BRPC
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

BUCK DONOVAN, Chair
MALCOLM FICK, Vice-Chair
SHEILA IRVIN, Clerk
SAM HAUPT, Treasurer
LAURA BRENNAN, Executive Director

APPROVED FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
September 17, 2026

This was a virtual meeting as allowed by An Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted during the State of Emergency extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30A sec.20 until June 30, 2027.

I. Opening

A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7pm. Chair Buck Donovan stated that, in accordance with the provisions of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law: *Meetings of the BRPC Commission Committee are recorded. Others may record meetings after informing the Chair that they wish to do so, as long as the method of recording does not interfere with the conduct of the meeting.*

B. Roll Call

The following Commission members were present:

Jay Meczywor, Adams Alternate
Al Blake, Becket Delegate
Natasha Loeffler, Becket Alternate
Peter Traub, Cheshire Delegate
Mary McGurn, Egremont Delegate
Pedro Pachano, Great Barrington Delegate
Malcolm Fick, Great Barrington Alternate
Mark Hawthorne, Lanesborough Delegate
Buck Donovan, Lee Delegate
Daniel Bross, Lenox Delegate
John Fletcher, Otis Delegate
Sheila Irvin, Pittsfield Delegate
Sari Hoy, Sheffield Delegate
Christine Rasmussen, Stockbridge Alternate
Sarah Gardner, Williamstown Alternate
Douglas McNally, Windsor Delegate
Michael Kintner, Windsor Alternate

Towns with no Delegate or Alternate present:
Alford, Clarksburg, Dalton, Florida, Hancock, Hinsdale, Monterey, Mount Washington, New Ashford, New Marlborough, North Adams, Peru, Richmond, Sandisfield, Savoy, Tyringham, Washington, and West Stockbridge

Staff Present:
Laura Brennan, Marianne Sniezek, Caitlin Davis, Courteny Morehouse

Others Present:
David Cachat, PCTV
Maitri Chandrashshekar, UMass Amherst
Jared Gelormino, West Stockbridge Planning Board
Donna Gordon, Egremont Planning Board
Isabella Johnson
Kate McNulty Vaughn, Lenox Planning Board
Elizabeth Sandoval
David Schecker, West Stockbridge Citizen
Eilen Vining, Egremont Citizen
Carin Upstill

C. Vote to Approve Minutes of the July 16, 2026 Commission Meeting

Douglas McNally moved to approve the July 16, 2026 draft meeting minutes. Christine Rasmussen seconded the motion. There was no discussion of the motion.

A roll call vote approved it: Jay Meczywor, Al Blake, Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Mark Hawthorne, Buck Donovan, John Fletcher, Sheila Irvin, Christine Rasmussen, and Doug McNally each voted to approve. Pedro Pachano, Daniel Bross, Sari Hoy and Sarah Gardner abstained.

II. Welcome to Newly Appointed Delegates or Alternates

Newly elected Delegates or appointed Alternates were invited to introduce themselves. No new delegates or alternates were present at the Commission meeting, but Laura mentioned she was happy to meet with new members in person or online for orientation.

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

BRPC Delegates & Alternates were offered the opportunity to comment on any item not on the agenda. Discussion or action were referred to a future meeting and not discussed at this meeting.

Buck Donovan mentioned the proposed changes to the Census. Laura indicated that draft comments from BRPC were underway. Laura would need any comments from communities by September 25th. The BRPC comment letter would be approved by the Executive Committee prior to the submission deadline.

IV. Comments from the Public

Members of the public were offered the opportunity to comment regarding topics on the agenda or other matters they wish to bring to the Commission's attention. Commenters are asked to state their names and the city or town they are from. Any discussion or action would be referred to a future meeting and not discussed at this meeting. There were no comments from the public.

V. Presentation & Discussion of Executive Committee Actions

Executive Committee actions taken on the Commission's behalf during the August 6, 2026, and September 3, 2026, meetings were presented for information and discussion.

There were no comments from delegates or alternates on the Executive Committee Actions.

VI. Presentation of Egremont Cottage Cluster Zoning

Egremont Planning Board member and BRPC Executive Committee At-Large member Mary McGurn provided a presentation about recent zoning work in Egremont.

Mary McGurn presented Egremont's Cottage Cluster Zoning.
Highlights from Mary's presentation included:

- Presented a diorama/simulation of Cottage Cluster Housing
- Affordable design and shared systems
- Safeguards to retain Egremont's small-scale character
- Site Plan Review
- Advisory Design Guidelines vs. Required Development Standards

John Fletcher asked with a shared driveway and septic system, who would be responsible. Mary answered that would be an HOA responsibility.

Pedro Pachano asked the following questions:

- Were models or reports run in regard to inclusionary housing
    - The model used was a 4 unit development at market rate; small by design
- What were the parking requirements
    - Paved Paradise by Henry Grabar was referenced as an educational read in regards to parking. There would be two parking spaces per single-family home. Waiver option included parking that would be more reasonable
- Were there limits on unit sizes
    - There was a mix; 400 square feet for a stationary tiny home was offered. With a waiver, 1200 square feet cottage cluster could also be done.
- Why were dimensions increased
    - To preserve the open space

Buck Donovan asked about multi-family zoning. Mary confirmed it was two family by right and zoning reforms added a third.

Sari Hoy asked Mary how she was able to get the community to engage and if there were deed restrictions for Egremont's short term rentals. Sari also commented on how interactive and impressive Egremont's website was.

Mary described that theirs was a community who liked to be involved and food being offered at meetings was a big incentive. Donna Gordon, a planning board member for Egremont, mentioned that a new bylaw was vetted regarding short-term rentals and they hoped to create a registration system to capture the town. They also hoped for regulation and protection of residents who needed the income from seasonal homes. There was no deed restriction on short-term rentals.

Mary also mentioned meetings regarding short-term rentals were separate from the Planning Board meetings.

Mary provided additional resources, created by ChatGPT Work Astra:

Plan Your Filing with Confidence:
https://egremont-planning-guide.mary-mcgurn.chatgpt.site/

Designing with Egremont
https://designing-with-egremont.mary-mcgurn.chatgpt.site/#top

Rural and Village Design Guidelines

VII. Presentation of Berkshire County Plan Search Tool

BRPC Principal Planner Courteny Morehouse provided a presentation and demonstration of a model developed in partnership with UMass Amherst that accesses the most recent municipal plans from all Berkshire communities and allows users to ask questions about the contents of those cataloged plans.

Courteny Morehouse presented Berkshire County Plan Search Tool.
Highlights from Courtney's presentation included:

- Overview of the navigator tool
- Navigator demo
    - Courteny asked, 'How many municipalities use volunteer fire departments?' as an example
- Admin Dashboard

The tool was currently in the testing phase to BRPC staff and several community members. UMass would host the AI tool for now in their own data center. After one year, there would be re-evaluation to decide if the cost would be worth it to host. The cost would be based on usage and the type of questions being asked. The estimated cost was $1,800-$3,000 per year. There were test accounts available if commission members were interested in being a part of the testing phase.

Mary McGurn asked which API model UMass used to build this and if they looked at newer models with reduced costs. UMass used Claude Haiku to create the tool. Mary also asked if there would be a user guide available and Courteny mentioned that was in the process of being reviewed.

Pedro Pachano asked if the tool would summarize plans. Courteny responded yes that it could summarize and cite specific parts in various plans.

VIII. Discussion of the Executive Director's Report

Laura provided the following highlights from the Executive Director's Memorandum:

- MARPA conference October 5th with Lieutenant Governor Driscoll as the keynote speaker
- BRPC's Annual Meeting October 15th at the Pittsfield Country Club. Roger Bolton would be the recipient of this year's Kusik Award. The keynote speaker would be Ben Downing, CEO of the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC).

- MILUS would be partnering with other RPAs in Western MA to provide feedback to some draft potential suitability maps. Laura asked members to save the date of November 12th

IX. Open Discussion about Items of Interest in Cities or Towns

Pedro Pachano expressed an interest in forming a regional housing committee to discuss affordable housing and what the process would be to form this type of committee; loop in the seasonal communities. Would this also include citizens in the community? It would need to be organic and function as a sub-committee that would have access and interaction with municipal housing authorities. Laura suggested CJ Hoss and Brett Roberts as points of contact at BRPC for the seasonal communities and non-profit entities and community partners.

Buck Donovan mentioned that consolidated permitting applications were coming up October 1st for solar and BESS. The town of Lee was going to have a special town meeting that date to implement bylaws. The state would also be holding informative meetings regarding permitting related to this, as well as sizing and zoning with regards to bylaws already in place by towns. Laura mentioned the planning board can be designated by the town's select board to be the "single point of contact" to manage these applications.

X. Adjournment

Doug McNally moved to adjourn the meeting. Pedro Pachano seconded the motion. There was no discussion on the motion.

The motion passed unanimously with a roll call vote from: Jay Meczywor, Natasha Loeffler, Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Mark Hawthorne, Buck Donovan, Daniel Bross, John Fletcher, Sheila Irvin, Christine Rasmussen, Sari Hoy, Sarah Gardner and Doug McNally.

The meeting adjourned at 9:09pm.