



# Franklin Regional Council of Governments

## Franklin Regional Planning Board— *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, November 7, 2019 / 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; Peggy Sloan, Planning Director - FRCOG

### FRPB MEMBERS

- Jerry Lund**, Chair, Leyden, At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Bob Armstrong**, Conway Select Board
- James Basford**, Orange At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee, FRPB representative to the FRCOG Council, FRCOG Executive Committee, Representative to the Route 2 Task Force
- Steven Blinder**, New Salem Planning Board
- Julia Blyth**, Northfield At-Large, Rep. to the Connecticut River Streambank Erosion Committee
- Ted Cady**, Warwick Planning Board, FRPB Executive Committee
- Wayne Hachey**, New Salem Select Board, FRCOG Council
- Stanley Garland**, Bernardston Select Board
- Elizabeth Irving**, Montague Planning Board
- Jonathan Lagrèze**, Colrain Select Board, Colrain Planning Board
- Thomas Miner**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair, Shelburne At-Large, FRPB Exec. Comm., Rep. to the Trans. Planning Org.
- Peter Nai**, Bernardston Planning Board
- Charles Olchowski**, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Micki Paddock**, Shutesbury At-Large
- Dana Roscoe**, Sunderland Planning Board
- Mike Shaffer**, Erving Planning Board
- Jane Shaney**, Ashfield Planning Board
- Chuck Washer**, Shelburne Select Board, FRPB Representative to the REPC
- John Ward**, Gill Select Board
- John Wheeler**, Shelburne Planning Board
- Marguerite Willis**, Charlemont Select Board

### FRCOG STAFF

**Linda Dunlavy**, Executive Director; **Peggy Sloan**, Planning & Development Director; **Liz Jacobson-Carroll**, Administrative Services Assistant;

### PRESENTERS/GUESTS

- Claire Chang**, Owner, The Solar Store
- Emily Johnson**, Director’s Assistant, Harvard Forest
- Brian Keir**, Bernardston Select Board

<b>1. Introductions</b>	J. Lund, Chair – FRPB & FRPB Members
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J. Lund convened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. A round of introductions followed.

<b>2. Review and Approval of September 26, 2019 FRPB Minutes</b>	J. Lund, Chair – FRPB & FRPB Members
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**T. Cady moved to adopt the 9/26/19 minutes, W. Hachey seconded the motion, and the motion passed with 2 abstentions (T. Miner, J. Wheeler).**

<b>3. Presentation on the Massachusetts Rural Policy Plan &amp; Discussion</b>	L. Dunlavy, Executive Director -- FRCOG
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L. Dunlavy's presentation provided overviews of

- the mission of the Rural Policy Advisory Commission, its composition and its goals
- demographic and socio-economic trends in MA
- the goals, process and timeline of the Rural Policy Plan (RPP), its highlights and the top priorities it identifies

Declining and aging populations, relatively low median incomes, and high housing/transportation costs are prevalent in the majority of MA's rural areas, Dunlavy outlined. Western MA residents spend approximately 54% of their income on combined housing/transportation expenses, while Boston residents spend approximately 38%. Dunlavy noted the low percentage of residents employed in professional/scientific/management careers, and the pronounced lack of workforce support systems in rural regions. State funding for economic development tends to be awarded to relatively large-scale residential projects, and to projects related to patenting, neither of which are likely in western MA.

Plan goals included identifying rural assets and challenges, describing how rural areas differ from each other within the state, highlighting current best practices in and beyond MA, and identifying policy, investment and regulatory recommendations prioritized for implementation. In meeting those goals, the Plan identifies three types of rural communities prevalent in MA -- suburban/bedroom communities, economically distressed regions, and locations with a prevalence of 2<sup>nd</sup> homes – and describes how these challenges impact these types of communities. The plan focuses on issues in several categories -- infrastructure, economy, community, governance and climate – and includes specific, action-oriented recommendations and suggestions for possible funding, policy, and administrative changes. L. Dunlavy shared examples of challenges and recommendations in each category.

Discussion topics included:

- ways to attract residents, including those from eastern MA and those foreign-born, and possible population growth due to the arrival of climate refugees
- the potential for a MA Office of Rural Policy, a statewide growth management plan and the need for a rural-urban coalition
- the potential for high-speed rail to increase population and/or tourism
- quantifying the effect of Leverett's development of a home-grown broadband system on housing sales

#### 4. Presentation on Siting & Impacts of Solar Systems in Pioneer Valley & Discussion

E. Johnson, Director's Assistant – Harvard Forest

E. Johnson identified her team members, and then noted that the idea for the project sprung from meetings with rural planners, and is a preliminary (not statewide) review of the relative prevalence of solar arrays built on various types of sites in the past. She described the Harvard Forest staff's use of Google Earth and 2016 National Land Cover Data to supplement incomplete data from the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Johnson outlined three purposes of the study:

- to identify the locations of solar arrays in the Pioneer Valley (69 towns in Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties.)
- to identify the land-cover that preceded these arrays
- to inform regional and local planners regarding the presence of arrays in the region

E. Johnson shared key findings of the study. These include:

- Ground-mounted arrays built on landfills, barren/abandoned lots, mine/gravel pits, and other developed areas represent 19% of the region's total solar acreage.
- Ground-mounted arrays built in undeveloped areas such as forests, agricultural land, and areas covered by scrub/shrubbery or grasslands/herbaceous plants, represent 77% of the region's total solar acreage.
- Non-ground-mounted arrays built upon developed parking lots and rooftops represent 4% of the region's total solar acreage.

She shared aerial photos to illustrate the resulting types of land-cover transformations, as well as additional statistics:

- In Franklin County, 26 solar projects encompass 248 acres; 46% of towns (12) have at least one project; and the average size of the projects is 9.54 acres.
- In Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties combined, 133 projects encompass 1,231 acres, 57% of towns have at least one project, and the average size is 9.26 acres.

Pie charts illustrated the percentage of each type of land currently covered by arrays in Franklin County, and in the three-county region. In Franklin County, 92% of the land currently covered by solar arrays had been undeveloped. In the three-county region, 77% of that land was undeveloped. Bar graphs illustrated the number of acres covered by solar arrays in the relevant towns in the region. Building on the Harvard Forest preliminary study, MA Audubon will be conducting a statewide analysis, she said.

Noting that communities are beginning to recognize the impacts of large scale arrays on farmland and open space, E. Johnson concluded her presentation encouraging town officials to consider:

- including solar array development as a topic in their Open Space and Recreation Plans
- updating town bylaws (many of which were written a decade or so ago)
- consider temporary moratoriums to allow bylaw development
- impacts from the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) Program

Discussion topics included incentivizing rooftop arrays; intersections with the fast-growing marijuana/hemp industries; complementary land use involving livestock, plantings and pollinators; and the possibility of siting arrays on otherwise unbuildable grades.

<b>5. Update on SMART Program &amp; FERC Relicensing of Northfield Mountain Hydroelectric Facilities</b>	P. Sloan, Planning Director – FRCOG & J. Ward, Gill
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P. Sloan introduced J. Ward who asked C. Chang to assist him in explaining the potential impacts of the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) Program on land use.

C. Chang described the overwhelming popularity of the program, which opened in November 2018, and quickly created a 2-year backlog of projects. That triggered a review by the Department of Energy Resources (DOER), which extended the net metering cap from 1600 to 2400 megawatts. The SMART Program is based on incentives to prioritize for social and environmental good, Chang explained, by identifying “adders” (building on brownfields, for example) and “subtractors” (cutting down trees), but that financial calculations are, in fact, the State’s over-riding concern. She indicated that the DOER is planning another review and expansion prior to Thanksgiving. The new cap will be met quickly by backlogged projects, and another period of waiting will ensue, she predicted.

C. Chang described MA’s huge capacity for offshore wind energy generation, noting that it could power all of New England and export energy to New Jersey. She hopes that we can complement offshore wind and solar generation with storage, noting that the SMART Program incentivizes projects that include both. Currently, ISO New England manages the power supply in the region and having a utility own storage may make the system more resilient, Chang added.

In response to a question from P. Sloan, Chang indicated that town officials may want to consider adding storage to their substations, or building stand-alone storage (not connected to an array) facilities, as these would add value. To reach the goal of 100% renewable energy statewide, MA must increase its capacity by 10 orders of magnitude to 20-30 gigawatts of solar energy, C. Chang said. Referencing electricity as the easiest form of energy to make sustainable, she offered that Boston should generate their own energy by putting solar panels on every surface, and that the carbon offset of solar generation is more effective than carbon sequestration. Discussion topics included the urgent need not just to *meet*, but to *reduce* demand, and the balancing scale, efficiency and profitability with caps on storage and net metering.

P. Sloan reported that the FERC relicensing of Northfield Mountain hydroelectric facilities has been stalled, that no meetings have been held.

<b>6. Other Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting/Adjourn/Public Comment</b>	J. Lund, Chair - FRPB
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**T. Cady moved to adjourn the meeting, C. Olchowski seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned at 8 PM.**

Documents Distributed / Presentations Viewed:

- Agenda
- FRPB Minutes, September 26, 2019 – DRAFT
- Presentation: *Introduction to the Rural Policy Plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*
- Presentation: The Siting and Impact of Solar in Franklin, Hampshire & Hampden Counties Preliminary Study

The next meeting will be held on January 23, 2020. Copies of all documents are available. Please contact Liz Jacobson-Carroll at [ljc@frcog.org](mailto:ljc@frcog.org) or 413-774-3167 x101.

Respectfully submitted,

Gisela Walker, Clerk - FRPB