



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Franklin Regional Planning Board— *DRAFT MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, September 22, 2016 / 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Location:	JW Olver Transit Center, 12 Olive Street Greenfield, MA – First Floor Conference Room
Facilitator:	Jerry Lund, Chair - FRPB

FRPB MEMBERS

Kenneth Miller, Ashfield Planning Board; **Kayce Warren**, Ashfield Select Board; **Thomas Hutcheson**, Conway Select Board; **Greg Snedeker**, Gill Select Board; **Charles Olchowski**, Greenfield At-Large; **Jan Carr**, Heath At-Large; **David Travers**, Heath Select Board; **Sam Lovejoy**, Clerk- Montague At-Large; **Julia Blyth**, Northfield Select Board; **Nathan L’Etoile**, Northfield At-Large; **Jim Basford**, Orange At-Large; **Chuck Washer**, Shelburne Select Board; **Tom Miner**, 2nd Vice Chair – Shelburne At-Large; **Nan Riebschlaeger**, Wendell Planning Board; **Richard Nathhorst**, Leverett Planning Board; **Jeanie Schermesser**, Erving At-Large; and **David Young**, Warwick Select Board.

FRCOG STAFF

Peggy Sloan, Planning & Development Director; **Rebekah Boyd**, Administrative Services Coordinator; **Pat Smith**, Senior Land Use Planner; and **Jessica Atwood**, Economic Development Program Manager

PRESENTERS/GUESTS

Bill Ennen, Last Mile Broadband Liaison, Executive Office of Housing and Development; **Richie Davis**, Recorder Newspaper; **Nancy Hazard**, Greening Greenfield; and **Cheryl Handsaker**, Charlemont.

1. Introductions	Jerry Lund, FRPB Members
-------------------------	--------------------------

In the absence of the Planning Board Chair, S. Lovejoy, Clerk convened the meeting at 6:01 p.m. A round of introductions followed.

2. Review and Approval of June 23, 2016 FRPB Minutes	Joan Rockwell
---	---------------

T. Miner moved to adopt the 6/23/16 minutes. T. Hutcheson seconded the motion. Motion passed with 3 abstentions.

3. Update and discussion on the Last Mile Broadband Initiative	B. Ennen, Last Mile Liaison - EOHED
---	--

Former Mass Tech Collaborative economic development specialist, B. Ennen introduced himself as the liaison between the state and the “Last Mile” Broadband towns. B. Ennen was recruited by the Baker administration to help get the Last Mile Broadband project sponsored by Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) back on track. The “Middle Mile” network has been built and the last “Last Mile” remains as the most challenging part of bringing broadband to citizens in unserved and underserved towns. Gov. Baker has reexamined the Last Mile program, B. Ennen stated, and in May restarted it with greater flexibility. The previous approach to the Last Mile of fiber to the home was constructed on assumptions that have proven to be extremely costly and cumbersome to implement. The State is willing to look at different approaches. Currently 33 last mile towns, including Ashfield, Warwick, and

Charlemont, are looking at different solutions and are deeply involved in “readiness” — the nitty gritty effort required to get the broadband infrastructure implemented. Now that towns are no longer focused on just a 100% fiber-to-home solution, they can look at the different options (combinations of wireless, fiber, cable) and build the project based on their needs and financial capacity. As they’re doing this, the private sector is paying attention. B. Ennen believes the catalyst was the Baker administration’s notion that *“one size does not fit all.”*

S. Lovejoy asked if MBI was running into towns being frustrated when asked to do a lot of work themselves. R. Nathhorst of the Broadband Committee in Leverett urged towns to jump in, saying it can be done without expertise. P. Sloan asked about example of hybrid solutions. B. Ennen said that Otis intends to partner with Westfield Gas & Electric for a variant of fiber to the home, while New Marlborough will possibly build out fiber to home that Frontier will own. Some communities await important information from private companies, while others will combine fiber with a wireless system to keep costs lower. In hybrid solutions, a town transitions people from wireless to fiber. The build out to complete fiber can be done in phases to reduce the risks of borrowing. Towns are now considering different options said B. Ennen.

G. Snedeker noted that Senator Rosenberg’s press release said there would be no costs to partial cable towns for the “Last Mile” cable. B. Ennen said the partial-cable initiative was meant to achieve 96% coverage with towns paying nothing. As a partial cable town, Gill is a victim of bad timing, said G. Snedeker, having spent the last 2 years hammering out a franchise agreement with Comcast, while staying in touch with MBI because they were slated for assistance. The build-out cost is close to quarter of a million dollars, but Gill gave up its revenue stream and now money is available to other towns. G. Snedeker asked for support from other towns in hopes that Comcast’s projected 3-year build out of Gill would take place ahead of the 2-year MBI sponsored build-outs given that the Comcast build-out in Gill was not supported by funding that is supporting Comcast’s build-out in other municipalities

C. Handsaker felt the poorer unserved towns are the most disadvantaged and have been asked to fund a significant portion of the network. She asked if the state was looking at redressing this. Focusing on equity, not numbers, B. Ennen responded by asking if it’s fair to have the State building out a partial cable project with no contribution from that town. A town that doesn’t have service asks why partial cable towns don’t have to put up money. Consequently, the burden is disproportionately higher on unserved towns, B. Ennen noted. Handsaker said the money to put out to support cable extensions is twice as high, and does look inequitable to unserved towns.

J. Carr said the time-consuming “make ready” process seems to be putting the cart in front of the horse. Heath is hearing now that Axia Connect may be interested in Western MA if it can get 20,000 subscribers. Towns are being pushed to quickly get pole counts to “get ready.” It seems counterproductive to be pushing towns in one direction, when private companies may be interested. At what point are towns locked into a solution, J. Carr asked. B. Ennen noted that 90 days ago none of the private companies seemed interested in investing in underserved towns and the emerging interest from the private sector is positive news, but he agreed that it was difficult to sort through the options. His caution to towns: If it looks too good to be true, it might be. He urged towns to examine where the money is coming from.

S. Lovejoy asked about pole surveys and the length of time they are valid. Ennen said that pole data could go stale, but the counter argument is that there is little activity on utility poles in Heath compared to Boston for example. Engineers are typically only concerned if there's a lot of pole use. B. Ennen offered two ways towns can complete a pole survey: they can solicit for and hire contractors who can then put the survey results directly into the design with contribution from MBI, or the pole survey could be achieved through MBI choosing the contractor and funding the work. For towns using MBI professional services, said B. Ennen, pole survey expenses are funded out of professional services, not construction allocation. Those going it alone will be reimbursed out of professional services for pole survey.

R. Nathhorst described another scenario: Simply write down the numbers of poles, put on a spreadsheet, and use digital camera to photograph the poles. A GPS camera will assign data, he said.

B. Ennen said some towns would like to do fiber to the home, but are looking into other opportunities simultaneously. Don't stop the process, B. Ennen said, but at some juncture, the community may want to pause and make sure they've found a path that makes sense for town.

Members further discussed:

- The cost/benefit analyses of fiber to curb with supplemental cable to the home rather than fiber all the way to the home (savings to switch to wireless not worth it, unless drop is very large D. Young opined)
- Incentive to build straight to home to get high "take rate" (the number of subscribers who sign up in the first year)
- Ways to engender cooperation with utility companies that own the poles

S. Lovejoy asked if there was any sense that things are actually going to be built in two years. D. Young reported that MBI had exceeded Warwick's expectations in implementation of the plan since the mid-May. B. Ennen said by 2017 a number of towns in the region will have finished the "make ready" work with engineering plans and pole surveys completed. At that point the number of houses and people to be served is known, the pole owners have been approached and have done the work necessary to bring the poles up to the standard required to accommodate fiber optic and then contractors can come along and hang fiber.

B. Ennen ended his presentation by saying he'd be happy to sit down with towns to discuss their projects. Members showed their appreciation with a round of applause.

4. Presentation: Reducing Pollution in the Millers River Watershed using Low Impact Development (LID) Techniques	P. Smith, Senior Land Use Planner – FCROG
---	---

Using a power point slideshow, Pat Smith described the project in which FRCOG and the Miller's River Watershed Council provided Low Impact Development (LID) education and technical assistance to develop ordinances and bylaws in Orange, Montague, Northfield, Warwick, Erving, Wendell, and New Salem. The project was completed to mitigate the impacts of storm water runoff in urban areas and encourage development that incorporates LID to protect more sensitive rural areas of the watershed.

S. Lovejoy suggested FRCOG extend outreach to building inspectors to encourage them to pass on the LID techniques, as well as to municipal and commercial officials and planners, such as highway superintendents and architects. G. Snedeker asked if any public or private certificates can be earned so a contractor can be hired to do such work. P. Smith suggested that the Baystate Roads workshops might provide such a thing. P. Sloan said some towns are now adopting subdivision laws that have the LID techniques in them. The LID Powerpoint presentation is available on the FRCOG Website. Appreciation for P. Smith’s work and presentation was shown with applause from those present.

5. FERC Relicensing of the Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Facility, Zoning Reform & FERC pipeline permitting process update	T. Miner, 2 nd Vice Chair - FRPB
--	---

Causation Study. T. Miner announced that FirstLight has just released its erosion causation study for its relicensing application. The Study conclusions minimize responsibility for riverbank erosion related to the operations of the pumped storage facility, e.g.:

- Hydroelectric operations have “limited to no impact” on the Connecticut River bank erosion; just 4% of the total riverbank segments
- Boats cause erosion nearly 3 times that of the hydroelectric plant
- Natural high flows are the dominant cause of erosion at 78% of the riverbank segments

T. Miner commented that treating a flowing river like a tidal river, with daily water level fluctuations and suggest that there is little or no impact does not make sense. Scientific information will be needed to rebut that claim, he said. The Connecticut River Watershed Council (CRWC) has retained a consultant to evaluate some of the relicensing studies. T. Miner recommended that the FRCOG consider doing this as well if funding is available.

Use of extra upper reservoir storage. FirstLight has filed a new request with FERC for permission to use extra storage capacity of the upper reservoir for added generation from December through March with no restrictions on the use. Previously the New England Power Pool needed to request the added generation when demand exceeds supply. A concern is the impact on bank erosion during the winter, T. Miner noted. The CRSEC (Connecticut River Streambank Erosion Committee) intends to submit comments on FirstLight’s request to FERC.

“Closed loop” option. The “closed loop” option (creation of new off-river lower reservoir) is being evaluated by nonprofit stakeholders. CRWC has studied the land needed and found there may be sufficient area. A new reservoir must be in close proximity to the current pumped storage infrastructure. This will be proposed to FERC as a viable alternative that would decrease or eliminate adverse impacts of the pumped storage project on the river. G. Snedeker lives on a stretch of the river, read the causation study and was dismayed and described the havoc the raising and lowering of the river was wreaking on erosion of the riverbank.

7. Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance	S. Lovejoy
---	------------

P. Sloan reported that in August, FRCOG sent a letter to Federal legislators outlining problems with and suggesting changes for the FERC process. The FRCOG Regional Pipeline Advisory Committee, FRPB Executive Committee and FRCOG Executive Committee came up with the items for the Congressional delegation to consider. FRCOG is following up with Regional Planning Agencies and Congressional aides.

The Citizen Planner Training Collaborative's annual fall workshops hosted by the FRCOG in Greenfield this year will focus on zoning exemptions related to agricultural and educational uses, and on creating master plans. Registration is open. Other topics can be explored in towns farther afield.

T. Miner moved to adjourn the meeting. D. Travers seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Documents Distributed/Presentations Viewed:

- Agenda
- Minutes of June 23, 2016
- Last Mile Broadband Initiative presentation
- *Reducing Pollution in the Millers River Watershed Using Low Impact Development Techniques*

The next meeting will be held on October 27, 2016. Copies of all documents are available. Please contact Rebekah Boyd at admin@frcog.org or 413-774-3167 x100.

Respectfully submitted,

Sam Lovejoy, Clerk - FRPB