



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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REGIONAL ISSUES COMMITTEE –Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 28, 2025, 3:30 p.m.

via Zoom

Committee Members Present

Andrew Groff, Williamstown (non-Commission member)
Kent Lew, Washington (non-Commission member)
Christine Rasmussen, Alternate from Stockbridge, RIC Chair
Malcom Fick, BRPC Chair, ex-officio; Alternate from Great Barrington
Sheila Irvin, Delegate from Pittsfield

Committee Members Not Present

Kyle Hanlon, Delegate from North Adams
Eleanor Tillinghast, Mount Washington (non-Commission member)

BPRC Staff Present

CJ Hoss, Community Planning and Development Program Manager
Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director

1. Call to Order and Open Meeting Law Statement

Christine R. called the meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Roll call was taken, and the meeting was recorded.

2. Approval of Minutes – February 5, 2025, February 26, 2026, and March 26, 2025

Delayed until the next meeting.

3. Introduction to Battery Energy Storage in reference to eventual siting requirements and guidelines

CJ H. said he wants to begin a discussion on this topic because BRPC will be expected to provide commentary on regulations as they are proposed in the coming months. Additionally, battery energy storage is a rapidly developing technology and BRPC should serve as a source of information for local stakeholders. Many of the discussions on the topic thus far have been focused on themes safety and emergency management including the risk of fire, the design of containment structures, and the use of firefighting chemicals including PFAS. These topics figured prominently in the battery energy storage zoning bylaw that BRPC helped develop for Hinsdale two years ago. CJ H. said he wants RIC to start compiling a list of related topics that they want to address or learn more about.

Tom M. said that the energy facilities siting bill that was passed includes provisions for drafting regulations regarding storage and transmission facilities in addition to generation facilities like solar arrays. These regulations are expected to be released by Fall 2025. Tom M. would like to host a focused presentation on battery energy storage for a larger group of municipal officials.

Malcom F. asked if storage facilities are typically located on the site of generation facilities. Kent L. said that since solar arrays produce electricity in DC and batteries store electricity in DC, it typically makes sense to couple the facilities. The other option is to locate storage facilities near transmission facilities like substations.

Malcom F. asked how large storage facilities tend to be relative to solar arrays. CJ H. said they are significantly smaller. Andrew G. showed an example of a 5MW array in Lanesborough and the associated storage facility, with the storage facility occupying a small fraction of the area of the array. At that facility, the batteries are stored inside used shipping containers, which also contain isolated fire suppression systems.

CJ H. said that the Pittsfield Conservation Committee is currently considering a proposal for a battery energy storage facility on a three-acre plot behind the Williams Street Plaza. Sheila I. said that residents in the neighborhood are opposing the facility. Andrew G. said that locating storage facilities close to end users like in dense residential areas provides substantial grid stability benefits.

Kent L. said that it is important to understand the nuances of the chemicals used in different kinds of batteries and the different risks and tradeoffs they carry.

Christine R. asked if there is a role for BRPC to play in getting ahead of the technology by providing education to planning board members, conservation committee members, and other interested parties in local communities.

Malcom F. asked why battery energy storage would ever be sited in residential areas and not always either alongside solar generation or in industrial zones. Sheila I. said that the land for the proposed Pittsfield facility was purchased before Pittsfield had completed its zoning regulations on storage facilities.

Christine R. asked if there is a need for communities to purchase special equipment or materials for fire suppression. Andrew G. said that at the Lanesborough facility, fire suppression is internal to the storage modules. If the fire suppression fails, the modules need to burn themselves out. Kent L. said that he thinks training for fire and emergency personnel is as important as equipment.

Christine R. summarized the discussion and said that BRPC should focus on questions of local training and education, facility siting, and zoning regulations. CJ H. said that advocating for state-provided education and training can be part of the commentary BRPC submits.

Malcom F. said that Great Barrington currently does not have bylaws pertaining to battery energy storage and does not allow battery energy storage as a primary use. If the state intends on releasing regulations that supersede local zoning ordinances, or allow facility siting in the case where municipalities do not have pertinent bylaws, BRPC should move quickly to inform local communities so they can begin to prepare.

Kent L. said it would be useful if the committee working on the regulations were to publish a schedule for the release of draft regulations and the opening of the comment period. Once the draft regulations are released, BRPC, RIC, and local communities should identify missing items and things that are misguided or not applicable to the region. Tom M. said that DOER has hired a new energy facilities siting manager with staff support and that he had seen a tentative schedule.

4. Continuation of discussion regarding legislative priorities

Christine R. said that the Massachusetts Senate and House have both passed their versions of the budget bill. Resolving differences between these versions will probably take several months. In the meantime, committee hearings have begun. It is probably now appropriate for BRPC and RIC to begin more targeted advocacy for their legislative priorities.

Tom M. said that the next step is figuring out when there will be hearings on the priority bills and providing testimony. This is somewhat difficult as the schedules are not announced very far in advance. Tom M. said that he thinks the Municipal Empowerment Act contains a lot of improvements for municipalities, but it is not likely to get much attention until after the budget cycle.

Christine R. said that many Berkshire County municipalities are interested in legislation regarding online legal ads. Many municipalities do not have local newspapers, and posting ads in regional newspapers can be very expensive. Representative Leigh Davis has signed onto a bill regarding online legal ads. Tom M. said that the bill has not yet had a hearing, so there is still time to weigh in on it. The members agreed that Rep. Davis should be invited to the next RIC meeting. If she cannot attend the next regularly scheduled meeting, there could be a special session held for her. Tom M. said he would reach out to her.

Christine R. said that the bills that focus on the open meeting law would make the 2027 extension permanent. CJ H. said that some of these bills also provide more flexibility for town meetings. Christine R. said that BPRC should not support H.3299 because this bill would require at least one third of meeting participants to attend in person.

Christine R. said that the various bills that address bridges, roads, culverts, and Chapter 90 funding are very important for Berkshire County municipalities. Kent L. said that it would be helpful to understand the differences between the various bills. CJ H. said that many of the bills cover different topics. Kent L. said that H.3646 is sponsored by Rep. Davis and Senator Paul Mark, and H.3647 is sponsored by Rep. Davis. If RIC invites Rep. Davis to speak about online legal ads, they should also ask her about these bills. Other important bills are H.3628, which deals with unpaved roads, and other transportation bills supported by Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark is Joint Chair of the Committee on Transportation as well as a member of the Ways and Means Committee. Once the budget cycle finishes, RIC should invite Sen. Mark to speak about these bills and how BRPC can help support them.

Christine R. said that BRPC should support the Act Creating a Municipal and Public Safety Building Authority. Kent L. said that this bill was referred to the Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security. Christine R. said that the bill proposes using marijuana tax revenues to fund the building authority, and RIC should find out more about how these funds are distributed.

Christine R. said that many people throughout the Berkshires are concerned about Pilot reform and would like to see it go forward. Kent L. said that the bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Revenue.

CJ H. said that he felt there was a plan for a follow-on meeting. He and Tom M. would try to have Rep. Davis and a speaker on battery energy storage attend. If he hears any updates regarding legislative priorities before the next meeting, he will let members know.

5. Next Committee Meeting Date

The next meeting will be on Monday, June 23, 2025, at 3:30 p.m.

6. Adjournment

Kent L. made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Sheila I. seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 4:29 p.m.