



1 Mercantile Street – Suite 520
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 www.cmrpc.org

CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
 July 27, 2023 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
 In-Person/Hybrid Meeting

Attending Officers	Attending Sub Regional Delegates
Chairperson: Howard N. Drobner, Boylston	North: Otto Lies, Holden
Treasurer: Daniel Schur, Westborough	Northeast: Julianne Hirsh, Northborough
Clerk: Timothy H. Wheeler, Berlin	Southeast: Walter Baker, Sutton
Asst. Treas.: C. Richard Williams, Rutland	West: Jeffrey Howland, New Braintree
Asst. Clerk: Robert Hassinger, Grafton	Not In Attendance:
Staff:	Vice Chair: Barur Rajeshkumar, West Boylston
Janet A. Pierce, Executive Director	Southwest: Andrew Coles
Trish Settles, Dep. Dir., RCCP	Central City: David Quiroa, Worcester
Rich Rydant, Project Manager, Transportation	Guests:
Matthew Deiulis, Administrative Assistant	Tim Nahrwold, CMRPC Alternate, Rutland

1. Call to Order:

Mr. Drobner called the July 27, 2023, Executive Committee meeting to order at 7:05 pm with a roll call to establish a quorum.

2. Approval of Minutes-

Mr. Hassinger made a motion to accept the minutes of June 29, 2023 seconded by Ms. Hirsh.
Motion Approved, with one abstention.

3. Public Comment:

None.

4. Executive Director’s Report:

a. Staffing and Administration

- Mrs. Pierce opened their report by providing staffing updates. Beginning with open job ads, Pierce noted there are seven open positions and job offers had been made to several candidates with six already accepting positions. Continuing, Mrs. Pierce noted two staff resignations from Associate Planner, Nina Weisblatt, and Principal Planner, Wenzheng Wang.



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- Mrs. Pierce provided updates on grant submissions.
- Mrs. Pierce expanded on her 'office space' report from the previous month's meeting, noting she has met Mike Jacobs of Glickman, Kovago & Jacobs, who CMRPC contracted with on our previous leasing agreements, and learned that Unum is requesting all tenants sign long term lease commitments through 2030. The Committee inquired about the current lease agreement, current office space concerns, and what CMRPC's options are to expand their office space. The CMRPC leadership team provided sufficient clarification to the committee.

b. Transportation:

Rich Rydant, Transportation Project Manager, who attended in place of Sujatha Krishnan, Deputy Director of Transportation, gave their report.

- Mr. Rydant began the report by announcing that the *Long-Range Transportation Plan* (LRTP) has been completed and endorsed by the CMMPO and Federal Highway Administration. Rydant commended the staff for their tremendous efforts and made note of MassDOT and FHWA providing recognition of the staff's efforts. Rydant was encouraged by these comments, as the Transportation staff will be up for federal certification next year and the LRTP is a crucial element of their review.
- Rydant reported that staff has arranged a *Rural Transit Dialogue* including MassDOT, FTA- which will be held on August 3rd and for which the newly appointed Director of Rural Affairs, Anne Gobi, as well as RPAs and Rural transit stakeholders will be in attendance.
- Rydant expanded on Ms. Pierce's previous note of a significant transportation grant application- here he reported that the *Safe Streets for All* was submitted for \$600k of grant funds that can be applied to a wide variety transportation feasibility and safety projects. Moreover, the grant results are set to be released in October.
- Rydant reported that CMRPC staff conducted a Webster Square walk audit- which was coordinated with the Webster Square Tower's Senior Housing as a continuation of the previously completed *Age-Friendly Plan*. Rydant noted that there was a great turnout and useful feedback.
- Rydant reported on the I-495 southbound exit to I-290 ramp construction project, subsequent traffic jams leading to said exit and how cars diverting the traffic by taking exit 62 are causing congestion issues in Berlin. Transportation staff are working with MassDOT to establish traffic counts and formulate a plan to reduce traffic concerns in the area.



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- In addition to the Berlin traffic counts, data collection throughout the region is in full swing with traffic counting, pavement, sidewalk, and ADA ramp data collection.
- Rydant reported that staff have arranged to present on the Trails Assessment at the Moving Together Conference in Boston.
- Rydant closed their report by announcing that the Worcester Regional Transit Authority have hired Joshua Rickman to be their new administrator.
- Ms. Pierce added that a significant number of culvert analysis requests have been submitted through CMRPC because of the recent weather. Furthermore, she invited the committee members to consider opportunities for their own communities to pursue assessments.

c. Regional Collaboration and Community Planning (RCCP):

- Deputy Director Trish Settles gave the RCCP report.
- Ms. Settles began with a staffing update. Here she reiterated Ms. Pierce's note that two employees had resigned and added that Greer Jarvis would be making a transition from Transportation to RCCP as a Resiliency Planner in the beginning of August.
- Ms. Settles updated the committee on results of a very busy and profitable 'grant season' - where, most notably, Ms. Settles reported that CMRPC was able to secure a *Climate Pollution Reduction Act Grant* through the EPA for \$1,000,000. Furthermore, this project which will include both a steering and technical advisory committee, will run for four years and will be in collaboration with the Northeastern Connecticut's Council of Governments (NECCOG), Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) and serve over 80 communities between the three planning regions.
- RCCP has been actively helping towns with submitting grant applications to fund *Imagine 2050* projects that range from *Master Plans* to *Housing Production Plans*.
- Additionally, Ms. Settles announced that RCCP submitted several grant applications to the *Community One Stop program* which totaled hundred of thousands of dollars; have reviewed and analyzed the *Mass Works Grant* application submittals for the region; submitted a large *PARC Grant* on the behalf of Blackstone and a *LAND Grant* for Boylston; submitted an application with REPA for continued support to our communities with Green Communities annual reports and competitive grant applications.
- Ms. Settles noted that as of June, nearly 60% of the available *District Local Technical Assistance Funds* and about 30% off the *DLTA Augmentation Funds* have been used



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by the majority of CMRPC's communities which is on track with what RCCP had expected when the funds were announced earlier in the year.

- Ms. Settles closed with reports on a variety of accomplishments and potential upcoming projects in RCCP's pipeline. Some noteworthy included a contract with *Muni-GIS* was signed to provide communities with an alternative to LPA hours, where communities can pre-pay to bank time for general assistance from CMRPC GIS staff; the new CMRPC website should launch before the end of the year; the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* is in its final stages; the *Division of Ecological Restoration (DER)* is releasing funds for *Dam Reconnaissance* throughout the central Massachusetts area.
- Ms. Settles opened the floor to the committee for questions. The committee briefly discussed potential projects in the area.

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

Executive Director Janet Pierce presented Warrant #23-12a for the payment of bills as required by Section 7, Chapter 40B, for the month of June 2023 totaling \$138,107.78.

- Mr. Williams made a motion to approve Warrant #23-12a for the month of June 2023 in the amount of \$138,107.78, seconded by Mr. Schur. **Motion approved.**

Executive Director Janet Pierce presented Warrant #24-01 for the payment of bills as required by Section 7, Chapter 40B, for the month of July 2023 totaling \$3,376.83.

- Mr. Williams made a motion to approve Warrant #24-01 for the month of June 2023 in the amount of \$3,376.83, seconded by Ms. Hirsh. **Motion approved.**

The report of cash and the cash flow chart were presented to committee members, showing an ending balance as of June 30, 2023, of \$2,322,706.84.

6. Committee and Sub-Regional Briefings:

- a. Transportation – No meeting was held in July.**
- b. Legislative Affairs – No meeting was held in July.**
- c. Physical Development Committee-** Mr. Wheeler noted that there would be a Physical Development Committee meeting on August 10th, where the committee will hear about potential projects that DLTA and DLTA funds could be applied to.
- d. Rural Caucus–** Ms. Settles reported that the Rural Caucus met the previous night, which had guests from The New England Rural Health Association and MRPC in attendance. In addition to a presentation from the Central Mass Health Foundation and typical roundtable discussions, the caucus contemplated the topic for their



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October meeting. Ms. Settles recalled that Mr. Wheeler, inspired by a recent Surgeon General’s report on Loneliness in America and its effects on health, and suggested that they pursue an initiative to measure how isolated people that live in rural towns are from other members of their community and how this affects their wellbeing. Ms. Settles dubbed this initiative the “Happiness Index”. Ms. Settles noted that the “Happiness Index” will be discussed and fleshed out at the next Rural Caucus meeting.

e. Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization – Ms. Pierce informed the committee there was no news to report, but the next meeting will be August 3rd at 3pm.

f. Sub-regional–

- Mr. Wheeler thanked the commission for their assistance in coordinating MassDOT to perform traffic counts in Berlin to track cars diverting the traffic stemming from the I-290 exit off I-495 westbound. The committee discussed this until Mr. Wheeler disconnected from the call due to technical issues.
- Mr. Williams formally introduced his guest, Tim Nahrwold, who is a CMRPC Alternate from the Town of Rutland.
- Mrs. Pierce noted that CMRPC staff will have a table at the blueberry festival in Charlton and she invited the committee members to come by for a visit. Pierce then discussed the progression of CMRPC’s in-person community outreach in a post-pandemic world. The conversation evolved into discussions on trail audits, specifically an upcoming trail audit in Northborough.

7. New Business:

- Mr. Drobner noted that he has not had an opportunity to work on Janet’s contract, but he expects to have materials prepared for the next meeting.

8. Adjournment: Upon a motion by Mr. Williams, seconded by Mr. Hassinger to adjourn at 8:12 pm. **The vote by roll call was unanimous. Motion approved.**

Respectfully submitted by Matthew Deuilis, CMRPC.