# MONTACHUSETT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES JULY 30, 2013

#### 1. INTRODUCTIONS

J. Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

A list of those members present and absent can be found on the last page of this document.

#### 2. APPROVAL OF THE JUNE 25, 2013 MEETING MINUTES

R. Grubb made a motion to approve the minutes of June 25, 2013 as distributed. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

#### 3. TREASURER'S REPORT

J. Meehan read the June 2013 cash schedule. Balance after last warrant \$60,440.76; Total Receipts this month \$222,517.57; Total cash on hand before this warrant \$282,958.33; Less: amount of this warrant \$202,756.47; balance after this warrant \$85,270.74.

R. Grubb moved to accept the June cash schedule as read subject to audit and to be placed on file. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

#### 4. STATUS REPORTS

#### 4.1 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING

## 4.1.1 FY11 CDBG Program

Phillipston (lead community) with Royalston

Housing Rehabilitation Program. Nine rehab projects are complete. One rehab project is underway. We received bids on three rehab projects. Three well projects are complete. Three septic projects are in design and permitting. Seven applications are in process. Another six applications were distributed. An unusually prolonged and wet late winter and spring season has delayed some septic site testing and roof repairs; however, they are now progressing. Currently, there are ten owners on the waiting list, which, together with cases completed or underway, will more than use the balance of funds. We have received additional calls from owners not on the waitlist who will be submitting applications. DHCD approved extending the grant until December 31, 2013 to allow additional time for the consultants to complete a revision to the affordable housing plan and to accommodate pending additional housing rehab cases already in progress, in design, and on the waitlist.

# Phillipston and Royalston Town Hall Accessibility Design.

*Phillipston and Royalston.* HL+S completed full design plans, specifications and a cost estimate for the approved design option. This project is complete.

#### Phillipston and Royalston Affordable Housing Plans.

*Phillipston and Royalston*. The consultants submitted the final draft plan for review and approval by each town's respective Boards of Selectmen and Planning Boards prior to submitting the final plan to DHCD. A joint workshop on MGL Chapter 40B is set for Saturday, September 14, 2013.

#### **Townsend**

One project is complete. A second project started. Work was suspended because the homeowner has asked for additional changes in the approved scope of work.

#### Clinton

Three cases (five units) are complete. Two projects, consisting of two two-family properties, are nearing completion and should be finished in the next three weeks. With these projects, the program will exceed the activity goal of seven units and use the balance of available funds. Additional applicants will be placed on the town's waiting list for a potential future grant application, or the town may choose to use available program income funds to assist these homeowners.

#### 4.1.2 FY12 CDBG Program

Phillipston (lead community) with Royalston

<u>Housing Rehabilitation Program</u>. We will use FY11 funds until they are fully committed before using the FY12 funds. We have begun entering new housing rehab applicants in this grant year.

### Infrastructure projects.

*Blossom and Park Streets, Royalston.* Contract documents have been executed and August 5 has been set as the start date.

Brooks Village Road, Phillipston. On behalf of the Town of Phillipston, we opened bids for the Brooks Village Road project on June 20, 2013. At its meeting on June 24, the Board of Selectmen awarded the contract to the low bidder, Massachusetts Broken Stone Company, for \$245,762.40. Contract documents have been executed.

## 4.1.3 Distressed Property Identification and Revitalization (DPIR) Grant Program

On June 13, 2013, on behalf of the towns of Ashburnham (lead), Athol and Winchendon, and the cities of Fitchburg and Leominster, we submitted an application to the Attorney General's Distressed Property Identification and Revitalization (DPIR) grant program. The grant program is designed to help communities with high rates of distressed properties "turn the corner" on the foreclosure crisis by effectively identifying distressed and vacant bank or creditor foreclosed properties so that communities can advocate for prompt disposition of the properties, improve local enforcement, or take other steps to address the properties. The Attorney General's Office (AGO) expects towns will use some of the money to enhance their enforcement efforts. The grant will not fund direct rehabilitation, receivership or demolition efforts, per se, although the AGO says receivership funds can be used in conjunction with this project. Foreclosure studies indicate that these communities have experienced a persistent high foreclosure rate during this prolonged housing crisis. We are waiting for an announcement of funding awards.

#### 4.1.4 Monitoring Visit

DHCD staff is scheduled to conduct a monitoring visit of the FY11 Phillipston Royalston program on Tuesday, July 30, 2013.

#### 4.2 COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

## 4.2.1 Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA)

MRPC staff is in the final stages of updating the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document and it is anticipated that a draft CEDS document will be forwarded to the CEDS Committee and MRPC Commission Members sometime mid-August.

MRPC staff continues to work on the various elements of the EDA funded Siting of Renewable Energy Facilities project and with both the Townsend Planning Board to draft a wind energy conversion system bylaw and the Town of Royalston to draft a solar bylaw. A Montachusett Energy Advisory Committee meeting was held on Friday, July 19<sup>th</sup> where MRPC staff presented on Wind Energy in the Montachusett and Northern Middlesex County and WPI faculty and Boreal Renewable Energy Development (a consultant hired by MRPC to work with WPI Faculty and students) discussed potential student activities for this project.

# 4.2.2 Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), promoting Low Impact Development (LID) in the Millers River Watershed

MRPC staff met with the Town of Athol Planning Board on July  $8^{th}$  and anticipates working with Hubbardston over the next month.

## 4.2.3 Hazard Mitigation Plan Update Project

MRPC Staff continues our work towards updating the Local Hazard Mitigation Plans for our 22 communities. Most of the initial work has been focusing on updating each community's existing identified hazards and hazards assessment from the initial Hazard Mitigation Plans. At this time only such work needs to be completed with the towns of Clinton, Hubbardston and Shirley. Therefore at this time, MRPC Staff is working towards the development of updated Mitigation Actions with all of our communities.

# 4.2.4 Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Challenge Grant

Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Analysis project (Fitchburg, Leominster, and Westminster). MRPC staff continues to work on the Transportation Element, the Open Space and Recreation Element, and the Facilities/Institutions Element. A Steering Committee meeting was held on June 20<sup>th</sup> where additional transportation data and concepts were presented and discussed.

## 4.2.5 Templeton Master Plan

MRPC staff met with and presented a portion of the Services and Facilities to the Templeton Planning Board on July  $9^{th}$ .

# 4.2.6 Lunenburg Master Plan

Work has been initiated by MRPC on the inventory and analysis of the Economic Development Element and a presentation was made by MRPC staff to the Lunenburg Planning Board on July 22, 2013.

## 4.2.7 Fitchburg – ArtistLink

MRPC is assisting the City of Fitchburg on a portion of its ArtistLink Grant Project. The overall Project seeks to foster additional artist live/work space within Downtown Fitchburg, including the B.F. Brown School. MRPC's role is to provide assistance related to development of zoning reform to encourage artist space development and help determining the feasibility of artist space for vacant properties. There are no new actions to report on over the past month.

## 4.2.8 Fitchburg – Capacity Building for Local Policy

MRPC has received \$25,000 in funding from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) to assist the City of Fitchburg and the Montachusett Opportunity Council, Inc. (MOC) on development of policy initiatives related to improvement of vacant lots within the City of Fitchburg. Health considerations associated with vacant lots was an issue identified in the Draft Health Equity-related Planning and Zoning Study. MRPC has now finalized a Scope of Services and Workplan for the remainder of this Project, based on input from the City and MOC, which runs through the end of August.

#### 4.2.9 District Local Technical Assistance

- 1. **Hubbardston**: Work with Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) to assist the Town of Hubbardston and Rutland to analyze costs and benefits of a possible sharing of a Director of Public Works between the two Towns. MRPC and CMRPC staff merged research and a rough draft report was discussed with local officials from both communities. After much consideration, the Town of Rutland has determined not to proceed.
- 2. **Shirley**: Develop a Gateway Plan for the Lancaster Road Priority Development Area. A Small Planning Charrette was held on Thursday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, in order to seek public and Town Officials input on the development of the Lancaster Road PDA Gateway Plan.
- 3. **Shirley**: Zoning Bylaw Assistance (Lancaster Road) that would encourage and support economic development opportunities. MRPC and the Town of Shirley have agreed to a scope of services for this DLTA Project, based on a meeting held on May 17, 2013. A more formal project kick-off meeting on this Project was held on June 11<sup>th</sup> with the Shirley Economic Development Committee. Most of the Zoning Bylaw development work is being initiated over the next few months, after the Lancaster Road PDA Gateway Plan Charrette noted in the 1<sup>st</sup> Shirley project identified above.
- 4. **Lunenburg**: Investigating/researching and working to adopt a mixed use Village District Bylaw in the Downtown area that could promote economic development while retaining small town community character. MRPC staff drafted and forwarded a detailed draft scope of work to the community. A meeting was held with the Lunenburg Planning Director on July 3<sup>rd</sup> to discuss next steps to be taken as part of this project.
- 5. **Ashby**: Ashby Infrastructure for Economic Development Program: Public Sewer Implementation Strategy, Public Water Feasibility Study and Infrastructure Priority Assessment. MRPC staff reviewed a draft scope of work with representatives of the community and forwarded a contract to be signed by a representative of the community (Chair, Board of Selectmen). The contract has been signed and work is being initiated.
- 6. **Athol**: Creation of a joint fire district between the towns of Athol and Orange. MRPC staff forwarded a draft scope of work to the towns, a meeting was held with fire chiefs from the two communities, a contract has been executed and work has been initiated. MRPC staff also contacted Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) to make them aware of the study and that Orange is participating since the Town of Orange is a FRCOG community. A meeting was held with the Athol Fire Department on July 15<sup>th</sup> and another meeting has been scheduled with the Athol and Orange Fire Departments on August 5<sup>th</sup>.
- 7. **Ashby**: Delopment Impact Study. MRPC staff forwarded a draft scope of work to the community, a meeting was held with representatives of the community to review scope details, and a contract has been executed and work has been initiated.
- 8. **Royalston**: Zoning Bylaw wherein it is desired to adopt certain provisions involving as-of-right siting of solar energy facilities. MRPC staff forwarded a draft scope of work to the

community, a meeting was held with representatives of the community to review scope details and obtain data/information, and a contract has been executed and work has been initiated. A meeting with local officials to review a draft bylaw was held on July 19<sup>th</sup>.

- 9. **Shirley**: Town-Wide Analysis of Environmental and Development Characteristics of Land by Zoning District. MRPC staff reviewed a draft scope of work with a representative of the community and a contract has been forwarded to the Town that needs to be signed by the Chair of the Board of Selectmen. Work is scheduled to be initiated in August.
- 10. **Lancaster**: Housing Production Plan. MRPC staff forwarded a draft scope of work to the community, a meeting was held with the Lancaster Planning Director to review scope details, a contract has been signed and work has been initiated.
- 11. **Lancaster**: Examine the creation of village zoning districts in Central and South Lancaster. MRPC staff forwarded a draft scope of work to the community, a meeting was held with the Lancaster Planning Director to review scope details, a contract has been signed and work has been initiated. A meeting with the Lancaster Planning Director is scheduled for July 25<sup>th</sup> to discuss progress to date and next steps to be taken.

## 4.3 GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS)

#### 4.3.1 MR*Mapper*

MRMapper is currently in BETA version 2.3. Significant upgrades to the server software and user interface were completed in early November and also in early February. We are currently running ArcGIS Server 10.1 and Adobe Flex 3.1. In addition, several tools have been upgraded or added in the last month and all internet communications/connections with MRMapper are secured and encrypted by GeoTrust Inc.

Currently the MRPC is working with several of our communities to create several internal, secure and public-facing websites. We have recently added a Historic Orthophoto, Census 2010 Tract & Block Groups, Census 2010 Environmental Justice, High Crash Locations and Top Lane Departure Crash Locations applications to the site.

We are currently working on adding additional applications and functionality to the site.

## 5.3.2 Central Mass Evacuation Plan - Phase IB

Phase IB is primarily working with the region's communities to develop the evacuation zones and routes and will also address and fill in the gaps as identified in the Phase I project. This project is mainly divided into three major steps: (1) Identify/convene key stakeholders and complete three Stakeholder Group meetings, (2) Development of Evacuation Zones, Routes and Traffic Control Points data and (3) Creation of the Central Massachusetts Evacuation Toolkit Database.

In conjunction with the Hazard Mitigation Plan Five-Year Update Project we are in the process of conducting Community Critical Facility data review and Evacuation Route data collection sessions. The majority of sessions has been completed and will continue in the next few months. It is anticipated that an extension will be given by the Central Region Homeland Security council in order to complete this project. This project will be ongoing for the next few months.

#### 4.3.3 Hazard Mitigation Plan Five-Year Update Project

The MRPC has begun working on Hazard Mitigation Plan Five-Year updates for all of the MRPC Communities, including Devens. The GIS Department will be working directly with the planners and local officials to update all relevant data for the project. 21 of 23 Local Hazards meetings have been completed to date. In conjunction with the Worcester County Evacuation Plan, we are also currently working on updating Critical Facility data for the region. 17 of the 23 Critical Facility Data meetings have been completed to date and the remainder will continue in the next few months. This project will be ongoing for the next several months.

## 4.3.4 Westminster Master Plan Update Mapping

The MRPC has begun working on assisting the Town of Westminster with a series of maps that will be included in their Master Plan update. The mapping will be completed over the course of the next two fiscal years and will include a total of 10 maps as well as GIS Technical Assistance & Set-Up for the Town Planners' office to be able to utilize the maps and data. Currently the Cell Tower Overlay, Infrastructure and Economic Development, Protected Lands and Road Status maps have been completed. This project will be ongoing for the next couple of months.

## 4.3.5 MART System Comprehensive Update

MART and the MRPC are in the process of performing a comprehensive review of the entire Bus Route System and all associated data. It is anticipated that this project will be ongoing for the next several months.

## 4.3.6 Regional Evacuation Routes

The MRPC is working on a Regional Evacuation Route project in conjunction with the Central Mass Evacuation Plan – Phase IB and as part of the MassDOT UPWP. The goal of the project is to prepare community-based maps identifying evacuation routes and highlighting potential restraints, chokepoints, issues or concerns. Data derived from this project will be used to assist in the Central Mass Evacuation Plan – Phase IB project. This project will be ongoing for the next several months.

#### 4.3.7 Wachusett Corridor Planning Study

The HUD Challenge Grant project has been completed.

In addition to the HUD Challenge Grant project the MRPC is working on the Open Space/Recreation element of the Wachusett Smart Growth Corridor Analysis project. The GIS department has updated the existing Open Space in the corridor based on the existing Open Space and Trails map included in the HUD Challenge Grant. Currently a draft map has been created showing updated Open Space and recreational points of interest. This project will be on going over the next few months.

## 4.3.8 Ayer DPW Infrastructure Data Collection

The MRPC is working with the Town of Ayer to collect infrastructure data using GPS. Data collected will be Water Hydrants and Gate Valves, Wastewater Manholes and Cleanouts and Stormwater Catch Basins, Manholes, Culverts and Outfalls. A MR*Mapper* application including all data has been created for quality assurance and editing by the town.

#### 4.3.9 MassGIS Multi-Building Site Identification

The MRPC is currently working on a project for MassGIS to identify multi-building sites in our region. A site is an area usually with a common ownership or location name where multiple entities such as owners or residents occupy one or more buildings, and where first responders may find difficulty in locating the source of an emergency call. The goal is to identify sites where correct mapping of addresses requires a field visit. This project has been completed.

#### 4.3.10 Route 117 Corridor Profile

The GIS Department is assisting the Transportation Department with a series of maps and data products for the Route 117 Corridor Profile. This project will be ongoing for the next several weeks.

## 4.3.11 MRPC Regional Trail Inventory Update

The MRPC is currently updating all communities' trail data in a comprehensive update. Currently draft maps have been sent to the respective communities for review and split into two comment periods. The first comment period is open to the public and will be completed by June 19<sup>th</sup>. The second period will be completed by July 5<sup>th</sup>; and any changes proposed will need approval by the confirmed CEO (Chief Elected Official). It is anticipated that this project will be complete by September 30<sup>th</sup>.

# 4.3.12 MART Fitchburg/Leominster Transit Development Plan (TDP) Update

The MRPC is currently working on the MART Fitchburg/Leominster TDP Update. This project involves mapping and data analysis as it relates to a variety of demographic factors. This project is expected to be completed by the end of the month.

#### 4.3.13 Clinton Open Space Update

The MRPC is currently working on mapping updates to the Clinton Open Space Plan. Updated maps include Required Map 2 - Environmental Justice Populations, Required Map 3 – Zoning, Required Map 5 - Unique Features, Required Map 7 - Open Space Inventory, Required Map 8 - Action Plan and Optional Map F - Plant & Wildlife Habitat. This project is expected to be completed by the end of the month.

### 4.3.14 Leominster Open Space Update

The MRPC is currently working on mapping updates to the Leominster Open Space Plan. Required Map 1- Regional Context, Required Map 2- Environmental Justice Populations, Required Map 4- Soils & Geologic Features, Required Map 5- Unique Features Map, Required Map 6- Water Resources Maps, Required Map 7- Open Space Inventory and Required Map 8- Action Plan Map. It is anticipated that this project will be complete by October 1st.

#### 4.3.15 DLTA

The MRPC is currently working on mapping components related to several DLTA projects including Lunenburg Village District, Lancaster Village District, Athol/Orange Fire District Feasibility, Ashby Build-out and Shirley PDA/PPA. Mapping projects related to DLTA will be ongoing over the next several months

#### **4.4 TRANSIT**

## 4.4.1 Wachusett Commuter Rail Station and Layover Facility

The preconstruction work on the Wachusett Commuter Rail Station in Fitchburg and on the MBTA's Commuter Rail Layover Facility at the Westminster Business Park has been completed. The construction phase has been awarded to S&R Construction Enterprises for \$22.9 million the project is expected to be substantially complete by December, 2014. Staff continues to work with attorney Erb & Erb to acquired two additional properties in Fitchburg for the construction of the Wachusett Station and working with attorney Mark Goldstein to prepare a temporary construction easement documents for the adjacent neighbors; Also working with Pan Am Railways to transfer 5<sup>th</sup> Mass Turnpike property to MART.

# 4.4.2 Parking Expansion at N. Leominster Station

Erection of steel at N. Leominster parking garage has been completed; the work on Decking is now underway. Mr. Kahale continues to assist MART and provide technical assistance on this construction project of N. Leominster parking garage structure facility for Three-hundred Fifty (350) parking spaces; Staff continues to attend the weekly construction progress and coordination meetings with Consultant, Engineers and Contractor. MART anticipates completion of the project by November of 2013.

#### 4.4.3 Ayer Parking Facility

MART has received an approval from FTA on its TEAM application to start the Land acquire process with properties owner. Mr. Kahale continues to assist MART, FTA and Town of Ayer to move forward the construction of the proposed project of Ayer Commuter Rail Surface Parking Lot for 200 parking spaces at Ayer Rail Trail parking lot Location at Park Street; the State has awarded Ayer the Mass Works Infrastructure Program Grant in the Amount of \$266,667 to be used as matching funds to be combined with Town and MART funds to utilize the \$3.2 million federal grant.

### 4.4.4 Littleton Commuter Rail Station

MRPC staff continues to assist MART and the Town of Littleton to move forward the construction of Littleton Commuter Rail Station; the construction project of the station and the platform is underway; MBTA and MART are anticipated completion of the project by October 2013.

#### 4.5 TRANSPORTATION

# 4.5.1 2013-2014 Montachusett Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The UPWP for the Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) was endorsed at the MPO meeting of July 17<sup>th</sup>. MPO members reviewed the three comments received on the draft document and their associated responses and updates to the draft. After discussion, the UPWP for October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014 was approved. Copies of the MPO endorsed UPWP are available on our website.

## 4.5.2 Planned Weekend Service Stoppage on the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line

The Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC) continued their discussion regarding the planned stoppage of service of the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line on weekends from June to November by the MBTA. The following is from the MBTA fact sheet regarding the Fitchburg Line Improvement project:

The Fitchburg Line Improvement Project will improve reliability of service and reduce trip times for commuters.

This \$200 million investment in the line's infrastructure is scheduled for completion by the end of 2014.

The Project includes:

Construction of a second track between Acton and Ayer; A new Littleton Station with additional parking *(opening in May 2013)*; A new South Acton Station;

Upgraded signal system and track improvements to allow maximum train speed to be increased from 60 mph to 80 mph; and Improvements to 7 bridges.

In order to support this level of construction and complete the improvements in a timely manner, it is required that weekend service be suspended on all or a portion of the line for extended periods through 2015.

Interruption of service is inherent in this project given its size and scope. The objective is to limit disruptions to weekends to minimize the impact of construction on weekday service.

Alternate bus service will not be provided during these shutdowns. Given the number of weekends required, busing during these shutdowns would be unpredictable and impractical to provide given the limited busing resources available and the needs of other construction projects on the MBTA system.

Similar weekend service suspensions have been employed on other major projects and will allow for consistent service suspensions rather than unpredictable weekend-by-weekend busing.

MBTA recognizes the inconvenience that these weekend service suspensions will cause, but they are the only practical way to ensure that project is completed on time so our customers will be able to realize the Project benefits by December 2015.

The MJTC has raised concerns regarding the impacts to commuters who rely on the weekend service as well as the attempts by the MBTA to notify those affected. Information has been gathered about other commuting options available in the area that may be of use to commuters. Additionally, the MJTC has asked that a letter be sent to area representatives alerting them to this issue and seeking their input and support. The MJTC plans to continue discussions over the next few meetings.

# 4.5.3 Election of MJTC Officers

The MJTC elected officers at the July 17<sup>th</sup> meeting. The results were as follows: Chair – David Manugian, Groton Vice Chair – Paula Caron, Fitchburg Secretary – Jon Wyman, Westminster

# 4.5.5 Next MPO Meeting – August 8, 2013 at 1:00 PM Next MJTC Meeting – September 18, 2013 at 7:00 PM

#### 5. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

## **5.1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ANNOUNCEMENTS**

J. Meehan presented Mr. Bob Grubb with a watch and gift certificate on behalf of the MRPC, as a token of our gratitude for Mr. Grubb's 35 years of dedicated service as a board member of the Planning Commission.

#### 6. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, J. Meehan adjourned the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

#### **EXHIBITS AND DOCUMENTS DISTRIBUTED AT MEETING**

- June 25, 2013 MRPC Minutes
- July 30, 2013 MRPC Handout
- July MRPC Cash Schedule

# July 30, 2013 – MRPC MEETING ATTENDANCE

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**STAFF PRESENT:** George Snow, George Kahale, Jason Stanton, Sheri Bean, Brad Harris, Bobbi Jo Johnson, Linda Parmenter

**GUESTS**: Mark Goldstein, MRPC Legal Counsel