



MONTACHUSETT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRPC)

REMOTE MEETING

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2023, 7:00 PM

Meeting Registration Link:

[November 9, 2023 MRPC Meeting Registration](#)

QR Code:



MRPC Meeting Material:

[November 9, 2023 MRPC Meeting Material](#)

MINUTES

1. Open Meeting, Introductions and Announcements

This meeting is being held under Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, signed by Governor Healey on March 29, 2023, allowing local and regional governments to hold public meetings remotely or in a hybrid fashion. All votes will be taken by roll call. Chairperson L. Shifrin called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Roll call vote followed:

A. Pease- present
B. Yocum- present
D. Valliere- present
G. Corbosiero- present
K. Norton- present
K. Newman- present
K. Nartowicz- present
R. Hoyt- present
L. Shifrin- present
S. Donahue- present
G. Tillotson- present
K. Munroe- present
A. Reid- present

2. MRPC Minutes – October 5, 2023 – Approval of Commissioners Requested

Having no objections, G. Corbosiero moved to accept the October 5, 2023 minutes as presented, the motion was seconded.

Roll call vote followed:

A. Pease- yes
B. Yocum- abstain
D. Valliere- abstain
G. Corbosiero- yes
K. Norton- abstain
K. Newman- yes
K. Nartowicz- yes
R. Hoyt- yes
S. Donahue- yes
G. Tillotson- yes
K. Munroe- yes
A. Reid- yes
L. Shifrin- yes

3. Cash Schedule – October 2023 – Acceptance of Commissioners Requested

L. Quinlivan presented the October 2023 Cash Schedule. The opening balance for October 1, 2023 was \$685,716.39, total receipts and transfers for the month were \$284,201.89, total cash on hand before this warrant was \$969,918.28, less the amount of this warrant \$422,667.41, left a balance after the warrant of \$547,250.87.

Having no objections, G. Corbosiero moved to accept the October 2023 cash schedule as presented subject to audit. The motion was seconded.

Roll call vote followed:

A. Pease- yes
B. Yocum- yes
D. Valliere- yes
G. Corbosiero- yes
K. Norton- yes
K. Newman- yes
K. Nartowicz- yes
R. Hoyt- yes
S. Donahue- yes
G. Tillotson- yes
K. Munroe- yes
A. Reid- yes
L. Shifrin- yes

4. Guest Announcements and Questions

No guest announcements or questions

5. Administrative Matters

5.1 Digital Equity Planning – Outreach and Focus Group Presented by J. Legros, Senior Planner

Below is a summary of the “Top Ten” informational discussion points related to the Massachusetts Broadband Institute’s Municipal Digital Equity Planning program, which provides planning services through pre-qualified consultants related to digital equity planning. By applying for the program communities will be eligible for these services which can be provided as either a “Digital Equity Planning Charrette” or a “Digital Equity Plan”, depending on the community’s needs.

1. Digital Equity Planning services include either a Digital Equity Planning Charrette (public education and input forums), or the development of a Digital Equity Plan.
2. To receive free Digital Equity Planning services communities must apply now through the [online application](https://airtable.com/shrVgdSM8h102rv2t) (<https://airtable.com/shrVgdSM8h102rv2t>). Single-community applications are welcome and communities are encouraged to partner together for a regional planning process.
3. Benefits to communities include the ability to:
 - Engage in digital equity planning activities to build a broad understanding of how internet access, or lack thereof, affects residents;
 - Identify barriers to digital equity and help bridge the digital divide;
 - Develop strategic documents designed to identify community needs, interest, and key assets; and
 - Provide a framework to guide future municipal decision-making and potential investments and activities that will increase access and usage of the internet for populations most impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. This program provides an opportunity for cities and towns to access free consultant services to undertake digital equity planning work on a municipal or multi-town/regional basis.
5. MRPC is a pre-qualified Digital Equity Planning consultant and can provide Digital Equity Planning services to communities of the [Montachusett Region](#).
6. MRPC has been selected by MBI to provide Digital Equity Planning Consulting Services to develop Digital Equity Plans for the following Towns: Local Digital Equity Plans for the Towns of Ashby and the City of Leominster, Winchendon, and a Northwest County Regional Digital Equity Plan for the Towns of Phillipston, Royalston, and Templeton.
7. MRPC has published a NEW in-depth [Digital Equity Planning](https://www.mrpc.org/digital-equity-planning) program webpage (<https://www.mrpc.org/digital-equity-planning>) and collected an extensive list of additional related [Digital Equity Resources](https://www.mrpc.org/additional-resources) (<https://www.mrpc.org/additional-resources>)
8. Between now and December 31st, and possibly beyond, MRPC will be sending out a weekly informational outreach email and social media blasts updating you and your fellow local officials on this program and other Digital Equity topics and opportunities.
9. Don’t forget to take the Massachusetts Statewide Digital Equity Survey. Information from the survey will aid the development of a Massachusetts Digital Equity Plan and inform local and regional community plans throughout the Montachusett Region. The [Massachusetts Digital Equity Survey](https://made.civilspace.io/en/projects/ma-digital-equity/engagements/ma-sdep-public-survey/sections/1) can be taken at the following link: <https://made.civilspace.io/en/projects/ma-digital-equity/engagements/ma-sdep-public-survey/sections/1>
10. MRPC invites you to discuss how your community may benefit from the program and schedule a brief informational presentation at one of your upcoming community meetings or events.

Planning Staff at the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission are standing by to answer any questions you may have, and we look forward to the chance to speak with you more by phone, or at an upcoming community meeting or event. Please share this information, as attached, with any interested municipal staff or community stakeholders.

5.2 Budget Amendments - Action Requested

REPORT – Presented by G. Eaton

MRPC presents a draft revenue estimate each February prior to the upcoming Fiscal Year (FY). In February 2023, management presented a revenue estimate for FY24 and the Commissioners adopted the FY24 Budget in June 2023.

A significant increase in new contracts and revenue was realized by MRPC late in FY23 and early in FY24. In FY23, MRPC did not have enough employees to deliver all the required services and had to increase the number of employees needed in both the Planning and Development, and Transportation Departments. For approximately six months MRPC advertised for multiple positions, interviewed, and hired three new employees in the Planning and Development Department and one existing employee in the Planning and Development Department was promoted and transferred to the Transportation Department. Also, three Principal Planners were promoted to Senior Planners (one in Planning and Development and two in Transportation).

MRPC has nearly achieved parity between the amount of projected dollars to be earned in FY24 and the number of employees on the agency's payroll. As of this point in time we do not need to hire any additional full-time personnel (which the exception of hiring a Communications Intern [see section 5.3, below]), but we do need to present the status of the FY24 Budget and amend our FY24 Budget to reflect our current financial position.

Handouts for tonight's presentation include FY24 projected revenue, expenses, and salaries for all employees.

Below, please find a summary of the most pertinent points of this proposed FY24 Budget Amendment.

To construct a conservative FY24 Budget, and for the purpose of today's proposed Budget Amendment, Management eliminated potential revenue sources, as follows:

- Lancaster Master Plan \$123,500
- Westminster Master Plan \$123,500
- Lancaster Division of Capitol Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) Property Master Plan \$31,000
- Westminster Zoning Bylaw Review \$30,000
- Lancaster Housing Production Plan (HPP) \$46,400
- Templeton EDIC ED Plan \$39,000

The elimination of the revenues in the previous list would lead to a proposed deficit of \$219,054 (or 9.0%) If no additional revenue were to be obtained during the next eight months of the current fiscal year. These data points have been summarized in the following table.

ITEM	AMOUNT
CONSERVATIVE REVENUE PROJECTION	CONSERVATIVE REVENUE PROJECTION
Proposed total revenue for FY24	\$2,217,938
Proposed total expenditures for FY24	\$2,437,512
Proposed Surplus/(Deficit) for FY24	(\$219,574) (9.0%)
PROJECTED OVERHEAD RATE	PROJECTED OVERHEAD RATE
Total Indirect Costs (Admin Salaries, Leave Time Plus Office Costs)	\$1,111,832
Total Direct Labor Costs (Employee and Other Charges Directly to Contracts)	\$840,568
Projected Indirect Rate	132.27%

If none of these additional projects are awarded revenue is received in FY24, the agency will need to make cuts to personnel and expenses to eliminate the (\$219,574 or 9.0%) deficit. If we do not plug the deficit, then we will need to reduce our personnel and/or non-personnel expenses.

However, MRPC is only one-third of the way into the fiscal year. We have eight months to obtain local contracts and apply for additional grant opportunities to increase services to our communities and maintain the current level of human resources available to complete all contracted work.

Taking a more positive view, we believe that five of the six above contracts may be awarded to the MRPC coupled with the possibility that the likelihood of MRPC working on the Lancaster Master Plan is still up in the air.

If the five remaining (non-Lancaster) contracts are awarded, then we can chip away at the above projected deficit. This potential scenario could reduce the projected deficit to a total of \$98,249 (or 4.0%) within several months.

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The following table illustrates several possible funding scenarios throughout FY24.

ITEM	\$ AMOUNT (TOTAL REVENUE, EXPENDITURES, AND DEFICITS)	% PROJECTED DEFICIT
Proposed total revenue for FY24	\$2,217,938	
Proposed total expenditures for FY24	\$2,437,512	
Proposed Surplus/(Deficit) for FY24	(\$219,574)	(9.0%)
Westminster Master Plan \$123,500. 25% of the funds could be realized in FY24.	\$30,875	
NEW POTENTIAL DEFICIT	(\$188,699)	(7.7%)
Lancaster DCAMM Property Master Plan \$31,000. 75% of the funds could be realized in FY24.	\$23,250	
NEW POTENTIAL DEFICIT	(\$165,449)	(6.8%)
Westminster Zoning Bylaw Review \$30,000. 50% of the funds could be realized in FY24.	\$15,000	
NEW POTENTIAL DEFICIT	(\$150,449)	(6.2%)
Lancaster HPP \$46,400. 50% of the funds could be realized in FY24.	\$23,200	
NEW POTENTIAL DEFICIT	(\$127,249)	(5.2%)
Templeton EDIC ED Plan \$29,000. 100% of the funds could be realized in FY24.	\$29,000	
NEW POTENTIAL DEFICIT	(\$98,249)	(4.0%)

Regardless of which scenario occurs, MRPC's management team (Executive Director, Fiscal Director, Fiscal Assistant, GIS & IT Director, Planning and Development Director, and Transportation Projects Director), supported by the Senior Planners and others on staff as needed, to collectively and collaboratively manage the delivery of current services, create new service opportunities for our communities and region, pursue additional funding (such as from

the State's One Stop and Community Compact Programs), and hire new personnel and consultants to deliver planning and related services.

As a part of this FY24 Budget Amendment presentation, the Executive Director will also summarize the FY24 Budget in terms of revenue, expenses, personnel names, titles, and annual salaries.

RESOLUTION

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission hereby approves of the FY24 Budget Amendment as presented in the above REPORT and accompanying revenue and expenditure estimates and salaries for all personnel identified within the FY24 Budget document.

Having no objections, G. Tillotson moved to accept the resolution as presented. The motion was seconded.

Roll call vote followed:

A. Pease- yes
B. Yocum- yes
D. Valliere- yes
K. Norton- yes
K. Newman- yes
K. Nartowicz- yes
R. Hoyt- yes
S. Donahue- yes
G. Tillotson- yes
K. Munroe- yes
A. Reid- yes
L. Shifrin- yes

5.3 Hiring of Communications Intern - Action Requested

REPORT – Presented by G. Eaton

MRPC has an increasing need to ramp up communications to its communities and inhabitants in the region. We need to disseminate information through our email and social media accounts. Such communications are related to our annual transportation planning, Safe Streets for All (SS4A), Digital Equity Planning, and Economic Development Administration (EDA) contracts. Content on our website also needs to be updated and maintained. Additionally, there is a need for a communications outreach plan.

For several months, MRPC has been advertising for one or more Interns. We've received an application from a candidate that has experience in this area. An Interview was conducted on Tuesday, October 31st with Dorothy (Dottie) Bresnahan. Ms. Bresnahan currently provides similar services for two other organizations and is qualified to assist MRPC with all the above tasks. The Executive Director recommends the hiring of Dorothy ("Dottie") Bresnahan as a

Communications Intern at an hourly rate of \$17.00 for no more than ten hours per week for a period not to exceed six months.

RESOLUTION

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission hereby approves of the Executive Director's recommendation to hire Dorothy ("Dottie") Bresnahan as stated above to accomplish the aforementioned objectives.

Having no objections, B. Yocum moved to accept the resolution as presented. The motion was seconded.

Roll call vote followed:

A. Pease- yes
B. Yocum- yes
K. Norton- yes
K. Newman- yes
K. Nartowicz- yes
R. Hoyt- yes
S. Donahue- yes
G. Tillotson- yes
K. Munroe- yes
A. Reid- yes
L. Shifrin- yes
D. Valliere- yes

5.4 Other Administrative Matters

No other administrative matters were discussed.

6. Department Updates

6.1 Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

No new updates at this time.

6.2 Planning & Development

No new updates at this time.

6.3 Transit & Transportation

The next MPO meeting will be held November 15th at 1:00 pm. There will be a TIP amendment discussed and a possible new TIP amendment coming out on the transit side.

On Safe Streets 4 All grant, we have received seven proposals and are currently reviewing those proposals. We have a couple of interviews scheduled for next week and hope to have some selected by the end of next week.

7. New Business

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

L. Shifrin had a question for all of the community members. The town of Townsend is going to be addressing CPA, the Community Preservation Act, how many of the communities that are in the region participate in that? G. Eaton stated we can get that information for her and others. J. Stanton pulled up a website and put the link to the website in the chat section of the meeting. H. Ford emailed the link to all commissioners.

Townsend is wondering if MRPC helps with presentations for the CPA because of all the changes since the CPA first came out and because our town rejected it twice already. When it first came out, it came out as being a tax only on sale so if somebody was selling their home, it was an additional cost to the buyer. It failed because nobody felt it was equitable. Now it is up to the board of selectman. This would create a percentage of real estate tax that everybody will have to pay.

G. Eaton stated his takeaway from this question is that MRPC will try to schedule a lunch and learn for anyone interested, where we will bring in a professional who knows about this. We will have a day meeting and we will present the information to the commissioners at an MRPC for those who are unable to attend.

J. Legros stated we are currently in the process of creating a spreadsheet to assist with questions regarding CPA.

G. Tillotson stated Ayer adopted the CPA about a decade ago. Residents vote unanimously every year to keep it because it has brought landlords who had not been compliant and who had dangerous units into the fold because they're getting a guaranteed portion of the rent every month and they like that. It also allows us to keep people in town who are in trouble for a period of time, while they stay in the program and we're learning about that. G. Tillotson offered to speak with L. Shifrin if she would like and he is willing to share what he knows. The town feels the benefits outweigh the small percentage of the increase in tax.

G. Eaton reiterated that we would provide training and additionally, we will email a link showing a list of housing authorities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

8. Adjournment - The date of the next MRPC meeting – December 7, 2023, 7:00 p.m.

Having no objections, G. Tillotson moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 p.m. Motion was seconded.

This meeting will be recorded by the GoToMeeting app and will be made available for viewing at <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	
Leab, Doug	A	Ashby	7.2023		X
Pease, Alan	M	Ashby	7.2001	X	

Bialecki, Rebecca	A	Athol	7.2020.		X
Norton, Kathy	M	Athol	11.2023	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
Angus, Neil	N/V	DREZ	7.2023		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	7.2022		X
Burke, Russell	A	Groton	7.2016		X
Minar, Kara	A	Harvard	7.2021		X
Donahue, Stacia	M	Harvard	7.2018	X	
Kresge, Mark	A	Hubbardston	7.2023		X
Munroe, Kristofer	M	Hubbardston	2.2023	X	
Dolan, Kelly	A	Lancaster	7.2023		X
Streeter, Frank	M	Lancaster	7.2023		X
Vacant	A	Leominster			X
Valliere, Dean	M	Leominster	7.2019	X	
Vacant	A	Lunenburg	7.2020.		X
Reid, Amanda	M	Lunenburg	7.2022	X	
Ermini, Annette	A	Petersham	7.2022		X
Vacant	M	Petersham			X

Telepciak, John	M	Phillipston	10.2001		X
Jackson, Melanie	A	Phillipston	7.2022		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	
Newman, Kristen	A	Sterling	7.2023	X	
Page, Patty	M	Sterling	7.2019		X
Toth, Timothy	A	Templeton	7.2023		X
Rich, Dennis	M	Templeton	7.2017		X
Sexton-Diranian, Charles	A	Townsend	7.2022		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, B. Harris, H. Ford, C. McNamara, J. Stanton, L. Quinlivan, J. Legros

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS DISTRIBUTED AT THE MEETING:

October 5, 2023 MRPC Meeting Minutes
November 9, 2023 MRPC Meeting Agenda
Current Grant Opportunities Spreadsheet
FY24 Budget Amend Expenses 11/9/23
FY24 Budget Amend Revenues 11/9/23
FY24 Budget Amend Salaries 11/9/23
MRPC – Digital Equity Outreach Letter
2022 – MBI – One page Municipal DEP Program 11/28/23