



---

## **APPROVED FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES March 20, 2025**

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

### **I. Opening**

#### **A.** The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m.

Chair Malcolm Fick stated that per the open meeting law, BRPC was recording this meeting. Others may record the meeting after informing the meeting Chair. Documents presented must be provided to the Chair at the meeting.

#### **B.** The following Commission members were present:

Peter Traub – Cheshire Delegate  
Mary McGurn – Egremont Delegate  
Malcolm Fick – Great Barrington Alternate  
Leanne Yinger – Lanesborough Delegate  
Mark Smith – Lenox Delegate  
Sheila Irvin – Pittsfield Delegate  
Christine Rasmussen – Stockbridge Alternate  
Don Gagnon – Washington Delegate  
Samantha Page – Williamstown Delegate  
Roger Bolton – Williamstown Alternate  
Douglas McNally – Windsor Delegate

Towns with no Delegate or Alternate present:

Adams, Alford, Becket, Clarksburg, Dalton, Florida, Hancock, Hinsdale, Lee, Mount Washington, New Ashford, New Marlborough, North Adams, Otis, Peru, Richmond, Sandisfield, Savoy, Tyringham, West Stockbridge

Staff Present:

Thomas Matuszko, Laura Brennan, Kate Hill Tapia

Others Present:

Pittsfield Community Television, Virginia Riehl, Michelle's iphone, Jenny Raitt, Lillian Zavatsky, Sabrina's Notetaker otter.ai, DFMCW 12

### **C. Vote to Approve Minutes of the January 16, 2025 Commission Meeting**

Doug McNally motioned to approve the January 16, 2025, draft

meeting minutes. Sheila Irvin seconded the motion. A roll call vote approved it: Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Malcolm Fick, Leanne Yinger, Sheila Irvin, Christine Rasmussen, Don Gagnon, and Doug McNally.

Abstained: Mark Smith, Roger Bolton

**II. Comments from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Delegates and Alternate Delegates**

There were no comments.

**III. Comments from the Public**

There were no comments.

**IV. Presentation of Executive Committee Actions**

Executive Committee actions taken at the February 6 and March 6, 2025, meetings were in the meeting materials packet. There were no comments.

**V. Presentation and Discussion Presentation and Discussion about the Building for Tomorrow Report**

Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments and a member of the Unlocking Housing Production Commission reviewed highlights from the [Building for Tomorrow Report](#), which provides over 50 recommendations to increase the supply of housing and lower costs for Massachusetts residents, including updating land use and zoning practices and streamlining local permitting. The report is a companion to the recently released [state housing plan](#).

A diverse commission was charged with identifying barriers to housing development and how to address them. The report is a bold overarching approach to improving housing production in Massachusetts. Jenny explained that they organized their work into four categories with accompanying recommendations.

- Economic Incentives and Workforce Development
- Land Use and Zoning
- Regulations, Codes, and Permitting
- Statewide Planning and Local Coordination

The multibillion-dollar housing bond bill ([Affordable Homes Act](#)) provides opportunities to implement the recommended policy initiatives.

Some report recommendations relevant to municipalities and regional planning agencies:

- The Commonwealth, via (a re-established) State Planning Office, should require municipalities to report critical

development-related data annually and provide technical assistance to facilitate such reporting.

- allow larger housing developments to transfer approval authorities from local boards to Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) via local option
- allow adjacent cities and towns to regionalize land use boards or delegate permitting authority to RPAs via local option

There was discussion about cluster housing in rural communities with shared water and septic and the hope that could be addressed. Jenny said the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs has been investigating mechanisms to fund water, sewer, and wastewater infrastructure, including regional fee structures.

Space for housing but lack of transportation was noted as an issue. The Unlocking Housing Production Commission did not address transportation issues. It is hoped that the millionaire's tax funding transit authorities and the well-funded transportation bond bill will expand opportunities.

In response to a question about the rollout of the recommendations and raising concerns about local land use control, Jenny said that the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities' (EOHLC) housing tool kit addresses what will work and is right for each community. The report does not recommend one approach across the state.

The Governor's administration has not filed new housing legislation, but some advocacy organizations have.

Commission members noted that access to transportation was not specifically addressed, and microtransit should be explored. Level funding to regional transportation agencies vs. more funding for MBTA is a concern.

Jenny welcomes follow up questions at:

[jraitt@nmcog.org](mailto:jraitt@nmcog.org)

978-454-8021 x120

**VI. Vote to Have the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Allow Remote Participation in Accordance with the Requirements of 940 CMR 29.10, Applicable to all Subsequent Meetings of the Commission and its Committees, but such Adoption shall be Deemed Rescinded upon Passage by the Legislature of Remote Participation upon Terms Equal to or More Expansive than those Permitted under Section 20 of Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021.**

Without legislative action beforehand, the provision to allow flexible remote public meetings expires on March 31, 2025. Before the relaxation of the virtual option due to COVID, there was an option for remote participation subject to certain requirements, including that the Commission would have to vote to allow remote participation, and there would need to be a quorum, including the meeting Chair, in person. This vote will provide the BRPC with another option should the legislature not act.

Doug McNally moved to allow remote participation in accordance with the requirements of 940 CMR 29.10, applicable to all subsequent meetings of the Commission and its committees, but such adoption shall be deemed rescinded upon passage by the legislature of remote participation upon terms equal to or more expansive than those permitted under Section 20 of Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021.

Roger Bolton seconded the motion. A roll call vote approved it: Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Malcolm Fick, Leanne Yinger, Mark Smith, Sheila Irvin, Christine Rasmussen, Don Gagnon, Samantha Page, and Doug McNally.

## **VII. Presentation and Discussion about the Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program**

Laura Brennan, BRPC Assistant Director & Economic Development Program Manager, gave a presentation about the [Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program](#), which exists to help municipalities revitalize downtown and commercial areas by encouraging the occupancy of long-term vacant storefronts. The program allows municipalities to use refundable tax credits to attract businesses to prominent vacancies within a community's downtown and/or commercial area. Programmatic changes increase the usefulness of this program for smaller communities such as:

- Communities are no longer required to establish a Vacant Storefront District to participate in the program.
- If awarded, a municipality will maintain access to the credits through the final quarterly meeting of the EACC in 2026.
- A storefront is now considered vacant if it has been unoccupied for at least six (6) months.
- Communities without a town center may still have eligible vacant commercial buildings.
- A project match is not required but is encouraged. Potential sources include staff and volunteer time, dismissal/waiver of fees, etc.

The highly recommended Expression of Interest (EOI) is due March 26, 2025. BRPC can help submit those and complete the One Stop application.

## **VIII. Report and Possible Discussion of the Executive Director's Memo**

### **A. Open Meeting Law**

This topic is no longer relevant because the legislature passed a bill sent to the Governor for signature and the above remote participation topic and vote.

## **II. Adjournment**

Roger Bolton made a motion to adjourn. Sheila Irvin seconded the motion. A roll call approved the motion: Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Malcolm Fick, Leanne Yinger, Mark Smith, Sheila Irvin, Christine Rasmussen, Don Gagnon, Roger Bolton, and Doug McNally.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 15, 2025, at 7:00 p.m.

### **Documents and Exhibits Used:**

[Vacant Storefront Program Presentation](#)