



MONTACHUSETT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRPC)

REMOTE MEETING ONLY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2024, 7:00 PM

MRPC MEETING MATERIALS:

[February 8, 2024, MRPC Meeting Material](#)

MINUTES

1. Open Meeting, Introductions and Announcements

This meeting was 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 were taken by roll call. Chairperson L. Shifrin called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

L. Shifrin – present
K. Munroe – present
R. Ward – present
G. Tillotson – present
K. Norton – present
B. Yocum – present
S. Donahue – present

(Attendees that joined the meeting after the roll call are listed on the meeting attendance)

2. MRPC Minutes – January 4, 2024 – Approval of Commissioners Requested

Having no objections, additions or subtractions, G. Tillotson moved to accept the minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

L. Shifrin – yes
K. Munroe – yes
R. Ward – yes
G. Tillotson – yes
K. Norton – yes
B. Yocum – abstain
S. Donahue – yes
R. Hoyt – yes

3. Cash Schedule – January 2024 – Acceptance of Commissioners Requested

L. Quinlivan presented the January 2024 cash schedule. The opening balance for January 1, 2024, \$546,423.63, total receipts and transfers for the month \$136,374.18, total cash on hand before this warrant \$682,797.81, less the amount of this warrant \$209,919.15, left a balance after the warrant of \$472,878.66.

Having no objections, K. Munroe moved to accept the January 2024 cash schedule as presented subject to audit. The motion was seconded.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

L. Shifrin – yes
K. Munroe – yes
R. Ward – yes
G. Tillotson – yes
K. Norton – yes
B. Yocum – yes
S. Donahue – yes
R. Hoyt – yes
K. Nartowicz – yes

4. Guest Announcements and Questions

G. Kahale, MART Representative provided the following report:

As part of the Faire Share Program, MART implemented several new services to its Bus Route System in the MART Region. On January 16, 2024, MART implemented a new Bus Route in Gardner, Gardner Route 3 which runs North/South in a 30-minute loop connecting the Shopping Centers and the Heywood Hospital; on February 5, MART added more frequent service on the InterCity Route between Fitchburg/Leominster and Gardner during the weekdays and added Saturdays to the InterCity Route and the Winchendon Link. Also, added Sunday service to Gardner and Athol-Orange Bus Routes, and soon MART will be adding Sunday service to some of Fitchburg and Leominster Bus Routes, and more frequent service to Worcester and Boston. Furthermore, MART is running a Fare-Free Service on all its Fixed Bus Route System up to June 30, 2024.

5. Administrative Matters

5.1 FY24 Budget Review and Amendment – Information Only

The FY24 MRPC Budget is still in deficit of about 2-3%. Cuts are being proposed at this meeting in expenses. Cuts in personnel (layoff[s]) may also take place before June 30, 2024, if insufficient revenue is realized and the total number of people on the payroll remains too high. Please see the accompanying handout.

5.2 FY25 Draft Budget Presentation – Information Only

Please see the accompanying handout for a projection of revenue and expenses in FY25. All staff will have to pull together to seek out and obtain new funding sources to maintain the current level of employment.

5.3 Appoint Brian Doherty, Transportation Project Director as Authorized Signatory (To Replace Current Signatory, Brad Harris) – Action Requested

REPORT

Mr. Bradford Harris resigned from his position of Transportation Projects Director effective January 5, 2024. Commencing January 8, 2024, Mr. Brian Doherty was appointed to succeed Mr. Harris in this position.

In accordance with the Bylaws of the MRPC, Article II Commission Organization, 3., D., c., those authorized to sign checks on behalf of the Commission are the Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, Executive Director, and Transportation Director. Mr. Harris was an authorized signatory on MRPC's two-party checks.

As Mr. Harris has departed, the Executive Director respectfully requests the Commissioners' approval to allow management's removal of Mr. Harris as a signatory and the authorization of Mr. Brian Doherty, Transportation Projects Director as a co-signer of payables checks with the agency's financial institution, Enterprise Bank and Trust Company (EBTC).

RESOLUTION

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission hereby directs MRPC staff to remove Mr. Bradford Harris as a signatory on checks with MRPC's financial institution and add Mr. Brian Doherty, Transportation Projects Director as a new signatory.

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

Roll Call Vote Followed:

L. Shifrin – yes
K. Munroe – yes
R. Ward – yes
G. Tillotson – yes

K. Norton – yes
B. Yocum – yes
S. Donahue – yes
R. Hoyt – yes
K. Nartowicz – yes

5.4 Municipal Officials Survey – Information Only

Recently, several communities have asked the MRPC if it could provide certain municipal services, such as planning, conservation agent, accounting, assessor, treasurer, building officials and sealer of weights and measures. In response to these inquiries, the Executive Director drafted a municipal employment needs survey that is being reviewed by staff. It will be issued to all local officials this month. Findings will be reported in March or April.

This survey will be used to aid the Commissioners and management in future discussions concerning whether MRPC expands its portfolio of services, or not, to its communities, or not.

G. Eaton urges all communities to be an ambassador for the commission, talk to anyone and everyone and gather subjective data, anecdotal data and email us with this information and let us know if there is a problem.

G. Tillotson agreed that there are challenges finding people to fill different positions and believes there is a trend that stemmed from the pandemic and is very curious as to the outcome of the survey. He would like to know what positions are going unfulfilled the most.

6. Department Updates

Status of all ongoing projects can be found by clicking on the link, below:

<https://mrmapper.mrpc.org/webapps/v2.27/CurrentProjects/>

6.1 Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

No new updates at this time

6.2 Planning & Development

6.2.1 Mass Trails Grant Application Resolution for Matching Funds – Action Requested

REPORT:

MRPC recently applied for a Mass Trails Grant to complete trail vision plans for nine of our communities (Ashburnham, Clinton, Gardner, Hubbardston, Lancaster, Leominster, Lunenburg, Sterling, and Westminster). MRPC staff reached out to all 22 of our communities for interest in trail planning and the nine listed responded with interest. If awarded, the trail visioning for each community (Phase I) will include vision-planning for all their associated trails and trail-networks, GPS'ing of trails that are digitally undocumented, creating trail maps, and a vision for walkability and connectedness. As a planning study for nine different communities,

this project will consider designing and building a full range recreational trails from natural surface pedestrian trails, mountain bike trails, shared use trails, rail trails, motorized trails, and equestrian trails. The product of this planning effort will be an implementation plan that will act as a roadmap for each community to develop their trail network with the cumulative effect of creating a regional trail network that can be marketed as a regional attraction for users in and outside the region. This is the first phase of a 3-phase project that will result in a regional trail plan and marketing program for the Montachusett Region.

The Mass Trails grant requires a 25% match. MRPC requested \$156,688 in funds with a total match of \$87,162, equaling a 36% match of the total cost of the project, increasing our odds of award. The required match will come from community volunteers (\$25,000), United Planning Work Plan tasks (\$30,000), and DLTA funding (\$32,162)

RESOLUTION:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission approves of the Planning and Development Director's request to use \$32,162 of the total DLTA award of \$207,474, as matching funds against the Mass Trails Grant.

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

K. Munroe requested to hear more about the trail vision plan and how it specifically would be actionable for the communities, and how the work would be done. How does the amount of work get balanced, what is a deliverable that's actionable and how do we make sure that this is something that is useful instead of just being a report that sits on a shelf?

K. Chapman stated with each of the vision plans, we see volunteers in the town giving us information. We currently have a lot of the information already. If there are no volunteers, we will figure out how we can do it. Once we do each community's plan, they will have a set of recommendations to do whatever it is that they are looking to accomplish. The idea is that once we have each community's approved plan, we will then be able to go after more money because we can then look at the region.

G. Tillotson spoke of being supportive of putting together a network trail for our communities to be brought together with multimodal transportation. G. Tillotson said he would like to discuss further offline with K. Chapman.

K. Munroe expressed concern regarding better communication and having a more cohesive regional group. Where we need the most help is coming up with strategies for acquiring these key parcels. K. Munroe thinks this project could do the most good in developing strategies on acquiring parcels and getting to the point of being shovel ready as well as if it resulted in a piece of infrastructure where Open Space committees talked more to each other. Having a more cohesive regional group would be a win.

K. Chapman will reach out to get input from all the ConCom's.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

L. Shifrin – yes
K. Munroe – yes
R. Ward – yes
G. Tillotson – yes
K. Norton – yes
B. Yocum – yes
S. Donahue – yes
R. Hoyt – yes
K. Nartowicz – yes

6.2.2 Resolution for Matching Funds for EDA Year 3 of 3 Partnership Planning Grant – Action Requested

REPORT:

MRPC was awarded a three-year Economic Development Administration (EDA) Planning Grant in 2022. We are currently in the second year of the grant which ends March 31, 2024. In this second year, data collection is underway to update the Montachusett Region Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (MRCEDS) for the region, which expires in July 2024. In the third year which extends April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025, the CEDS Committee will meet to review the projects in the CEDS and finalize the document for submission to the EDA by July 31, 2024. In addition, funding will be sourced to implement the projects listed in the CEDS. EDA requires a one-to-one match for this Planning Grant.

RESOLUTION:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission approves of the Planning and Development Director's request to use \$70,000 of the total Program Year 17 DLT award of \$207,474, as matching funds against the annual EDA planning grant.

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

Roll Call Vote Followed:

L. Shifrin – yes
K. Munroe – yes
R. Ward – yes
G. Tillotson – yes
K. Norton – yes
B. Yocum – yes
S. Donahue – yes
R. Hoyt – yes
K. Nartowicz – yes

6.2.3 Resolution to approve use of DLTA Funding – Action Requested

REPORT:

MRPC is collaborating with CMRPC on a Milltown Caucus to assist our communities with resources, discussion, funding opportunities, and redevelopment of mill buildings. In order to fund MRPC's staff time and resources for this project, we would like to set aside \$15,000 of the Program Year 17 District Local Technical Assistance award to support these regional efforts. CMRPC is also providing \$15,000 of their DLTA funding towards this project. This project falls under the Planning Ahead for Growth category of eligible funding.

RESOLUTION:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) recommends that \$15,000 of the Program Year 17 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) award, if eligible, be conditionally awarded based upon approval from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to support the Central Mass Milltown Caucus in collaboration with the Central Mass Regional Planning Commission.

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

Roll Call Vote Followed:

L. Shifrin – yes
K. Munroe – yes
R. Ward – yes
G. Tillotson – yes
K. Norton – yes
B. Yocum – yes
S. Donahue – yes
R. Hoyt – yes
K. Nartowicz – yes

K. Chapman reviewed the new grants that the Planning & Development Department has been awarded and is working on.

G. Tillotson asked how DLTA funds work, and how do we know there are funds left when there is a request for funds to be used as a match? K. Chapman confirmed that she and the Fiscal Department keep track of the balance of funds.

K. Chapman gave a final reminder that the first round of LTA proposals is due by March 6, 2024.

G. Tillotson asked why Ayer is required to do an economic feasibility study for MBTA. K. Chapman stated it is because part of Ayers zoning for base code, Ayer allows affordable housing at a higher rate than what is allowed by the MBTA communities. This will prove that it is not going to be economically unfeasible.

S. Donahue shared that Harvard is working on their MBTA bylaw with J. Vos. When the same economic study question came up, they decided to back off affordable housing, trying to increase the number due to lack of funds as well as capacity to do an economic study.

6.3 Transit & Transportation.

B. Doherty mentioned that work is underway on two major products for the year. The transportation improvement program which is for fiscal years 2025 to 2029 in our Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). The work program is the projects that department staff work on through 3C contract throughout the year. Project solicitation closes tomorrow, and we will get back to communities shortly thereafter. We are still working along with the Joint Transportation Committee and the MPL to get these out for a draft public comment in April. We will provide updates to those two groups and to the Commissioners as well as progress towards the final drafts.

B. Yocum questioned a study being conducted to possibly enlarge and widen Route 2. B. Doherty stated we are not involved in any study with Route 2 at this time and is not aware of anything that is currently going on. B. Yocum offered to send information regarding the study she is referring to.

7. New Business

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

G. Tillotson brought to our attention the next meeting listed on the agenda was incorrect and should be changed from March 8th to March 7th. H. Ford will make the correction.

8. Adjournment - The date of the next MRPC meeting – March 7, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

L. Shifrin moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:04 pm, motion was seconded.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

L. Shifrin – yes
K. Munroe – yes
R. Ward – yes
G. Tillotson – yes
K. Norton – yes
B. Yocum – yes
S. Donahue – yes
R. Hoyt – yes
K. Nartowicz – yes

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>
Arpano, Abby	A	Ashburnham	12.2023		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

Guests: G. Kahale, MART Representative, T. Eaton

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

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS DISTRIBUTED AT THE MEETING:

January 4, 2023, MRPC Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2024, MRPC Meeting Agenda

February 8, 2024, MRPC Meeting Detailed Agenda

Current Grant Opportunities Document

FY24 Budget Update

Summaries – FY24 Budget Update and FY25 Draft Budget Projection