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CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

January 30, 2025 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

Virtual Meeting

Attending Officers	Attending Sub-Regional Delegates
Chairperson: Howard N. Drobner, Boylston*	West: Jared Grigg, Spencer*
Vice Chair: Robert Hassinger, Grafton*	Central City: David Quiroa, Worcester*
Treasurer: Daniel Schur, Westborough*	North: Otto Lies, Holden*
Asst. Treasurer: Andrew Coles, Auburn*	
Clerk: Timothy H. Wheeler, Berlin*	
Staff:	Not In Attendance:
Janet A. Pierce, Executive Director *	Northeast: Julianne Hirsh, Northborough
Trish Settles, Deputy Director, RCCP*	Southeast: Walter Baker, Sutton
Sujatha Krishnan, Deputy Director, Transportation*	Asst. Clerk, Barur Rajeshkumar, West Boylston
Dara Griswold, Finance Manager*	Southwest: William Trifone, Dudley
Stephanie Toupin, Human Resources*	
Anthony Senesi, Communications*	
Kerrie Salwa, Director, Economic Development*	
Sherrie Haber, Executive Assistant*	*indicates remote participation

Call to Order:

Chairperson Drobner called the Executive Committee meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. with a roll call to establish a quorum.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion: to accept the Executive Committee Meeting Minutes from January 2, 2025. Moved by Mr. Schur, seconded by Mr. Hassinger Roll Call Vote. **Motion Unanimously Approved.**

Public Comment:

None.

Executive Director's Report:

1. Staffing and Administration (Janet Pierce, Executive Director)

A. Chairperson Dobner asked Ms. Pierce for an update on Open Meeting Law virtual meetings and federal funding turmoil

- B. Ms. Pierce stated that the virtual meetings have not been extended yet. She did not get any updates on the issue at either the Legislative Affairs breakfast or at MMA.
- Mr. Quiroa added that he has heard it will be extended in the supplemental budget and that he can't see why it wouldn't be extended.
 - Mr. Hassinger added that the controversial aspect would be making it mandatory and the need to update technology.
- C. Ms. Pierce gave a brief staffing update – We had 3 staff leave this month – Victoria, Jasifa and Elena. We have one person that just started, Tina and 4 interns. Ms. Toupin will update further.
- D. Ms. Pierce discussed Federal funding
- CPRG is our only Federal grant. The EPA has paused it with the federal freeze and we have not heard back since the order has been rescinded. We have drawn down all funds to meet invoices and staff through last week. We will continue the pause until we have a definitive answer. It is our only direct federal funding.
 - Other programs that have federal funding go through the state
 - MassDOT is 80% Federal funding and 20% State funding
 - WRTA is 80% Federal funding
 - Applications are in for EPA for Brownfields and 604B. Responses may be late.
 - CDBG – funded by HUD
 - Contracts with the MA Department of Public Health
 - Staffing – Ms. Pierce continued saying that we are fortunate our staff can work in other segments to cover for people who have left or for projects that are paused. She met with staff, explained that jobs are secure and that we will continue status quo.
- E. Ms. Pierce stated that we are working on budgets. Ms. Griswold is sitting down with division leaders. We are looking at our successes and at federal funding.
- F. Questions / Comments: Chairperson Dobner said that we will have to wait and see. He is concerned about Federal Highway funds. He expressed that CMRPC is in great financial shape and that the Commission could consider using reserve funds if needed to finish projects and keep staff. Ms. Pierce said there is no intention for lay-offs but they could happen. Mr. Grigg asked if everyone is engaged right now, and we had to use reserve funds how long could we continue. Ms. Pierce stated that everyone is engaged, that before we used reserve funds, openings would not be filled externally. The team is flexible and can fill in for each other. She would need to check funds for an answer to the question of how long. She stated that no decisions would be made until we hear something definitive.

2. Transportation (Sujatha Krishnan, Deputy Director)

- A. Ms. Krishnan stated that she is not worried about losing funding for Transportation. We had the yearly MARPA/MaDOT meeting on Thursday where they provide funding for the upcoming year. Funding is authorized through the legislative body, not the executive. The money is obligated for five years. There is a 2% increase from last year and there is no indication that would change.
- B. The January Readiness Day meeting with MaDOT to discuss TIP projects is on Tuesday. We do not have a lot of community projects
- C. The Transportation Committee is looking for members. There are only four regular members and there should be an alternate or delegate as well as a technical member from each region. It is a one hour per month commitment.
- D. Currently working on:
 - Protect Grant for vulnerable locations including Blackstone River Watershed and Northborough bridge structures
 - RFP released for 290 / Vernon Street (\$650K +\$100K for staff to manage)
 - Hardwick Complete Streets
 - Oxford Transportation study
 - Two Mass Trails applications for Princeton at Thomas Prince School and Charles River
 - Transit – WRTA public meetings for feedback on service changes
 - Regional bike plan and scheduling subregion meetings for bikes

3. **Regional Collaboration and Community Planning (Trish Settles, Deputy Director RCCP)**

- A. Ms. Salwa began the update with discussion of projects:
 - Economic Development forum in Northborough
 - Site specific economic development for Blackstone
 - Story map / Guide for Rutland to advertise property
 - Third digital equity project, this one for Millbury
 - First regional digital equity project
 - DLTA project for Auburn and similar in Berlin
 - Hillside project
 - Hosting Central Mass Brownfields meeting at MaDOT and expecting 60-70 people
- B. SWCEDO update – Meets Thursday, then again in April. Working on Marketing Central Mass, Ecotourism. Also hosting a regional dialogue the first week of March on Communication Skills for Town Meeting.
- C. Ms. Settles continued the update.
 - It is Community Block Grant application season and we launched 5 for FY25.
 - Updated federal and state data
 - Waiting for guidance from EOHLC and HUD

- Environmental – CPRG is paused but other resiliency plans are going on.
- Green communities is state based so there is no concern. The team is new but they are doing great.
- In Connor's area Emily Whitaker Smith is being promoted to Public Health Training Manager and we are looking to fill her current role.
- They are working on a large project for the Wachusett Regional School District and regional animal control with Charlton
- We've wrapped up 25 DLTA projects
- There are a number of current projects:
 - West Boylston open space – found more funding
 - Homeland 24 project funding
 - Hardwick Master Plan
 - Barre Zoning Bylaws
 - Warren Zoning Bylaws
 - Douglas Master Plan Phase 2
 - Northbridge Master Plan
 - Waiting to hear on Energy Assistance
- Waiting on:
 - East Brookfield
 - Community One Stop is open for applications
 - Brookfield
 - Sutton housing production
 - Holden MBTA
 - Outdoor recreation
 - Watershed project for Blackstone
 - Statewide Housing Plan
- We hosted an update on Healthy Aging
- The Federal Fiscal Infrastructure Office will host a meeting in Worcester
- We are hosting office hours on Community One Stop

4. **Human Resources (Stephanie Toupin)**

- A. Emily Whittaker-Smith has been promoted to Health Manager and that will be effective on Monday.
- B. Working with Ms. Haber on the Personnel Handbook and would like to review it with the Personnel Committee in late February.
- C. Recruitment system is live with applicant tracking on the website. It allows us to post to all the job boards. Managers can instantly see applications. Chairperson Dobner asked if the applications are being filtered. Ms Toupin explained that there are some "knock

out” questions that will stop an application from going to the managers. Chairperson Dobner asked that Ms. Toupin be sure that managers are not being bombarded with unqualified applications.

D. Mr. Hassinger asked if we have any DEI implications. Ms. Pierce replied that we need to keep track of information now that we have 50+ employees. Mr. Hassinger said that tracking is different than hiring and Ms. Pierce clarified that hiring is merit based.

E. We have seven interns – some new and some returning

- Jeremy Rubin-Thomas – Transportation Intern Returning (Clark)
- Elwin Reyes Contreras – Transportation Intern (Quinsigamond)
- Evan Karcasinas - Transportation Intern (UMass Boston)
- Charlotte Leavitt – RCCP Intern Returning
- Forest Kuestner- Burleson - RCCP Intern
- Anna Walker – RCCP Intern
- Katelynn Woods – RCCP Intern

F. Mr. Grigg asked what the interns do. Ms. Settles explained that they work in RCCP focused areas on things including using technical skills on master plans and mapping data. Ms. Krishnan explained that they work in Transportation on MaDOT projects doing data collection and analysis and on mapping projects. We had to turn candidates away this year and some interns stay on to be hired full time. Mr. Grigg was pleased to hear that they get something out of the work and it’s clear if they stay on to work at CMRPC.

G. Mr. Schur asked if Intern hours are billable and Ms. Settles confirmed.

Approval of Warrant for Payment of Bills and Review of Financial Statements:

Ms. Griswold presented Warrant 25-07 for the month of January totaling \$137,846.34. She stated that \$132,752.91 is pass-throughs and \$5,093.43 is CMRPC expenditures.

Motion: to approve Warrant 25-07 for the month of January in the amount of \$137,846.34.

Moved by Mr. Grigg, Seconded by Mr. Hassinger. Roll Call Vote. **Motion Unanimously Approved.**

Committee and Sub-Regional Briefings:

1. **Transportation** – Mr. Hassinger stated that they met just before this meeting. They voted to recommend adoption of State Safety Performance Measures as is done yearly. They looked at possible TIP candidate projects. They looked at priorities for State Resilience Implementation plan.
2. **Legislative Affairs** – Mr. Lies gave an update of the Legislative Affairs breakfast. He stated that it was one of the most interesting meetings he has attended with great presentations and the best attendance from legislators. Mr. Quiroa added that the presentations were great and there was a great turnout. He thanked the Legislative Affairs committee and the

team. Chairperson Hassinger agreed. Mr. Lies added that he learned Worcester has a 25mph speed limit. Ms. Pierce added that MaDOT and Federal Highway staff attended

3. **Physical Development** – Mr. Wheeler stated that they met two weeks ago. There were approximately 15 proposals for DLTA and we will expend \$180k. That will leave \$100k for the next round. They are meeting again on March 20th to hear the second round of proposals. He added that this is the first time we are using DLTA for match funds. The staff is continuing to be innovative. Ms. Pierce thanked the Physical Development committee. She stated that DLTA was level funded and DLTA-A was not in the budget. There is push for an amendment for more funding.

4. **Sub-Regional** –

- Chairperson Dobner gave an update on Boylston's Hillside Redevelopment Grant. There are 300+ acres and the majority is open space but there is development on 2 acres. There is discussion on converting the house on the property to a Senior Center.
- Mr. Schur gave an update on Westborough. The trail is getting pushback due to funding. The town is tightening its belt on some projects

New Business:

1. Chairperson Dobner stated that if we are looking to convene the Personnel Subcommittee that he will not be available on Mondays
2. Chairperson Dobner stated that he has been chair for three years now and it is customary to rotate. He asked that the Commission consider someone for election in June. Mr. Hassinger stated that we will need a Nominating Committee and Ms. Pierce said that we will ask for volunteers at the March Quarterly meeting.
3. Mr. Hassinger asked for a motion regarding virtual meetings. Chairperson Dobner entertained the motion because it is not something he anticipated and it is time sensitive. Discussion ensued on the merits of virtual meetings and what should be included in the motion. **Motion:** In support of continuation of virtual meetings for Regional Planning Commissions as is currently allowed. Motion made by Mr. Hassinger and seconded by Mr. Schur. Roll call vote. **Motion unanimously approved.** It was further discussed that the staff should have leeway in explaining the reasoning for supporting virtual meetings and that points include: allowing the commission to engage with the public; due to the geographical area virtual meetings allow us to involve all communities; allows better attendance / quorum especially if there are weather concerns. Committee members asked that this be sent to Senators and Representatives, the Regional Municipal Services committee, the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, The Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate.
4. Ms. Pierce thanked Mr. Grigg for serving on Physical Development

5. Ms. Pierce stated that next month's meeting may be long as we will discuss the Audit for FY25 and have a budget presentation for FY26.
6. Ms. Pierce stated that she would like the topic of the next quarterly meeting to be on Public Buildings to gauge support of the Delegates and Alternates. Chairperson Dobner told her to move forward.
7. Ms. Pierce explained the annual dinner will be set up with a networking / cocktail hour, then the meeting, dinner, then awards. A Constant Contact invitation is going out.
8. Ms. Pierce stated that she will discuss putting the ballot in the packet with Mr. Wheeler
9. Mr. Grigg asked if the quarterly meeting info for March has gone out and Ms. Pierce said that it will once it is finalized.
10. Mr. Grigg asked for clarification from Ms. Krishnan on which regions she needs participation from for Transportation Committee and she answered West and Southwest.

Adjournment: Having completed all business, Chair Drobner adjourned the meeting at 8:37pm.

Documents:

January 2024 Warrant

Draft Minutes January 2, 2025

Respectfully submitted by Sherrie Haber, CMRPC.