



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Thursday, February 1, 2024

Virtual meeting as allowed by Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023 extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20 until March 31, 2025.

I. **Call to Order & Open Meeting Law Statement**

Chair Malcolm Fick called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. as a virtual meeting as allowed by Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023 extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20 until March 31, 2025. He stated that BRPC was recording the meeting, and anyone else who wanted to record it needed to inform him.

II. **Roll Call:**

Read by Office Administrator Kate Hill Tapia:

Malcolm Fick, Chair, Gt Barrington Alternate

John Duval, Vice-Chair, Adams Alternate 4:07

Sheila Irvin, Clerk, Pittsfield Delegate

Doug McNally, Commission Development Committee, Chair, Windsor Delegate

Roger Bolton, Environmental Review Committee Chair, Williamstown Alternate

Christine Rasmussen, Regional Issues Committee Chair, Stockbridge Alternate

Kyle Hanlon, At-large, North Adams Delegate,

Sam Haupt, At-Large, Peru Delegate

Staff Present: Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director; Marianne Sniezek, Office Manager; Kate Hill Tapia, Office Administrator; Laura Brennan, Assistant Director, and Economic Development Program Manager; Melissa Provencher, Environmental & Energy Program Manager; Cornelius Hoss, Community Planning Program Manager

Others: Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield; James, Great Barrington

III. **Approval of January 4, 2024 Minutes**

Sheila Irvin moved to approve the January 4, 2024 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Roger Bolton and approved by a roll call vote from Malcolm Fick, Sheila Irvin, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Kyle Hanlon and Sam Haupt.

IV. **Financial Reports**

A. December 28, 2023, to January 23, 2024

The Boston Medical Center expenditures refer to the HEALing Communities Study project on substance and other opioid misuse and overdoses. The funding for that study ended in December 2023. Tom said check #17776 was listed incorrectly as an expense reimbursement; C Kaniecki is a subcontractor. Check #1200 for \$438,229 from Berkshire Brownfields to Greylock Works is for housing development.

Doug McNally moved to accept the report, and Roger Bolton seconded the motion. A roll vote approved it from Malcolm Fick, John Duval, Sheila Irvin, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

B. Accounts Receivable Report January 2024

Tom reported that the \$45,000 MassCEC billing process is complicated, so final approvals are challenging. Some of the smaller payments have been received.

C. Line of Credit Report

It has not been used.

V. Comments from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Delegates and Alternates

None.

VI. Items Requiring Action

A. Vote to authorize (after the fact) the Executive Director to sign any contracts and agreements with Berkshire Community College related to the BERK12 Mohawk Trail Regional School District Project

The Executive Committee was requested (after the fact) to authorize the Executive Director to sign any contracts and agreements with Berkshire Community College related to the BERK12 Mohawk Trail Regional School District project. BRPC would work with BERK12 to provide data and analysis on the district, including enrollment and projections. The grant runs through July 30, 2024, and would provide \$5,000 in funding, with no match required. [Mark Maloy](#) is the BRPC contact. Doug said this is a good example of a valuable service BRPC provides.

Doug McNally motioned to authorize the Executive Director to sign any contracts and agreements with Berkshire Community College related to the BERK12 Mohawk Trail Regional School District project. Sheila Irvin seconded it. A roll vote approved it from Malcolm Fick, John Duval, Sheila Irvin, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

B. Vote to Approve the Submission of a Grant Application to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Strategic Prevention Framework-Partnerships for Success (SPF-PFS) Program in the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services

The Executive Committee was requested to authorize the Executive Director to submit a grant application to the SAMHSA Strategic Prevention Framework-Partnerships for Success (SPF-PFS) program and to sign any resulting contracts and agreements. The project would build community resilience to address the loneliness epidemic identified by the Surgeon General through community-led strategies to increase social connectedness, ease navigation of peer and clinical mental health supports, and reduce the use and misuse of alcohol and other substances. The project would focus on six historically underserved populations in Central County: BIPOC persons, recent immigrants and Spanish speakers, young adults (18-25) not engaged in college full time, LGBTQ+ community members, people in more rural areas, and those experiencing persistent poverty. The primary goals are to reduce the prevalent misuse of alcohol, increase the capacity of community members from these populations to develop population-specific strategies that increase protective factors and the normalization of community and clinical mental health support.

BRPC's application was unsuccessful last year. This application was improved based on consultation with the funders.

This \$1,875,000 five-year grant would be a collaborative project between BRPC, The Brien Center, Volunteers in Medicine, the City of Pittsfield, and other community partners. There is no match required. Staff leads on this project are [Andy Ottoson](#), ext. 37, and [Nikki Lewis](#), ext. 35.

Roger Bolton motioned to authorize the Executive Director to submit a grant application to the SAMHSA Strategic Prevention Framework-Partnerships for Success (SPF-PFS) program and to sign any resulting contracts and agreements. Sam Haupt seconded it. A roll vote approved it from Malcolm Fick, John Duval, Sheila Irvin, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

C. Vote to Approve Submission of a Grant Application to the US Department of Transportation (DOT) – RAISE (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) Program

The Executive Committee was requested to authorize the Executive Director to submit a grant application and sign any resulting contracts and agreements to the US DOT RAISE program for the "Adventure Trail to Ashuwillticook: Active Transportation Connecting Berkshire County" application. This application seeks funds to complete planning, design, and permitting as follows:

- Adventure Trail through Williamstown and North Adams, connecting two world-class institutions, the Clark Art Institute and the MASS MoCA
- Ashuwillticook Rail Trail Extension Lime Street in Adams to Hodges Cross Road in North Adams
- Connection between the 5.8-mile Adventure Trail and 1.8-mile

Ashuwillticook Rail Trail Extension to 14 miles of the completed Ashuwillticook Rail Trail to Pittsfield, creating a 25-mile, entirely off-road network of accessible paths for pedestrians and cyclists

The total amount requested is estimated at \$10,000,000.00. There is no match required. The staff lead on this project is [Nicholas Russo](#), Senior Transportation Planner, ext. 19. BRPC was asked to lead this project. Original plans have evolved, and different routes are being considered. Navigating through North Adams is especially challenging.

Roger Bolton motioned to authorize the Executive Director to submit a grant application and sign any resulting contracts and agreements to the US DOT RAISE program for the "Adventure Trail to Ashuwillticook: Active Transportation Connecting Berkshire County" application. Sheila Irvin seconded it. A roll call vote approved it from Malcolm Fick, John Duval, Sheila Irvin, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

D. Vote to Approve Submission of Comments in Response to the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) Request for Comments on the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) Review and Stakeholder Questions

The Executive Committee was requested to authorize the Executive Director to submit comments to DOER on the SMART program, established to support solar development in Massachusetts as defined in 225 CMR 20.00. The tariff-based incentive is paid directly by the utility company to the system owner, following the approval of the application by the Solar Program Administrator and DOER. The DOER is conducting a review of the SMART program and soliciting comments from stakeholders. The comments deadline is Friday, February 2, 2024 by 5 p.m.

BRPC's comments emphasize disincentives on pristine land and incentives for using disturbed land and roof-mounted solar.

Doug McNally motioned to authorize the Executive Director to submit the proposed comments to DOER on the SMART program, established to support solar development in Massachusetts as defined in 225 CMR 20.00. Christine Rasmussen seconded it. A roll call vote approved it from Malcolm Fick, John Duval, Sheila Irvin, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

E. Vote to Approve Submission of Comments to the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy of the Massachusetts General Court regarding Several Legislative Bills Related to Solar Development and Regulation

The Executive Committee was requested to authorize the Executive Director to submit comments to the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy regarding legislative bills related

to solar development and regulation as the Regional Issues Committee recommended. There are several bills before this Joint Committee related to solar development on Commonwealth owned or operated facilities, incentivizing solar projects on built land, and expediting electric decarbonization infrastructure project permitting. The Regional Issues Committee has been discussing these bills with Senator Mark, a Joint Committee member, and has prepared the proposed comments. The comments must be submitted by February 7, 2024, when legislative committees should act on all bills. The legislative session ends July 31.

Committee members emphasized the importance of local authority for permitting, especially to ensure minimal environmental impacts.

Roger Bolton motioned to authorize the Executive Director to submit comments to the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy regarding legislative bills related to solar development and regulation as the Regional Issues Committee recommended. Christine Rasmussen seconded it. A roll call vote approved it from Malcolm Fick, John Duval, Sheila Irvin, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

VII. Committee Reports and Discussion

A. Commission Development

This committee met on January 4, following the Executive Committee (EC). Two year terms for officers and committee members were recommended for a vote at the January Commission meeting. Ideas for improved public relations and possible education and networking events were discussed. The next meeting is on March 7, following the Executive Committee meeting. Draft unapproved minutes were in this meeting's materials.

B. Municipal Planning Organization (MPO)

The MPO met on January 9. Topics included Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) adjustments and amendments and a presentation on Safety Performance Measure Targets. Draft minutes were in this meeting's materials. The next meeting is February 27.

C. Berkshire Brownfields

The Brownfields Committee met on January 18. Environmental site assessment locations in North Adams and Great Barrington were approved. Four site assessments in Pittsfield (370 Wahconah -former Bel Air Mill), JB Paper Factory, Stetson Cleaners, 100 Woodlawn, Tyler Street, (3 parcels) and two in North Adams (Windsor Mill, Hide Mound/Former Tannery Dump) were approved. Greylock WORKS revolving loan fund application was also approved. Draft minutes were not available.

Supplemental funding is a possibility which would allow for more assessments, remediation, and reuse.

D. Regional Issues

The Regional Issues Committee met on January 19 and discussed renewable energy bills submitted by Senator Paul Mark and how to proceed with this topic. Draft minutes were not yet available. The next meeting is February 28 at 3:30 p.m.

It was suggested that Christine write a letter to the editor about the importance of local control concerning solar regulation and development and the essence of the comment letters.

E. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

The CEDS committee meeting was on January 31, 2024. The agenda included a review of a Small Business Resiliency Assessment, a 5-year update on the Berkshire Blueprint 2.5, the CEDS 2023-2027 Year Progress Report to EDA, and a presentation on the proposed State Economic Plan by Steve Ellis, Town of Montague and statewide CEDS committee member.

VIII. Executive Director's Report

A. Report on New Contracts/Agreements

New Grants and Contracts received/initiated from 12/28/2023 to 01/23/2024.

- Washington – Zoning Recodification - \$3,000
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council – NACCHO Preparedness Summit Funding Award - \$3,420
- University of Baltimore - COCLI - Berkshire Post Overdose Program - \$130,950

Grants and Contracts not received.

Staff reported not being aware of any grants that have not been received.

B. Berkshires Tomorrow Inc. (BTI)

The BTI board approved the FY2023 Treasurer, Buck Donovan, and President, John Duval, to sign the Mass PC form, BTI's 2023 tax return prepared by our accountant, Adelson & Company PC.

C. Staff Updates

- Open Positions:
 - Internships - Outdoor Recreation and Arts & Culture Planning
 - Public Health Nurse Educator
 - Senior Planner – Housing
 - Public Health Community Social Worker

D. Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) Update

The Rural Policy Advisory Commission met on January 12, 2024. The major topics were priorities for the Housing Bond Bill hearing, possible topics for the upcoming April 6th MMA Western MA/Rural conference and an update about rural legislative priorities.

E. Passenger Rail

- West-East Rail – The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) announced at their January 16, 2024 Board of Directors meeting that a consultant was selected for the planning and conceptual design of the Palmer station. It was also cited that MassDOT's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) identified \$4m for planning and design for the Palmer station.
- Berkshire Flyer - There was no known activity over the last month.
- Northern Tier Passenger Rail – There was no known activity over the last month.

F. Select Board Handbook

The Massachusetts Select Board Association recently released the Select Board Handbook. Previously prepared as a printed version, this is a comprehensive online guide to the fundamentals of town government covering Select Board members' full range of roles and responsibilities. Not only is it useful for Select Board members, but others will benefit from the easy-to-use and understandable explanation of the functioning of town governments.

G. Municipal Empowerment Act

The Healy Administration recently filed the Municipal Empowerment Act, a wide-ranging bill intended to help increase municipal flexibility, strengthen municipal finances, address municipal workforce challenges, and improve the efficiency of local operations. If adopted, it would allow municipalities to increase the local meals and lodging taxes, allow a local-option vehicle excise tax, change procurement thresholds and requirements, make permanent popular pandemic-era allowances for remote or hybrid public meetings, outdoor dining permits, and to-go cocktail sales, [Municipal Empowerment Act | Mass.gov](#).

H. Housing Bond Bill

On January 18, 2024, the Massachusetts Legislature held a hearing on the Affordable Homes Act, Bill H.4138 (malegislature.gov) (Housing Bond Bill.) The Western Mass Housing Coalition, which BRPC participates in, submitted written testimony. In addition, BRPC, 1Berkshire, Berkshire Housing, and the Berkshire County Housing Authority submitted joint written comments (attached.)

Funding eligibility (competitive applications vs. formula-based allotments) will depend on the program channel.

I. MMA Western and Rural Mass Conference

Stay tuned for a date for the MMA Western and Rural Mass Conference at Hotel Northampton, an annual event for local officials to network and learn about important matters impacting their communities.

VIII. Old Business

None

IX. New Business

A. March 21 Commission Meeting

The next Full Commission meeting is March 21, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

Discussion at the last Commission meeting and the Commission Development Committee suggested using the Commonwealth's recently released Economic Development Plan as a framework for topics at future meetings.

Other potential items previously mentioned include:

- Brownfields report with a list of projects and payment schedules; sample of projects with photos
- Micro-transit
- Presentation of ResilientMass Plan
- Presentation on Recommendation of the Climate Chief
- Presentation on the meaning of environmental justice communities

X. Adjournment

Sheila Irvin motioned to adjourn the meeting at 4:55 p.m., seconded by Christine Rasmussen, and unanimously approved by a roll call vote:

Malcolm Fick, John Duval, Sheila Irvin, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

Attachments:

- Unapproved Minutes of the January 4, 2024, BRPC Executive Committee Meeting
- December 28, 2023, to January 23, 2024, Expenditures Report
- Accounts Receivable Report – January 2024
- Line of Credit Report
- Executive Director's Memorandum
- Unapproved Minutes of the January 4, 2024 Commission Development Committee Meeting
- Unapproved Minutes of the January 9, 2024 Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting
- Massachusetts Select Board Association's announcement of the Select Board Handbook
- Municipal Empowerment Act Summary
- Affordable Homes Act Summary
- Affordable Homes Act Testimony
- December 2023 Technical Assistance Memo