

**MONTACHUSETT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
DECEMBER 29, 2009**

*The Executive Committee acted on behalf of the Planning Commission.*

**1. PRELIMINARIES**

V. Koivumaki called for a moment of silence for the passing of Carl Eaton, father of Glenn Eaton.

**PRESENT**

R. Grubb (A), Gardner; G. Richard (M), Phillipston; J. White (M), Winchendon; V. Koivumaki (M), Lancaster; A. Pease (M), Ashby

**ABSENT**

M. Whitney (A), Ashburnham; B. Whitney (M), Ashburnham; J. Meehan (M), Athol; A. Pease (A), Ashby; W. Stacy (A), Ashby; J. Gibbons, (M), Ayer; C J. Ryan (A), Ayer; P. Lowitt (N/V), Devens; P. Caron (M), Fitchburg; A. Gross (M), Gardner; D. Manugian, (M) Groton; A. Eliot (A), Groton; K. McGuire Minar (M), Harvard; L. Wallace (A), Harvard; L. Brisbois (M), Hubbardston; P. Hale (A), Hubbardston; E. Christoph (A), Lancaster; J. Raymond (A), Leominster; T. Bodkin (M), Lunenburg; E. Anderson (A), Petersham; C. Colburn (M); V. Andreliunas (M), Royalston; J. Hardie (A), Royalston; Shirley; J. Lynch, (A) Shirley; C. Hajdu (M), Sterling; R. Columbus (A), Templeton; P. McCloy (A), Townsend; P. Haley (M), Templeton; N. Thalheimer (M), Townsend; A. Sears (M), Westminster; J. Kreidler (A), Winchendon.

**STAFF**

Stephanie Brow, Jason Stanton, Brad Harris, Linda Parmenter, George Kahale, Nancy Belliveau

**2. APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 24, 2009 MEETING MINUTES**

J. White made a motion to approve the minutes of November 24, 2009 with the addition of some verbiage in section 4.1 Regional Reviews - MassDevelopment – Environmental Notification Form – MacPherson Well Pump Station Upgrade. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

**3. TREASURER'S REPORT**

3.1 Cash Situation

3.2 Approval of the December 2009 Warrant

J. Meehan read the December 29, 2009 cash schedule. Balance after last warrant \$133,175.20; Total receipts this month \$253,610.26. Total cash on hand before this warrant \$388,754.76; Less: amount of this warrant \$194,152.30; Balance after last warrant \$194,602.46.

J. White moved to accept the December 2009 cash schedules as read, subject to audit and placed on file. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously

**4. REGIONAL REVIEWS – INFORMATIONAL**

**4.1 Department of Conservation and Recreation - Acquisition of Land - Ashburnham**

Under MA General Laws Section 40I of Chapter 7, requires that the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) notify the board of selectmen, regional planning agency, and local legislators at least one hundred twenty (120) days prior to any purchase or significant change in use of one or more acres of real property by the Commonwealth.

Pursuant to said General Laws, the DCR is considering the acquisition of approximately 154 +/- acres of land, or other property interest therein, in the Town of Ashburnham. The property is currently undeveloped. If acquired by the Commonwealth, the property will be used for conservation and passive recreation purposes as part of the Ashburnham State Forest.

## **4.2 Town of Templeton - Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Notice of Intent to Request Release of Funds (NOI/RROF) – Templeton**

On or about December 23, 2009 the Town of Templeton will request the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to release the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds under Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Acts of 1974 (PL 93-383), as amended for the following projects:

Back Bay Infrastructure Improvements Project: Construction

For the purpose of : installing new water and storm water drainage lines, re-grading and paving roads, and rehabilitating and installing sidewalks on portions of Summer Street and portions of Pleasant Street.

The Town of Templeton has determined that the project will have no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA PL 91-190) is not required.

Objections must be prepared and submitted in accordance with the required procedure (24 Code of Federal Regulations Part 58), and may be addressed to: Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant, Department of Housing & Community Development, 100 Cambridge Street, Suite 300, Boston, MA 02114.

## **5. STATUS REPORTS**

### **5.1 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & HOUSING**

#### **5.1.1 Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**

MRPC staff is working on three (3) grant applications to be submitted on February 12, 2010. They are as follows:

Lancaster, Townsend and Ashburnham Regional Housing Rehab Program and Public Social Service project

Ashburnham-Senior Center Design

Ashby Housing Rehab and Infrastructure Projects

Public Forums have been held in all participating towns. Some of the Public Hearings have been held already with more being scheduled for December and January.

#### **REPORT for FY 2009**

**Ashby/Hubbardston Joint Housing Rehab Grant:** The Housing Rehab Specialist has conducted the initial inspection on the first four (4) cases in both Towns. Letters have been sent to Mass Historic for the first two cases.

#### **REPORT for FY 2007:**

**Lancaster Regional Housing Rehab Program (LLTA):** The Town requested an extension until March 30, 2010 to allow the Town of Townsend to add program income funds to this grant in order to assist a Townsend homeowner with some emergency issues. Once DHCD has approved this extension request, we will have the Housing Rehab Specialist will conduct the initial inspection and create the work specs

#### **5.1.2 Septic Management Program Ashby DEP Funds for Septic Replacement Projects**

**REPORT:** Nothing new to report this month.

#### **5.1.3 American Dream Down Payment Initiative (ADDI)**

**REPORT:** Two cases to close this month

## **5.2 COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING**

### **5.2.1 Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA)**

As part of this contract, MRPC provides assistance to communities seeking grant funds to improve economic vitality. MRPC staff has been working to assist Ashburnham, Ashby, Lancaster, and Townsend to prepare FY2010 Community Development Block Grant applications. This year, block grants are due on February 12<sup>th</sup>.

The federal Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration approved the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission's (MRPC) request for \$125,360 to assist with a disaster mitigation plan in support of emergency back-up power sources. The goal of the plan will be to increase resilience and sustainability in the face of future power outages caused by disasters. A press conference announcing the grant was held on Friday, December 11, 2009.

As part of this project, a consultant will be hired to assess the capacity, structural deficiencies, and inadequacies of the electrical grid system throughout the region. MRPC staff worked to prepare a Request for Qualifications that will be used to hire the consultant. MRPC is also working to form a Regional Energy Advisory Committee.

### **5.2.2 Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

**2007 Grant Award:** All funds for projects under the 2007 grant award have been expended and close-out documents were completed and forwarded to EPA in December 2009. This will be the final status report for this project.

**2009 Grant Award:** MRPC's Environmental Consultant TRC, has been working since being hired in August on the following Environmental Site Assessments (ESA) that were approved by the Montachusett Region Brownfield Reuse Initiative Committee and EPA in July.

Phase II ESA: **13-17 West Lynde Street, Gardner.**

Phase II ESA: **58 Rear Main Street, Gardner.**

Phase II ESA (further assessment): **Nashua River Rail Trail Parking Lot, Ayer.**

Phase I ESA: **155 Airport Road, Fitchburg.**

Phase II ESA: **80 Lunenburg Street, Fitchburg**

Phase II ESA: **360 Pearl Street, Fitchburg**

All projects have been completed with the exception of 360 Pearl Street, Fitchburg. TRC anticipates completing this project in January 2010.

A Montachusett Region Brownfield Reuse Initiative (MRBRI) Committee meeting has been scheduled for January 14 at 1 p.m. at MRPC Offices where a status report on all projects conducted along with budget information will be presented. To date, all funds have been allocated to projects and approximately \$114,845 of the \$200,000 grant award has been expended.

### **5.2.3 Joint Board of Selectmen, Devens**

MRPC completed a draft of the Economic Assessment and presented it to JBOS on December 10. The assessment included financial data gathered necessary to provide a gross level of comparison of revenue and expenses in order to determine if sufficient revenue exists to cover expenses. MRPC expects to complete the final report and conclude this project in January.

### **5.2.4 Westminster Zoning**

MRPC is providing technical assistance to improve the Westminster Zoning Bylaw by making recommendations to insure that the Town's Industrial Zones and Commercial Zones are enhanced to further promote economic vitality in the community while improving the tax base. MRPC met with the Westminster Planning Board on December

7<sup>th</sup> to review work products. To conclude this project, the final report will be presented and forwarded to the town in January. MRPC also met with the Westminster Mixed Use Overlay District Committee on December 16<sup>th</sup>.

### **5.2.5 Templeton Town Center Master Plan**

MRPC is providing technical assistance to conduct and complete a Templeton Center Common Master Planning Project. MRPC prepared and forwarded a draft report to the community and will meet with the Planning Board on December 29 to present it.

G. Kahale indicated that John Hume and Sheri Bean were currently in Templeton presenting the Master Plan at the Planning Board meeting.

## **5.3 DISTRICT LOCAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS**

### **5.3.1 Ayer: Professional Planning and Technical Assistance to Develop a Green Communities Designation**

Project completed.

### **5.3.2 Harvard Wastewater Management System**

Final Report has been completed for the study to identify State and Federal grant sources, and define the requirements and eligibility for property owners to receive low cost financing or grant for improvements to the septic system or assist eligible property owners with betterment onsite connections costs.

### **5.3.3 Lancaster Group Procurement**

Project completed.

### **5.3.4 Lancaster Shared Conservation Agent and Veterans Agent**

Project completed.

### **5.3.5 Regional Special Needs Shelter**

A final meeting of the shelter subcommittee of the Montachusett Region Emergency Planning Committee (MREPC) was held on December 17, 2009 at the Fitchburg Fire Department Headquarters report at which time the draft report was discussed and reviewed. A final report version has been prepared for the communities and subcommittee members. The report provided information related to the development and location of a Regional Shelter to serve the requirements of the special needs population in the communities of Fitchburg, Leominster and Lunenburg.

## **5.4 GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS)**

### **5.4.1 Trail Inventory Project**

All trail and attribute data has been completed and draft maps have been sent to the individual communities for their review. The trail inventory project has been completed for Ashby. The MRPC is waiting for comments from Fitchburg and Lunenburg in order to finalize this round of Trail Inventory. All work is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

### **5.4.2 Lancaster Open Space**

This project has been completed.

### **5.4.3 Road Segment Crash Analysis**

Analysis is being performed with relation to crash location data relative to road segments. This analysis is being performed in order to locate dangerous road segments in hopes of initiating safety improvements. This project is currently on hold.

### **5.4.4 Route 140 Task Force Mapping**

Mapping continues to be completed regarding the Route 140 Task Force, including 3-D application mapping for particular areas of interest along Route 140. This project is expected to be ongoing throughout the next several months.

#### **5.4.5 Templeton Town Common Master Plan Mapping**

This project has been completed.

#### **5.4.6 MART Bus Route System Mapping**

The MRPC is in the process of updating bus route data for the Gardner & Fitchburg/Leominster Fixed Bus Routes. This updated data will be used to create maps that will be included in the MART System Map & Schedule pamphlets. The MRPC is awaiting MART's comments before continuing with the project.

#### **5.4.7 MART Bus Shelter Locating**

Staff has collected GPS data and pictures relative to the location of MART Bus Shelters. A draft map has been delivered to MART. The MRPC is awaiting MART's comments before continuing with the project.

#### **5.4.8 Traffic Count Mapping**

Staff is working to add point location data to 1400+ traffic count locations in the region. Once this process is complete traffic count data will be joined to the point location data to allow further mapping and data analysis tasks to be completed.

### **5.5 TRANSIT**

#### **5.5.1 Expansion of MART Storage Facility**

The construction of the expansion of the Vehicle Storage and Bus Wash Facility is underway and progressing. Contaminated Soil has been discovered at some section of the site during earth work. Building foundation are progressing and the retaining wall at the south end of the property; Water and Sewer lines connection have been completed. The rehab work on the old building has begun. MART anticipates project completion by the end of December, 2010.

#### **5.5.2 Wachusett/Gardner Commuter Rail Extension**

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, MEPA Environmental Office held a public meeting to receive public input on the Environmental Notification Form submitted by

The Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) for the proposed project of the Wachusett Station and the layover facility. The Project involves construction of a new passenger station and appurtenant facilities, and requires the relocation of train staging functions for both the MBTA and Pan Am Southern, as well as upgrades to one of the two existing mainline tracks from the present terminus of the Fitchburg Line to a proposed MBTA layover facility approximately 1.5 miles west of the proposed Wachusett Station. The meeting was well attended by Fitchburg and Westminster public Officials and residents from both communities.

J. Meehan asked if there was going to be any action along the commuter rail tracks in Gardner.

G. Kahale indicated that the study was funded to look at the possibility of taking the train through to Gardner.

Discussion followed regarding the history of the railways and tracking in the Montachusett Region.

#### **5.5.3 Ayer Parking Facility**

MRPC Staff has completed the assessment study for Ayer Commuter Rail parking facility at the Rail Trail parking lot Location. MRPC has submitted the final report to MART.

G. Kahale indicated that the parking study has been completed by the MRPC and released to the town of Ayer and a copy has also been sent to local media.

#### **5.5.4 Parking Expansion at N. Leominster Station**

Mr. Kahale continue to work with the consultant Jacobs Engineering of Boston on the architectural and the engineering design alternatives for the expansion of N. Leominster parking garage structure facility for the Four-hundred (400) plus parking spaces to be constructed at North Leominster Train Station. A meeting was held on November 24, 2009 with the consultant to discuss design alternatives for the expansion of N. Leominster parking garage structure.

V. Koivumaki asked if this parking garage will be full to capacity, as soon as it is built.

G. Kahale replied that it would most likely be full due to its close proximity to Route 2.

#### **5.5.5 Fitchburg Commuter Rail Improvement**

More than \$10 million in federal stimulus money will go toward the first phase of a massive rail improvement project on the Fitchburg Commuter Rail line, Gov. Deval Patrick announced Monday at a press conference near the tracks off Pioneer Drive in Leominster.

The \$10.2 million, from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, is being spent to do interlocking work -- switches that enable trains to move from one track to another -- on 13 miles of rail between Ayer and Fitchburg. U.S. Rep. John Olver, attended the press conference, along with state Sen. Jennifer Flanagan, state Sen. James Eldridge, and state Reps. Dennis Rosa, Stephen DiNatale, Jennifer Benson, and Harold Naughton. Also Federal Transit Administration, Cities Mayors, MBTA Officials and many others attended.

### **5.6 TRANSPORTATION**

#### **5.6.1 FFY2010 - 2013 Montachusett TIP Amendment**

The Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) met on December 9<sup>th</sup> to endorse an Amendment to the FFY2010-2013 Montachusett Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Meeting in the midst of a snowstorm the MPO endorsed an amendment that moved the Route 140 Gardner project to a FFY2010 as an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), or Economic Stimulus, project and added to the FFY2010 target project list South Street in Westminster at \$3,000,000. In addition, the MPO voted to release for a 45 day public comment period an Amendment to the Montachusett Public Participation Plan (PPP). The PPP outlines the process for public involvement in the development of Regional Transportation Plans (RTP), Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP), Unified Planning Work Programs (UPWP) and long range plans. Provisions within the PPP establish a thirty (30) day public comment period for draft documents or amendments requiring MPO endorsement. As a result of recent time specific actions, the Montachusett MPO seeks to amend the current PPP to allow for a reduced public comment period. This Amendment will add the following provision to the Procedures of Public Participation Process within the PPP:

At their discretion, the Montachusett MPO may vote to abbreviate the public comment period for a period of not less than ten (10) days under what the MPO considers to be extraordinary circumstances. Any abbreviated comment period will follow the procedures and provisions outlined in the PPP.

The 45 day comment period for the PPP and its amendments will run from Wednesday December 16, 2009 to the end of business on Friday January 29, 2010. This meeting as well as the January 2010 MRPC and MJTC meetings will also serve as opportunities for public comment. The amendment will be reviewed and endorsed by the MPO at a meeting to be scheduled.

#### **5.6.2 Route 140 Safety Improvement Task Force**

MRPC staff continued the data collection efforts on as part of the Route 140 Safety Improvement Task Force Study. Recently, staff collected field data on identified culverts in Westminster and Sterling. Culverts were located and conditions of the structures and the surrounding waterways were recorded and documented. Culverts were raised by

both communities as a major issue to the operation of Route 140. Data is intended to be overlaid with other information, such as crash data, pavement conditions and flooding, to determine possible problems and potential solutions. The next meeting of the Task Force is currently scheduled for January 21, 2010 in Princeton.

### **5.6.3 Central MA Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Stakeholder Input Meeting**

MRPC staff attended the Central MA Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Stakeholder Input meeting on December 15<sup>th</sup> held at MassDOT District 3 in Worcester. MassDOT is continuing the process of updating the Central MA Regional ITS Architecture plan conducted in 2005. This meeting was one of the first conducted to discuss ITS in the region with those individuals, organizations and departments that have direct input to the implementation and sharing of ITS data. MassDOT is the lead agency in this effort and will continue to organize and schedule meetings throughout the process.

## **6. OLD BUSINESS**

J. Meehan asked if there was any way to mitigate the impact of truck traffic from Graves Concrete, on residential roads in Athol.

B. Harris stated that Mr. Meehan could call MassDOT to find out what is being done through the state to alleviate the effect. Mr. Harris also indicated that he would contact MassDOT himself to gather any information possible concerning the truck traffic.

## **7. NEW BUSINESS**

There was no old business for discussion.

## **8. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, V. Koivumaki adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.