen Shot – BRPC Website re: Municipal Employment Opportunities
- Urban Area Maps (2)
- January Technical Assistance Memo