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CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
 January 25, 2024 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
 In-Person/Hybrid Meeting

Attending Officers	Attending Sub-Regional Delegates
Chairperson: Howard N. Drobner, Boylston	North: Otto Lies, Holden
Vice Chair: Robert Hassinger, Grafton	Northeast: Julianne Hirsh, Northborough
Treasurer: Daniel Schur, Westborough	Southeast: Walter Baker, Sutton
Asst. Treas.: C. Richard Williams, Rutland	Southwest: Andrew Coles, Auburn
Clerk: Timothy H. Wheeler, Berlin	West: Jeffrey Howland, New Braintree
Staff:	
Janet A. Pierce, Executive Director	Not In Attendance:
Trish Settles, Dep. Dir., RCCP	Asst. Clerk: Barur Rajeshkumar, West Boylston
Sujatha Krishnan, Dep. Dir., Transportation	Central City: David Quiroa, Worcester
Anthony Senesi, Communications Coordinator	

1. Call to Order:

Chairperson Drobner called the January 25, 2024, Executive Committee meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. with a roll call to establish a quorum.

2. Approval of Minutes-

Mr. Lies made a motion to accept the minutes of the January 4, 2024, Executive Committee Meeting, seconded by Mr. Schur.

Ms. Hirsh asked for clarity if the new format of Sub-regional updates was included in the minutes of the January 4, 2024, meeting. Mr. Drobner said that the new format of sub-regional updates will be to pick a sub-region for each meeting to share any news or updates. Mr. Drobner stated that the plan is for the Chair to ask one regional delegate for an update on their respective region. Mr. Drobner said that past practice was that each sub-region had an opportunity to share updates.

Mr. Howland said that he was not present at the January 4, 2024, meeting. Mr. Howland stated that the draft minutes for the meeting included him seconding the adjournment of the meeting. Mr. Senesi said that he re-reviewed the minutes, and determined that Mr. Hassinger, seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.



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Mr. Lies, who made the original motion to approve the meeting minutes of January 4, 2024, accepted the amendment described above. **Motion Approved.**

3. Public Comment:

None.

4. Vote to Adopt Grievance Policy:

- Mr. Drobner described the need for the Executive Committee to adopt the draft Commission Grievance Policy to comply with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), regarding recent grant applications and awards that CMRPC has been involved with. Ms. Pierce described the proposed Grievance Policy in detail and stated that it is like CMRPC's Title VI Policy. Ms. Pierce said that over the next few months, the Title VI Policy and the Grievance Policy may be combined in some way for ease of clarity and consistency. Ms. Pierce said that the Grievance Policy includes Human Resources Manager, Stephanie Toupin, as the Non-Discrimination Coordinator. Ms. Pierce stated that if municipalities receive Federal funding, they may need to adopt a Grievance Policy as well. Ms. Pierce said that the Personnel Board met last week to discuss the Policy, and now it is before the Committee to be considered for approval. Mr. Drobner said that the approval of the Policy is time-sensitive. Mr. Hassinger said that he did not have enough time to review the proposed Policy.

Ms. Hirsh made a motion to approve the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission's Non-Discrimination Grievance and Complaint Procedure Policy, seconded by Mr. Howland. Ms. Pierce recommended that the Committee amend the motion to include language that would give the Executive Director the ability to make any non-substantive changes to comply with the EPA's future suggestions to the proposed Policy and that in 60 days, the Committee would review the Policy again. Mr. Schur agreed with Ms. Pierce's recommendation and proposed the amendment to the Committee. Ms. Hirsh accepted the amendment to her original motion described above. Mr. Howland accepted the amendment to his original second of the motion. **Motion Approved.**

5. Executive Director's Report:

I. Staffing and Administration:



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- Ms. Pierce stated that CMRPC recently hired Stephanie Toupin as the Human Resources Manager. Ms. Pierce described Ms. Toupin’s experience. Ms. Pierce stated that Ms. Toupin will begin her role on January 29, 2024.
- Ms. Pierce stated that CMRPC recently released a job advertisement for the currently vacant Administrative Assistant position. Ms. Pierce stated that the Administrative Assistant role has been elevated to an Executive Assistant role to hire someone with more administrative experience.
- Ms. Pierce stated that once the Human Resources Manager begins her position, there may be more than 4-5 more positions that will be advertised and posted. Ms. Pierce said that Ms. Toupin will be working to revise the Commission’s Handbook.
- Ms. Pierce described the status of 7 Regional Planning Agencies, including CMRPC, with unfunded OPEB liabilities dating back to 2014. Ms. Pierce stated that some of the Regional Planning Agencies received special legislative approval to be exempt from paying into the system for retiree benefits. Ms. Pierce stated that the State Retirement Board continues pressuring the RPAs to pay for their unfunded liability. Through MARPA, the affected RPAs have continued to advocate for special legislation to make the agencies exempt.
- Ms. Pierce stated that the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) has been determined by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to be a “high-risk” project partner. Ms. Pierce stated that CMRPC subcontracts work to PVPC for housing rehab projects through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Ms. Pierce stated that CMRPC was not notified directly by PVPC and that she was made aware by a community that received a letter from EOHLC describing PVPC as high-risk. Ms. Pierce stated that she is disappointed that PVPC did not notify CMRPC, as a courtesy, to let the Commission be aware that these letters were being sent to communities in the CMRPC region that have subcontracted work with PVPC. Ms. Pierce said that she is aware that PVPC has had significant staffing changes within the division. Ms. Pierce said that she is working with CMRPC staff to identify a long-term solution to the subcontracted work through the CDBG program. Upon the recommendation of Mr. Schur, Ms. Pierce will request a performance bond from PVPC.

II. Transportation:

Deputy Director Sujatha Krishnan provided the Transportation report.



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- Ms. Krishnan said that Monica Tibbits-Nutt, Secretary & CEO of MassDOT, will be attending the CMMPO meeting in March.
- Ms. Krishnan stated that CMRPC staff attended a recent Sutton Select Board meeting to discuss the Central Turnpike and potential traffic calming measures in the vicinity.
- Ms. Krishnan stated that CMRPC staff met with the Town of Charlton to discuss potential Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) projects.
- Ms. Krishnan stated that CMRPC staff just met with the Town of West Boylston regarding safety issues with the Route 12/Franklin Street area. Ms. Krishnan stated that CMRPC will work to complete a road safety audit in that area.
- Ms. Krishnan stated that MassDOT released a trail priority map of the State, however, significant portions of the Blackstone Valley Trail were not displayed as a priority. Ms. Krishnan and CMRPC staff have been meeting with MassDOT partners to make Central Massachusetts trails a priority on the State level.

III. Regional Collaboration and Community Planning (RCCP):

Deputy Director Trish Settles provided the RCCP report.

- Ms. Settles said that CMRPC submitted the CMRPC Calendar Year 2023 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) report and spent 102% of the funds that were awarded to CMRPC. Ms. Settles stated that CMRPC has currently spent 75% of DLTA-A funds.
- Ms. Settles said that in a recent Physical Development Committee meeting about 63% of Calendar Year 2024 DLTA funds were allocated to 14 different projects.
- Ms. Settles said that several Hazard Mitigation Plans for the region are expiring and that CMRPC staff are working to update the Plans.
- Ms. Settles said that \$1.1 million was recently awarded to Blackstone, New Braintree, Rutland, West Brookfield, Charlton, Dudley, and Hardwick for Green Communities grants.

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

Executive Director Janet Pierce presented Warrant #24-07 for the payment of bills as required by Section 7, Chapter 40B, for the month of January 2024 totaling \$84,264.02.

- Mr. Williams made a motion to approve Warrant #24-07 for the month of January 2024 in the amount of \$84,264.02, seconded by Mr. Hirsh. **Motion approved.**



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The report of cash and the cash flow chart was not presented to committee members at the time of the meeting. Ms. Pierce stated that the cash flow has not changed significantly since last month.

7. Committee and Sub-Regional Briefings:

- a. Transportation** – Mr. Hassinger stated at the Transportation Committee meeting earlier in the evening, that the Proposed Amendment #3 for the 2024-2028 TIP Highway projects was recommended to be approved. Mr. Hassinger stated that the Committee recommended that the CMMPO adopt the State’s Safety Targets for Safety Performance Measures.
- b. Legislative Affairs** – Ms. Settles said the Legislative Affairs Committee met on January 9, 2024, and that there will be a drafted proposal, outlining the role and responsibility of the Legislative Affairs Committee in February.
- c. Physical Development Committee-** Mr. Wheeler said that the Physical Development Committee will meet in March to allocate additional 2024 DLTA funds to projects.
- d. Rural Caucus–** Ms. Settles reported that the Caucus will meet again in the Spring of 2024.
- e. Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization** – Ms. Pierce reported that the Southern Worcester County Economic Development Strategy was approved by the Economic Development Administration, and now the region qualifies for additional funding.
- f. Sub-regional–**
 - Chairperson Drobner asked two sub-region representatives to provide updates for their respective sub-regions.
 - i. North Sub-Region:** Mr. Lies stated that the Town of Holden may be the site of a new Starbucks location, on Route 122A. Mr. Lies stated that there are traffic concerns.
 - ii. Southeast Sub-Region:** Mr. Baker stated that he attended the Town of Sutton Select Board presentation, and he believed that Ms. Krishnan and the CMRPC staff did an outstanding job. Mr. Baker said that the discussion was 45 minutes long, and residents received a lot of information accurately and diplomatically.

8. New Business:



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- Ms. Pierce noted that the Annual Meeting & Awards Dinner will be held at the Wachusett Mountain Ski Area, with an opportunity for attendees to ride the SkyRide up to the summit of Wachusett Mountain.
- Ms. Pierce asked the Chairman if the Quarterly Meeting in March will be hybrid or fully remote. The Chairman decided that the Quarterly Meeting will be fully remote.

9. Adjournment: Upon a motion by Mr. Hassinger, seconded by Mr. Howland to adjourn at 8:47 p.m. **The vote by roll call was unanimous. Motion approved.**

Respectfully submitted by Anthony Senesi, CMRPC.