



Executive Committee Minutes Tuesday, July 2, 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 not recording the meeting, and anyone else who wanted to record it needed to inform him. Joshua Bloom indicated that he would be recording the meeting.

II. Roll Call:

Assistant Director Laura Brennan read the roll call:

Malcolm Fick, Chair, Gt Barrington Alternate

John Duval, Vice Chair, Adams Alternate (attempted to call in and left due to technical difficulties)

Buck Donovan, Treasurer, Lee Delegate

Sheila Irvin, Clerk, Pittsfield Delegate (not present)

Douglas 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 (arrived late)

Sam Haupt, At-Large, Peru Delegate

Staff Present: Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director; Marianne Sniezek, Office Manager; Laura Brennan, Assistant Director and Economic Development Program Manager; Patricia Mullins, Project Specialist

Others present: Joshua Bloom, Caroline Young, Donna Brewer, Julie Thomas, Marie (no last name evident), Debbie (no last name evident).

III. Vote to Approve the June 20, 2024 Minutes

Doug McNally moved to approve the June 20, 2024, meeting minutes. Sam Haupt seconded the motion. Roger Bolton offered an update or correction to Section VI, paragraph four: that the Environmental Review Committee's discussion informed the Commission's discussion and preparation of comments about the NIETC designation. It was approved by a roll call vote from Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

IV. Financial Reports

A. Vote to Approve the May 31, 2024 – June 27, 2024, Expenditures Report

Doug McNally moved to approve the May 31, 2024 – June 27, 2024 Expenditures Report. The motion was seconded by Sam Haupt and approved by a roll call vote from Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

Christine had questions about how the report is compiled but it was determined that those questions were in regard to the Receivables report.

B. Report on the Accounts Receivable/ Assessments – June 2024

Malcolm stated that this item generally includes invoices 90 days past due. Tom Matuszko provided explanations regarding the items Christine Rasmussen had asked about previously.

C. Report on the Line of Credit

There has been no need to use the line of credit, which still stands at zero.

V. Comments from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Delegates and Alternate Delegates

No comments were offered from Delegates or Alternates. At his discretion, the Chair allowed a nonmember to comment. Joshua Bloom stated his displeasure with BRPC's involvement and recommendations for the Rest of River study and resolution. He alleged that Executive Director Tom Matuszko had lied to the public and conspired with BRPC attorneys to withhold information from the public. Mr. Bloom displayed messages to this effect via his Zoom screen throughout the remainder of the meeting.

VI. Items Requiring Action

A. Vote to Approve the Submission of a Grant Application to the Planning Assistance Grant Program with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA). The application is for Berkshire County Priority Sites for Redevelopment Strategy Planning Project - estimated amount \$50,000.

The Executive Committee was requested to authorize the Executive Director to submit a grant application and sign any resulting contracts and agreements to the MA EEA Planning Assistance Grant program.

The Berkshire County Priority Sites for Redevelopment Strategy will update and expand upon a Sites Strategy created by BRPC in 2014. Locations will be identified using thresholds such as buildable acreage and square footage of extant buildings, then analyzed for a wide range of factors pertinent to redevelopment potential, including proximity to water/sewer, major roadways and/or rail access, current zoning, and quality of utilities including

broadband. While the 2014 version of this study focused on industrial/manufacturing sites and imposed a large acreage and square footage requirement for sites to be included, this update will also scrutinize locations for potential mixed-use and housing potential at smaller locations. This project will also identify and remove locations successfully redeveloped or where redevelopment has been underway since the previous iteration.

The total estimated amount requested is \$50,000.00. A 25% match is required. The staff lead will be Laura Brennan, Assistant Director & Economic Development Program Manager, lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org, x14.

Roger Bolton made a motion to authorize the Executive Director to submit a grant application and sign any resulting contracts and agreements to the Planning Assistance Grant Program with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) for Berkshire County Priority Sites for Redevelopment Strategy Planning Project for an estimated \$50,000.

Christine Rasmussen seconded. The motion was approved unanimously by roll call vote: Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

VII. Committee Report and Discussion

A. Commission Development Committee

Doug McNally reported that the Commission Development Committee met on June 6, 2024, and discussed the success of the 5th Thursday Microtransit event, the formation of a government relations working group, and plans for a combined Commission and Annual Meetings in September. The committee agreed that a breakfast format would probably not work but is exploring a combined Commission Meeting and Annual Meeting. Congressman Neal will be invited as a guest speaker. The committee also briefly touched on the potential formation of a government relations working group. Draft minutes were included in the meeting materials.

B. Environmental Review Committee

The Environmental Review Committee met on June 17, 2024, to discuss the Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF) for the City of North Adams Mount Williams Reservoir Dam and Notch Reservoir Dam Improvements and agree on comments. They also discussed the US Department of Energy (DOE) process for "National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor" (NIETC) designation. Draft minutes were not yet available. Roger Bolton did not have anything to add to the Executive Director's report. Tom Matuszko shared that Eversource informed BRPC that they are not in favor of expanding the corridor.

C. Metropolitan Planning Organization

Malcolm Fick reported that the MPO met on June 25, 2024. Amendments were made to the 2025 – 2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) was approved. The Chair was authorized to sign certification documents for the MPO members. There was

an update about Safe Streets for All (SS4A) activities. Draft unapproved minutes were in the meeting materials.

VIII. Executive Director's Report

A. Report on New Contracts / Agreements

New Grants and Contracts received/initiated 05/30/2024 to 06/27/2024:

- Sheffield - EOHLC - \$216,000
- Mass Tech Collaborative – Muni. Digital Equity Planning – New Marlborough - \$28,701.92
- Adams – Brownfields Assessment Services - \$53,412
- Adams – Economic Development Planning - \$10,000
- Lanesborough – Pavement Management - \$5,432
- Berkshire Benchmarks – BUW - \$10,000
- Berkshires Tomorrow Inc – Berkshire Benchmarks - \$14,700
- Berkshire Public Health Alliance – Inspection Services FY25:
Dalton - \$3,000; Savoy - \$7,500; Windsor - \$9,482

Grants and Contracts not received:

- Contract for the MassCEC Empower capacity-building project
- RAISE grant application for the Adventure To Ashuwillticook project

B. Berkshires Tomorrow Inc. (BTI) Update

The B.T.I. Board of Directors authorized the submission of a \$50,000 grant application to the Blue Cross Blue Shield MA Foundation Special Initiatives grant. BRPC's Public Health Department will use this to develop and pilot a sustainable infrastructure to provide field services to rural residents of Southern Berkshire County, MA, which will better connect them to medical and behavioral health services while reducing the need for emergency care.

C. Staff Updates

Tom highlighted the work of Patricia Mullins and Nancy Slattery who are both retiring. Both will still be working part-time for BRPC.

- Retirements:
 - Patricia Mullins
 - Nancy Slattery
- Open Positions:
 - Public Health Community Social Worker
 - Public Health Trainer

D. Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) Update

The Rural Policy Advisory Commission did not meet in June 2024.

E. Passenger Rail

- West-East Rail – No known activity over the past month.

- Berkshire Flyer – The Berkshire Flyer had its inaugural run of the season on June 21st. Ridership was similar to last year's first weekend. The train again was late getting into Pittsfield. We secured a last-mile shuttle service option thanks to the funding that Representative Farley Bouvier secured.
- Northern Tier Passenger Rail – No known activity over the past month.

F. BEAD Challenge

BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment) is a federal funding program for internet infrastructure to ensure residents and businesses get the high-speed internet connection needed for today's world. Between June 20th and July 20th, 2024, residents and businesses are asked to test their internet speed by taking the following steps:

- VISIT [HowsYourInternet.org](https://www.howsyourinternet.org) and click on the Broadband Map to search for your home address.
- SELECT Take a Speed Test under the Service Challenges window in the bottom left corner of the screen to complete the speed test.
- COMPLETE the speed test and enter your personal information if prompted. Check your inbox for reminders to take two additional required speed tests

This test is necessary to be eligible for BEAD funding to improve internet speeds. Email digital@berkshireplanning.org for more information or assistance.

Malcolm Fick highlighted the BEAD Challenge, inviting as many people as possible to participate. Doug McNally stated that we should warn our communities that MBI's information is significantly inaccurate and gave examples from Windsor. Sam agreed with Doug's assessment of the condition of the information published through MBI.

G. Transportation Funding Task Force Comments

The mission of the Transportation Funding Task Force is to explore "how we can create a long-term, sustainable transportation finance plan that will ensure a safe, reliable, equitable, and efficient transportation system." The meeting material contained comments sent to two Western Mass representatives of the Task Force.

H. Reduction of Notice Period – Noel and Paule Weihl Reality Trust APR

Following the actions of the Sheffield Select Board, Tom consented to reduce the notice period on a proposed purchase of an Agricultural Preservation Restriction on farmland in Sheffield, the 32.4 acres Noel and Paul Wiehl Realty Trust, at Hewins Street.

IX. Old Business

A. Discussion about the Annual Meeting

Tom Matuszko provided a brief update about the Annual Meeting planning. We are looking at a similar format as was used for 5th Thursday in May. Several venues are under consideration. The date is tentatively set for September 25th.

B. Review of and Discussion about National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor (NIETC) Comments submitted on June 24, 2024

Included in this meeting's material was a copy of the comments submitted on June 24, 2024 to the Department of Energy about the Proposed New York – New England Review of and Discussion about National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor (NIETC). Malcolm commented that the submission was a huge undertaking on the part of BRPC staff. Tom confirmed that the comments have been received. It was learned late in the process that Eversource felt their current right of way could accommodate any future transmission needs, and they were not in favor of widening the corridor. Eversource submitted comments to that effect. It is possible they still wanted the designation but not an expansion of the corridor. Doug thanked Tom on behalf of Windsor for the thorough comments compiled by the staff and described thirdhand interaction between Eversource and a local resident that indicated upgrades to capacity are already being installed. Roger reinforced that submitting the information was not wasteful, as now it is gathered and available for future use. Buck Donovan asked whether Tom had heard from any other communities. Tom Matuszko confirmed that he heard thankful comments from several communities, but not Hancock. Roger asked whether FRCOG submitted comments, and Tom confirmed that they did and he has a copy available if anyone is interested.

C. Discussion about a Potential Policy to Delete Recordings of Meetings Once Minutes have been Approved

At the June 6th Executive Committee meeting we initially discussed codifying and standardizing a practice we had done more consistently prior to virtual meetings with a policy of deleting recordings of meetings once minutes, which become the official record of the meeting, have been adopted. On June 25, 2024, BRPC received a public records request for "all video or audio recordings of meetings of any and all BRPC meetings, BRPC executive committee meetings, and Housatonic Rest of River meetings from 2018 till today, June 25, 2025". We have paused action on this item until the public records request is resolved.

D. Vote to Approve the FY 25 BRPC Meeting Schedule

At a previous meeting, the Executive Committee only set the meeting date for the July 2, 2024 Executive Committee meeting. The Executive Committee was requested to vote to set the FY meeting schedule for Executive Committee and Full Commission meetings for the rest of FY25.

Doug McNally made a motion to approve the FY25 BRPC Meeting Schedule. Sam Haupt seconded it.

Doug indicated that we would need to make special reminders due to holiday schedules that the meeting schedule has some inconsistencies, and the group agreed.

Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt approved the meeting schedule by roll vote.

X. New Business

A. Discussion of August 1, 2024 Commission Meeting

Tom indicated that a potential topic for consideration is the Berkshire Brownfields Program. This date may be at the end of the legislative session, and if that is the case, there could be a review of legislation that has passed. Roger also suggested a brief overview of the transmission corridors and what has occurred in that regard. Tom confirmed that the recently submitted comments will be provided to the Full Commission. Doug also suggested a recap of the BEAD Challenge Process and related funding that may be available or soon to be available at that time. Doug encouraged Tom to ask Wylie to provide information related to BEAD. Christine Rasmussen suggested asking Senator Paul Mark to provide the legislative update, including a highlight on the Seasonal Designation situation. Tom agreed to investigate that possibility. There was also discussion about IT and info on underserved communities. Doug MacNally gave multiple examples of inaccurate data from the Massachusetts Broadband Institute.

XI. Adjournment

Doug McNally made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:48 p.m., seconded by Sam Haupt, and unanimously approved by a roll call vote: Malcolm Fick, Buck Donovan, Doug McNally, Roger Bolton, Christine Rasmussen, Kyle Hanlon, and Sam Haupt.

Documents and Exhibits Used:

- 2024.06.20 Unapproved Executive Committee Meeting Minutes - DRAFT
- June 2024 Expenditures Report
- June 2024 Aged Receivables Report
- 2024.06.24 Line of Credit Report
- 2024.07.02 Executive Director Memorandum
- 2024.06.06 Unapproved Commission Development Committee Meeting Minutes – DRAFT
- 2024.06.25 Unapproved Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting Minutes – DRAFT
- 2024.06.24 Memorandum to Transportation Funding Task Force members
- Hewins APR Waiver Request
- Proposed BRPC Meeting Schedule FY2025
- New York-New England NIETC Phase 2 comments