

MONTACHUSETT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRPC)

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2022

7:00 PM

REMOTE MEETING

MINUTES

1. Open Meeting, Introductions, and Announcements

Chairman G. Corbosiero called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Chairman G. Corbosiero stated in accordance with Governor Baker's Covid-19 Executive Order regarding the Open Meeting Law and remote participation, votes will be taken through Roll Call.

2. Approval of October 6, 2022, MRPC Minutes – Approval of Commissioners Requested

Having no objections to the October 6, 2022 minutes, A. Pease moved to accept the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded.

Roll call vote followed:

A. Pease- yes
A. Reid- yes
D. Valliere- abstain
G. Tillotson- yes
J. DeRoy- abstain
J. Telepciak- abstain
K. Nartowicz- yes
R. Hoyt- abstain
S. Donahue- yes

3. Cash Schedule – October 2022 – Acceptance of Commissioners Requested

L. Quinlivan read the October 2022 cash schedule. The opening balance for October 2022 was \$848,423.23, total receipts and transfers this month were \$86,508.60, total cash on hand before this warrant was \$934,931.83, less the amount of this warrant of \$100,448.01, left a balance after the warrant of \$834,483.82.

Having no objections to the cash schedule, A. Pease moved to accept the October 2022 cash schedule as presented, subject to audit. The motion was seconded.

Roll call vote followed:

A. Pease- yes
A. Reid- yes
D. Valliere- yes
G. Tillotson- yes
G. Corbosiero- yes
J. DeRoy- yes
J. Telepciak- yes
K. Nartowicz- yes
R. Hoyt- yes
S. Donahue- yes

4. Guest Announcements and Questions

George Kahale, MART Representative presented the following:

- **Fitchburg Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC)**
MART Fitchburg (ITC) rehabilitation project (roof replacement and a color change to blue) is underway; MART anticipates a completion of the project by December 2022.
- **MART Bus Shelters Grant**
MART has been awarded \$180,000 for Bus Shelters through the Shared Streets and Spaces Program under MassDOT for FFY23, MART will be installing Bus Shelters in Fitchburg, Gardner, and Athol. MART has installed recently a new Bus Shelter one at 75 East Broadway in Gardner, and one at Putnam Place, 166 Boulder Dr. in Fitchburg: under 5307 funding program.
- **Ayer Depot Square Pedestrian Plaza**
the construction of Phase III of Depot Square Pedestrian Plaza located at the MBTA Station is underway. Phase III of the project is the Restroom Facility, the Fountain, the Waiting Shelter, and the Lighting of the Plaza. Also, MART is installing Fencing at the Rail Trail East of the parking facility. MART anticipates the completion of the two projects by the end of November 2022.
- **Athol-Orange Bus Route**
As part of MART system wide bus route evaluation and schedule update. Effective Monday, October 31, 2022. Athol-Orange bus route will run on a new schedule servicing a new neighborhood Pequig/Exchange Street area and a new stop at North Quabbin Family Physicians.

G. Tillotson invited all to attend the ribbon cutting at the new waiting shelter at the Ayer train station, Monday at 10:00 am. G. Tillotson stated he was surprised to see the new fence installed on the opposite side of the sidewalk and the rail trail as he did not remember seeing the fence on the plans. With the new fence, how is the snow going to be removed? There is no place to put the snow. G. Kahale stated the reason for the fence is to keep the leaves out of the garage. G. Tillotson stated it seems as though we put up a 7' fence to keep leaves out of the garage and took away a place for snow to go. G. Corbosiero asked if G. Kahale could look into this and get back to us at the next meeting with an explanation of where they intend to put snow when the situation presents itself. G. Kahale confirmed he will have a discussion with the engineer and will report back at the next meeting.

M. Bohart stated the bus shelter at Boulder Dr. looks fantastic. She also stated the public has asked if all of the bus locations have been decided or if MART is still taking recommendations. G. Kahale stated MART is still taking recommendations and if there are any recommendations, they can be sent to him.

5. Administrative Matters

5.1 New Service for Local Officials: Lunch and Learn Series – Survey Closed – Results to be Presented at this Meeting – Information Only

MRPC would like to provide information on topics of the most interest to municipal officials in the Montachusett Region. One tried-and-true interactive information delivery system is a “Lunch and Learn Series.” Management created and issued a survey on the possibility of creating such a program in October. The survey was emailed to 270 local officials in October; 61 (22.6%) survey respondents completed this survey as of October 31st.

Four questions were asked. The questions and some or all of their respective responses can be found, below. Detailed responses can be found in the full report provided at tonight’s meeting of the Planning Commissioners.

Differences in the percentages provided, below and those found in the full report are due to rounding.

Q1. If the MRPC offered a “Lunch and Learn” series, on which days of the month, from Noon through 1:00 p.m. would you be able to attend (check off as many as you wish).

The first week of the month was the clear winner. The top three choices were:

- First Wednesday of the month, 44.3%, 27 respondents
- First Tuesday of the month, 42.6%, 26
- First Thursday of the month, 39.3%, 24

Q2. What topics would draw you and/or your fellow local officials into the virtual meeting room? (Check off as many as you wish.)

New Federal and State Acts, grant funding, zoning, benefits of GIS, and MBTA communities were the five most important issues of the 13 provided to survey respondents as can be seen, below.

- Updates on recently passed state and federal legislation
 - 83%, 49
- Government grants for communities and regional organizations
 - 81%, 48
- State or local zoning issues
 - 66%, 39
- Geographic information system (GIS) use and benefits to communities
 - 53%, 31
- Updates to the MBTA communities’ program
 - 49%, 29

An “Other” category was provided to those taking the survey. All responses provided can be found in the report.

Q3. Would you be able to act as an expert on a topic?

Two respondents indicated that they could speak on topics while 20 were unsure. 36 of those responding wished to hear from others.

Q4. If you answered “Yes” to question #3, what topic(s) would you like to present to your peers?

Potential speakers chose the following, four topics on which to educate their peers:

- Downtown Revitalization
- Needs of Age 60+ individuals
- Hazard Mitigation Planning Process
- Open Space and Recreation Planning Process

The first week of the month was the top choice of the survey respondents. However, holding “Lunch and Learns” during the first week may conflict with staff preparation time needed for monthly Commissioners’ meetings. We’d like the input of our Commissioners at our November 3rd meeting to choose the best date of the month to hold these meetings.

Our first, and successive, “Lunch and Learn” meetings will be held from Noon through 1:00 p.m. The first date has yet to be determined but will possibly take place in January 2023. A confirmatory notice will be issued to all local officials before the first official session.

5.2 Employee Morale-Boosting Programming – Information Only

Under COVID-19, life has been challenging. People’s lives have been turned upside-down, both at home and at work.

Led by Holly Ford, Administrative Manager, MRPC instituted a program to ensure that employee morale is addressed by management. Therefore, every 60+/- days, all employees are provided with brief diversions from work as they participate in events such as “apple cider and donut day” and “slippers at work day.”

Recently, all employees from our four departments were invited to competitively decorate their respective work areas for Halloween. Independent judges chose the Transportation Department’s entry as best! ... **Congratulations Transportation Planners!**

More events are planned throughout the balance of FY23. While promoting some fun at work, management notes that team building among colleagues has increased.

5.3 MRPC and MEC, Inc. Records Preservation: Digitization of Documents – Information Only on 11/3/22 and Action to be Requested 12/8/22

On November 8th, management will meet with a representative from Ricoh to obtain a quote for the digitizing and scanning of many documents currently in storage (onsite). Examples of records include plans, financial (account payables and accounts receivables for many fiscal years), MA DEP Title 5 Septic System Repair files, and MEC receivership program files.

Once records have been digitized, some or most of the files in question would be

eliminated to remove bulk in the office and free up storage space, but only after obtaining the approval of the Massachusetts Public Records Division under the Secretary of State's Office. Management recommends that all such files are digitally recorded (scanned) and, hopefully, reduce the amount of paper stored onsite.

5.4 Additional Services to Communities with related Funding: Digital Equity Planning – Information Only

Below, please find an excerpt from the “Request for Qualifications for Municipal Digital Equity Planning Services published by Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MassTech).”

“Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (“MassTech”) on behalf of the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (“MBI”) is issuing this Solicitation for Municipal Digital Equity Planning Services (the “Program”) (Solicitation No. 2023-MBI-03).

About the Program

The ability to engage in digital equity planning activities will be a critical step for municipal leaders and staff to build a broad understanding of how internet access, or lack thereof, affects residents of their community. MBI is issuing this Request for Qualifications for municipal digital equity planning services to solicit responses from qualified contractors with experience in digital equity and broadband planning.

MBI intends to offer municipalities two planning options to pursue digital equity activities with the support from a selected prequalified planning consultant.

Digital Equity Charrette: This planning option is intended to be a low barrier to entry option to support municipalities with limited staff capacity and existing knowledge or activities related to digital equity

Digital Equity Planning: This planning option is designed to provide municipalities with an opportunity to execute a comprehensive planning exercise. For the Digital Equity Planning option, consultants will provide expanded data collection and dive into deeper conversations and engagement with plan participants.

Both planning options are intended to yield similar outcomes but will differ in process, duration of the planning activities, and level of detail and nuanced information provided to the municipality as an outcome of the planning process. Municipalities will be able to take advantage of both planning options if they so choose, thus enabling a pathway for municipalities to advance their thinking related to digital equity planning over time.

MRPC submitted its proposal to be considered a qualified provider of services to Montachusett communities under this program.

A Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for communities is expected to be published by MassTech in mid-November. 27:00

5.5 Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce Executive Roundtable Program – Information Only

MRPC's Executive Director continues to participate in the above-referenced program as he attended his second session on Wednesday, October 26th. These sessions attended

by executives from a variety of private sector enterprises provide an excellent forum for all to expand human resources skills and learn more about managing organizations through a crisis. This month's "takeaways" for MRPC's Executive Director revolved around conducting long-range work planning, the importance of delegating, and lining up sufficient resources for current and future work.

5.6 Invest Surplus to Engage Grant Writing Consultant – Action Item

REPORT

MRPC needs to build its capacity. Our organization should be delivering more services to our communities, especially in the areas of Open Space and Recreation, Hazardous Mitigation, Housing Production, and Master Planning.

All planners are expected to contribute to identifying service gaps, identifying financial resources to deliver services, and pursuing grants and other funds where appropriate. However, in defense of the planning staff, there is a struggle with the need to deliver services and pursue new funding.

To augment the grant-writing capacity of existing staff, MRPC's Executive Director recommends that the Commissioners approve the temporary hiring of a grant-writing consultant. The party to be engaged would work with Planners to pursue the funding that is necessary for the MRPC to boost its services available to communities. This is especially important in the era of so many funding opportunities made available to local, regional, and state governments due to the provision of dollars available from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and other federal legislation passed due to the economic decline brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current balance in the Massachusetts Municipal Depository Trust (MMDT) account is \$409,989.95; \$363,526.53 in the MMDT general account and \$46,463.42 in our MMDT Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB). In December 2018, \$90,000 in funds that were originally returned to MRPC from MEC, Inc. were transferred from MRPC's checking account and into the agency's MMDT general account. The Executive Director respectfully requests that up to \$50,000 of this \$90,000 amount be invested in this grant consultant hiring proposal in FY23.

Likely, the entire amount of funds will not be used. The dollar amount should provide MRPC with a significant amount of flexibility to find one or more parties to deliver grant-writing services, increase revenue, and boost our capacity to increase our services.

MRPC will comply with the State's Procurement Statute (G.L. of MA, c. 30B) in searching for one or more grant-writing consultants.

The Executive Director will provide status reports to the Commissioners no less than quarterly and no more than monthly concerning this increase in capability.

An assessment of the impact of this new strategy will be provided to the Commissioners before the MRPC's FY24 Budget is adopted to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the initiative and to determine if outsourcing of some grant writing services should continue into FY24.

RESOLUTION

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission approves the transfer of \$50,000 from the Massachusetts Municipal Depository Trust account into the MRPC's checking account and authorizes its Executive Director to engage with one or more grant-writing consultant(s) to prepare competitive proposals, thus increasing revenue to the MRPC and growing our planning services to cities and towns in the Montachusett Region.

G. Tillotson moved to accept the resolution as presented. Motion was seconded.

Roll call vote followed:

A. Pease- yes
A. Reid- yes
D. Valliere- yes
G. Tillotson- yes
G. Corbosiero- yes
J. DeRoy- yes
J. Telepciak- yes
K. Nartowicz- yes
R. Hoyt- yes
S. Donahue- yes
M. Bohart- yes

5.7 Other Administrative Matters

MRPC may receive additional DLTA planning funding and, if so, management will report on the impact on the organization's FY23 Budget on December 8th (next Commissioners' meeting). Any other funding awards will also be provided on December 8th. Any addition in funding would positively affect this year's budget by, probably, significantly reducing our originally projected deficit of 13.2% in June 2022.

6. Department Updates

6.1 Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

No new information at this time

6.2 Planning & Development

The deadline for the MBTA Communities options for technical assistance and Mass Housing Partnership technical assistance is November 10, 2022. If your community is interested, MRPC is listed as a consultant on their list. If you have not been receiving these emails and would like to, please contact K. Chapman.

MRPC Planning and Development department recently attended a two-day training on MBI Digital Equity Planning Services. MRPC will send an email as information becomes available.

J. Telepciak asked if Royalston will be able to benefit from this service. K. Chapman stated this is the information that will be collected to help those communities in need. It is very important for all communities to get involved.

K. Chapman reminded everyone the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative training session schedule is out and all meetings are virtual meetings. We will resend an email with the information.

6.3 Transit & Transportation

The MJTC meeting will be held Wednesday, November 9th at 2:30 pm and the MPO meeting will be held Wednesday, November 16th at 1:00 pm. Both meetings will be held virtually. We will be discussing some possible TIP amendments and also our Regional Transportation Plan.

7. New Business

This time is being reserved for topics that the chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed.

8. Adjournment

There being no further business G. Tillotson moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded. The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

This meeting will be recorded by the GoToMeeting app and will be made available for viewing on <https://www.youtube.com/user/MontachusettRegion/videos>.

This notice is subject to change with reasonable notice provided to all.

Meeting Attendance					
<u>Name</u>	<u>M/A</u>	<u>Representing</u>	<u>Appointment Date</u>	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Janssens, Leo	A	Ashburnham	7.2021		X
Hoyt, Roger	M	Ashburnham	7.2011	X	
Stacy, Wayne	A	Ashby	7.2021		X
Pease, Alan	M	Ashby	7.2001	X	
Bialecki, Rebecca	A	Athol	7.2020.		X
Doherty, Jacqueline	M	Athol	7.2020.		X
Copeland, Shaun	A	Ayer	7.2020.		X
Tillotson, Geoffrey	M	Ayer	7.2022	X	
Vacant	A	Clinton			X
Duffy, Phil	M	Clinton	12.2011		X
Lowitt, Peter	N/V	DREZ	7.2001		X

Bohart, Mary Jo	A	Fitchburg	7.2021	X	
Butland, Alyne	M	Fitchburg	7.2020.		X
DeRoy, Jessica	A	Gardner	7.2021	X	
Swartz, Robert	M	Gardner	7.2019		X
Cunningham, Peter	M	Groton	7.2016		X
Burke, Russell	A	Groton	7.2022		X
Minar, Kara	A	Harvard	7.2021		X
Donahue, Stacia	M	Harvard	7.2018	X	
Williams, Jeff	A	Hubbardston	7.2022		X
Livdahl, Alice	M	Hubbardston	7.2021		X
Vacant	A	Lancaster			X
Williston, Russ	M	Lancaster	11.2018		X
Vacant	A	Leominster			X
Valliere, Dean	M	Leominster	7.2019	X	
Vacant	A	Lunenburg			X
Reid, Amanda	M	Lunenburg	7.2020.	X	
Ermini, Annette	A	Petersham	7.2022		X
Vacant	M	Petersham			X
Jackson, Melanie	A	Phillipston	7.2022		X
Telepciak, John	M	Phillipston	7.2001	X	
Barclay, James	A	Royalston	7.2017		X
Nartowicz, Kyle	M	Royalston	7.2015	X	
Oelfke, Bill	A	Shirley	7.2020.		X
Yocum, Barbara	M	Shirley	8.2017		X
Kilcoyne, John	A	Sterling	7.2014		X
Page, Patty	M	Sterling	7.2019		X

Bennett, Jeff	A	Templeton	7.2020.		X
Rich, Dennis	M	Templeton	7.2017		X
Sexton-Diranian, Chaz	A	Townsend	7.202		X
Shifrin, Laura	M	Townsend	7.2019		X
Vacant	A	Westminster			X
Buckman, Gregg	M	Westminster	7.2021		X
Ward, Rick	A	Winchendon	7.2019	X	
Corbosiero, Guy	M	Winchendon	7.2011	X	

Staff: G. Eaton, H. Ford, L. Quinlivan, K. Chapman, J. Stanton, B. Doherty

Guests: George Kahale, MART Representative

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS DISTRIBUTED AT THE MEETING:

October 6, 2022 MRPC Minutes

November 3, 2022 Agenda

November 3, 2022 Handout

Lunch and Learn PDF

MART Status Report November 2022