



**MONTACHUSETT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRPC)  
REMOTE MEETING  
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2023, 7:00 PM**

**Meeting Registration Link:**

[October 5, 2023 MRPC Meeting Registration Link](#)

**QR Code:**



**MRPC Meeting Material:**

[October 5, 2023 Meeting Materials](#)

**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 will be taken by roll call.

Vice Chairman, R. Hoyt called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm, October 5, 2023.

**2. MRPC Minutes – September 7, 2023 – Approval of Commissioners Requested**

Having no objections, A. Pease moved to accept the September 7, 2023 minutes as presented. The motion was seconded.

Roll call vote followed:

G. Corbosiero- abstain  
L. Shifrin- yes  
K. Newman- abstain  
A. Pease- yes  
G. Tillotson- abstain  
A. Reid- yes  
S. Donahue- yes  
K. Munroe- yes  
R. Hoyt- yes

### **3. Cash Schedule – September 2023 – Acceptance of Commissioners Requested**

R. Swartz presented the September 2023 Cash Schedule. The opening balance for September 1, 2023 was \$721,127.88, total receipts and transfers for the month were \$114,348.25, total cash on hand before this warrant was \$835,476.13, less the amount of this warrant \$149,759.74, left a balance after the warrant of \$685,716.39.

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

Roll call vote followed:

G. Corbosiero- yes  
L. Shifrin- yes  
K. Newman- yes  
A. Pease- yes  
G. Tillotson- yes  
A. Reid- yes  
S. Donahue- yes  
K. Munroe- yes  
R. Hoyt- yes  
R. Swartz- yes

### **4. Guest Announcements and Questions**

No announcements or questions

### **5. Guest Speaker Shaun Suhoski, Member, Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) Update**

S. Suhoski presented an overview of the Rural Policy Advisory Commission created in 2015. The 2019 Rural Policy Plan has 15 focus areas within five categories. Those categories include infrastructure, economy, community, governance and climate. The overarching goal is to “Create and Office of Rural Policy”. Links to access reports online, follow the links provided on the handout.

Recent activities in 2023 include offering recommendations to Commonwealth’s next economic development plan, submitting testimony to EOHLC Secretary relative to proposed housing bond bill and forging a close working alliance with new Director of Rural Affairs Anne Gobi.

A link to the Rural Policy Plan can be found below.

[https://frcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Rural\\_Policy\\_Plan\\_10.01.19.pdf](https://frcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Rural_Policy_Plan_10.01.19.pdf)

Senator Anne Gobi was announced as the Commonwealth’s first ever Director of Rural Affairs on May 22, 2023.

Senator Gobi stated the number one issue she is trying to address right now is coming up with a workable definition. The definition being used by her office under Economic Development is, under 7000 people are less than 500 people per square mile. Under this definition, we have 181 rural communities in Massachusetts.

Ms. Gobi stated that part of her job is to try and figure out what is the best way to get state help to these communities. The other part is that we don’t want the state to tell communities what they should be doing.

We are trying to help communities to being able to say what help it is that they need from the State.

One way to get this done is by making a change to the definition. The other part is changing Chapter 90 and the requirement of the 25% match which can be extremely difficult. We know what the problems are, it is now time to find the solutions.

K. Munroe stated for him questions about rural equity in Hubbardston start and end with the watershed. Hubbardston has 50% of the town that can never be developed into ordinary revenue generating property because it is locked up in the watershed. Although there are improvements in the pilot program, the State still has control over it, and we feel stuck because we end up in a place where we also have an information asymmetry issue. There is only so much that Hubbardston has for internal resources that aren't volunteers. Hopefully this is something we can work with your office on in the future. Senator Gobi stated the pilot is going to be a big discussion.

K. Munroe asked about the issue with information asymmetry and gave the following example based on the last grant list that went out: Hubbardston, being a small town, essentially had four people look at the list; the Town Administrator, the DPW Director and two volunteer because that is all we have. To go through and break down the list to see what we could be eligible for, it's challenging. Senator Gobi stated that she is an office of one at the moment however she is going to be hiring soon and will be interviewing next week. This new person will have the job of working specifically on the rural small town grants. This will give towns somebody to talk with and to help with the process and then if awarded, can follow the process all the way through.

## **6. Administrative Matters**

### **6.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy**

An AI use policy is in development. Recently, the Executive Director issued a memo to all employees banning the use of AI for the preparation of reports and related duties until such a policy is written and adopted by the Commissioners for approval in the near future.

K. Monroe has provided MRPC some information this afternoon that we have not yet read but we will definitely be reviewing.

G. Eaton stated that although we use AI on a daily basis when we are emailing or using tools such as Grammarly, staff has been told that they are not to use ChatGPT to write reports.

See attachment: AI- Generated Images Report for more information.

K. Munroe gave a couple of examples of AI being extremely helpful. One of the examples is asking AI for suggestions. Many times it will give you a list of ideas that you would never have thought of on your own.

### **6.2 Conference Reports**

#### **6.2.1 Brownfields Conference held in Detroit, MI**

See accompanying report by Ryan Doherty, Regional Planner

#### **6.2.2 Economic Development Marketing, International Economic Developers Association (IEDC)**

See accompanying report by Glenn Eaton, Executive Director

Reports are in the folder and all are encouraged to read.

### **6.3 Other Administrative Matters**

## **7. Department Updates**

G. Eaton stated MRPC is moving toward an online mapping tool for department updates. This information will be rolled out as early as October and will be replacing the quarterly Contract Status Report. Commissioners are welcome at any time to contact staff to obtain contract updates.

J. Stanton gave an explanation of new map-based reporting format in Montachusett Region Mapper (MRMapper). When we do start using this, if there are any questions, please reach out to Mr. Stanton.

G. Tillotson asked if there is a chance to see an expected completed date? J. Stanton said all suggestions are welcomed and that is definitely something that can be added. All feedback is welcomed as this is still in development.

### **7.1 Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**

No new updates at this time

### **7.2 Planning & Development**

No new updates at this time

### **7.3 Transit & Transportation**

B. Harris announced that we have started our next program year with MassDOT which began on October 1, 2023 which is the federal fiscal year. We have some different tasks that we will be working on. We put out an RFP for consultant services for the Safe Streets for All grant. It is still out and available. On October 23<sup>rd</sup> we will be reviewing all proposals. We hope to have someone hired and working in early November. This grant is to develop a safe action plan for the entire region. We're putting a 24 month timeframe on this and will be reaching out to our communities to start getting them onboard.

## **8. New Business**

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

No new business.

## **9. Adjournment - The date of the next MRPC meeting – November 9, 2023, 7:00 p.m.**

Having no objection, G. Corbosiero moved to adjourn the meeting. Motion was seconded.

Roll call vote followed:

L. Shifrin- yes

K. Newman- yes

A. Pease- yes

G. Tillotson- yes

A. Reid- yes

S. Donahue- yes

K. Munroe- yes

R. Hoyt- yes

R. Swartz- yes  
P. Cunningham- yes

Meeting adjourned at 8:13pm.

*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
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
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 : S. Suhoski, Senator A. Gobi

Staff : G. Eaton, B. Harris, J. Stanton, L. Quinlivan, T. Murphy

**DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS DISTRIBUTED AT THE MEETING:**

September 7, 2023 MRPC Meeting Minutes

October 5, 2023 MRPC Meeting Agenda

Current Grant Opportunities Spreadsheet

RPAC 2022 Overview

RPAC Update

RPAC Rural Housing Priorities

AI Generated Images Report

Conference Report- Glenn Eaton

2023 Brownfields Report- Ryan Doherty

## Healey-Driscoll Administration Announces Massachusetts Senator Anne Gobi as Director of Rural Affairs

Gobi to Serve as Advocate for Rural Communities & Support their Economic Development and Growth

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

5/22/2023

- Governor Maura Healey and Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll
- Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

**BOSTON** — Today, Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll announced Massachusetts Senator Anne Gobi will join their administration as the new Director of Rural Affairs in the Executive Office of Economic Development.

In this new role [created](#) by the Healey-Driscoll Administration, Gobi will serve as a dedicated advocate and ombudsman cultivating economic development within rural communities. She will ensure that the needs of rural and regional economies are incorporated into the [economic development plan](#) being developed by the Executive Office of Economic Development and will be responsible for coordinating with secretariats and state agencies to ensure that state government is attuned to the unique needs of these towns.

“We are building an economy that benefits all communities, businesses, and people in Massachusetts, particular those that are too often overlooked and underrepresented like rural and small towns,” said **Governor Maura Healey**. “Senator Gobi’s fierce advocacy of rural equity, agricultural and small businesses, and conservation initiatives makes her the ideal candidate to help our rural towns across the state succeed.”

“Senator Gobi brings to this new role deep knowledge of the challenges that rural and small-town economies face and decades of experience serving the people of our state,” said **Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll**. “We are excited to welcome her to our administration and look forward to working with her to better reach rural communities and help them grow.”

Gobi was first elected to the Legislature in 2001 as State Representative and became State Senator in 2014 representing 22 communities in Worcester and Hampshire counties, several of which are rural. She currently serves as the Senate Chair of the Agriculture Committee, Vice Chair of the Higher Education Committee, and Co-Chair of the Commission on 21st Century Farming within the Legislature. She also co-chairs the Rural Caucus, Food Systems Caucus, Regional Transit Authority Caucus, Municipal Light Caucus and Regional Schools Caucus, and serves on the East-West Rail Commission.

“Massachusetts’ rural and small towns have such an important role to play in our state’s economy and I’m excited to have a true champion of these communities join Team Massachusetts,” said **Economic Development Secretary Yvonne Hao**. “Senator Gobi has the knowledge, experience, and passion required to connect with the needs of rural towns and plug these municipalities into our state’s many economic development resources.”



An avid outdoorsman, Gobi co-founded the Sportsmen's Caucus, which convenes supporters of fishing, hunting and other outdoor activities. She also serves as a member of the Veterans and Federal Affairs Committee. Prior to being elected to the Legislature, she taught at Leicester High School, had her own law office, and worked with victims of domestic violence at Central Mass Legal Assistance. A lifelong Spencer resident, Gobi graduated from Worcester State University and the Massachusetts School of Law.

"Our office supports all of Massachusetts' 351 cities and towns, more than half of which are rural communities," said **Undersecretary Ashley Stolba**. "We're excited that Senator Gobi will join our office to provide these municipalities with dedicated attention to help their economies succeed."

"I am thrilled to take on this important role and grateful to the Healey-Driscoll Administration for elevating our rural communities," said **Senator Gobi**. "While I will miss the Legislature, I look forward to continuing to work for the needs of small towns throughout the Commonwealth as their advocate in state government."

Gobi will start in her new role June 5 as a member of the Executive Office of Economic Development's economic foundations team led by Undersecretary Ashley Stolba. She will be tasked with conducting a review of all state grant opportunities, including the [Community One Stop for Growth](#), to ensure that barriers for rural and small towns are mitigated and will host dedicated office hours for rural towns to receive technical assistance to identify and explore grant opportunities. She will also serve as a member of the [Rural Policy Commission](#), which advocates for the vitality of rural communities as well as legislative and policy solutions that address rural needs.

On March 1, Governor Healey filed Article 87 legislation to create a new Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities headed by a cabinet-level secretary and to rename the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development as the Executive Office of Economic Development. Economic Development Secretary Hao [recently announced](#) a restructuring to better position her office to fulfill its mission of promoting business growth, opportunity, and economic vitality for Massachusetts' communities and residents. This realignment includes an intentional focus on supporting the needs of rural and small towns through the office's economic foundations team. The Article 87 reorganization plan will take effect June 1.

## **SENATOR ANNE GOBI ANNOUNCED AS DIRECTOR OF RURAL AFFAIRS FOR THE COMMONWEALTH**

The creation of the Director of Rural Affairs position was one of the top priorities of the MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission. The quick action to implement that priority by the Healey-Driscoll administration was a significant win for Franklin County and all rural communities within the Commonwealth. The Appointment of Senator Gobi furthers that win, and we are thrilled by the potential that lies before us.

Some of the reasons why we at the FRCOG are excited about the appointment of Senator Anne Gobi as the first Director of Rural Affairs in the Commonwealth:

- She knows the full legislature in the Commonwealth, and fully understands how the legislative process works
- She knows the range of existing state agencies and how they do, or do not, interact
- She understands from experience the issues that rural communities face

Senator Gobi will walk into the Director of Rural Affairs role with the networks built, the issues understood, and the ability to move forward from Day One.

We congratulate Senator Gobi, thank Governor Healey and Lt. Governor Driscoll, and look forward to participating in moving the rural policy agenda forward!

To learn more about the Rural Policy Advisory Committee, and the 2019 Rural Policy Plan, visit: <https://frcog.org/project/rural-policy-advisory-commission/>