



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Franklin Regional Planning Board— *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, September 27 , 2018 / 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 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 & FRCOG Executive Committee
- Julia Blyth**, Northfield Select Board, FRPB Executive Committee
- Ted Cady**, Warwick Planning Board, FRPB Executive Committee
- Wayne Hachey**, New Salem Select Board
- Thomas Hutcheson**, 1st Vice Chair, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Jonathan Lagrèze**, Colrain Select Board
- Nathan L’Etoile**, Northfield At-Large
- Kenneth Miller**, Ashfield Planning Board
- Thomas Miner**, 2nd Vice Chair, Shelburne At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Richard Nathorst**, Leverett Planning Board
- Charles Olchowski**, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Micki Paddock**, Shutesbury At-Large
- Patricia Perry**, Greenfield At-Large
- Nan Riebschlaeger**, Wendell Planning Board
- Mike Shaffer**, Erving Planning Board
- Joseph Strzegowski**, Conway Planning Board

FRCOG STAFF

- Peggy Sloan**, Planning & Development Director
- Liz Jacobson-Carroll**, Administrative Services Assistant
- Kimberly Noake MacPhee**, Land Use & Natural Resource Program Manager;

PRESENTERS/GUESTS

- Gregory Garrison**, Northeast Solar
- Barbara Francis**, Leyden

1. Introductions	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.

2. Review and Approval of June 28, 2018 FRPB Minutes	J. Lund, Chair – FRPB & FRPB Members
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J. Lund moved to adopt the 6/28/18 minutes, T. Hutcheson seconded the motion, and the motion passed with 1 abstention.

3. Presentation & Discussion of the Wendell Community Solar Project	N. Riebschlager, Wendell Planning Board & G. Garrison, Northeast Solar
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N. Riebschlager gave a brief history of the development of the Wendell Community Solar Project which was initiated by the Wendell Energy Committee. The Energy Committee gained the endorsement of residents at Town Meeting to utilize a recently acquired Town property.

G. Garrison gave a brief history of Northeast Solar (NS), which he began while enrolled in GCC’s renewable energy program. NS is committed to a business model that retains the economic benefits for the local community in comparison to corporate-owned large community solar sites which export benefits and money to outside investors. NS helps communities form non-profit cooperatives so that the savings they realize through the use of solar power are retained locally. Further, this approach allows members to purchase panels and a proportional piece of the solar array, to receive the additional benefits of tax credits, net metering credits, etc. Garrison noted that the various permitting processes necessary to establish this model have been extensive and time-consuming.

The Wendell project, which is now approximately 50% subscribed, is NS’s first. NS plans to launch as many as possible in Franklin County towns over the next 2.5 years in order to take advantage of the expiring tax credits. G. Garrison noted that NS is having preliminary discussions with Colrain, and has had heard from Conway that it may be interested in administering its own project -- rather than forming an independent cooperative -- in order for the Town to benefit.

G. Garrison emphasized that buying into a solar cooperative is not an investment, and that the Securities and Exchange Commission and the IRS are very clear about rules for cooperatives. While individual members will be able to sell their panels and membership back to the cooperative, they will get back their retained value, but no increased value. Neither are individuals able to buy or sell energy credits, as they have no re-sale value. The Wendell cooperative is designed to handle those financial transactions; it won’t buy back panels, but it will determine what the fair market value is and facilitate the transfer to a new owner. N. Riebschlager noted that members of the coop who may move within the National Grid region will be able to retain their participation.

The Wendell cooperative serves as the individual entity entering into an agreement with the utility company. NS makes sure the cooperative “Board” is set up administratively, which is a significant undertaking and includes electing board members, starting bank accounts, and the like. Everyone who buys a panel joins the coop as a member (currently limited to owners of individual residences). Members determine the costs and take care of the maintenance and business functions. Members are responsible for mowing the property, maintaining the equipment, distributing funds, etc. Once the initial costs of establishing the project are covered, and some funds for maintenance and decommissioning are put aside, savings are disbursed to the members. Wendell’s Board handles votes, meetings, and finances. G. Garrison serves on the board of the cooperative for a period of time in order to facilitate the start-up process.

Wendell's is the first project in the State that has the full approval from the Mass Solar Loan program. Members with low and fixed incomes can have up to 30% of the purchase price forgiven by the State. In response to questions, G. Garrison noted that after paying a \$500 non-refundable deposit, subscribers may apply for the loan, which takes about two weeks, and that the loan program has enabled a lot more people to buy solar. In a cooperative, everybody has the same cost per watt and the cost goes down as more participate. Consequently, the threshold for entry is greatly reduced. He noted that anyone in the National Grid service area is eligible to buy into the Wendell project.

G. Garrison noted that NS does not build megawatt systems, but will continue to work on small projects in the Connecticut River Valley. NS is also looking for partners in the Eastern part of the State. He cited cost savings, the small amount of land needed (just over 2 acres) and the ability for a small group of people to manage and start a cooperative on a part time basis are all advantages of this approach. NS is focused on expanding solar ownership in the "Happy Valley," particularly among the many potential customers they have had to turn away due to unsuitable locations for siting solar PV. NS invests about \$25,000 to start each project. In order to support the expansion of their business, NS is investing in employees by offering a training program to help them become electricians and installers. Approximately 70% of NS's employees come through GCC, Garrison noted.

G. Garrison referred to the state's next incentive, the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) program, which will eliminate the cap on credits. This will enable individuals to buy more than they need and claim infrastructure expenses on their taxes. Discussion also included the economics of banks and others profiting off solar energy systems.

G. Garrison answered several questions. He explained that NS hired a Boston attorney to craft general bylaws for this type of system, which they give to towns to use as a base for crafting their own. Wendell's new cooperative bylaws are based on it. Garrison noted that State procurement rules did not apply to Wendell, because the cooperative hired NS, not the municipality. He mentioned that all of NS's systems will have a power bank on site, so that during power outages, people can charge up their cell phones. The fixed cost of the permitting, engineering, interconnection, and building processes is fixed at \$25,000, so the minimum number of panels per project is 500-1000; the average member is purchasing 10. He expects approval of the utility interconnection in Wendell next week.

R. Nathorst indicated that the Town of Leverett is looking into buying power from residents who are generating more than they need -- as an alternative to those individuals selling their excess back to the utility for "a pittance."

J. Lund's expression of thanks was followed by a round of applause.

4. Presentation and Discussion on the Municipal Vulnerability Program	K. Noake MacPhee, Land Use & Natural Resource Program Mgr. - FRCOG
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K.N. MacPhee introduced the state's Municipal Vulnerability Program (MVP), which aims to encourage towns to prepare for climate change in two phases. First, it will provide a planning grant to help towns assess their vulnerabilities and strengths, to develop action plans based on those assessments, and to apply for MVP designation. Second, it will provide funding to those communities successful in receiving the MPV designation to implement their action plans. In the first cycle of the program,

Ashfield/Conway, Charlemont, Colrain, Buckland, Deerfield and Montague received planning grants. In the second grant round, Erving received a planning grant and Deerfield and Montague received implementation funds.

Towns with planning grants get help from FRCOG to complete their assessments, create a prioritized list of actions to be taken, and file the request for MVP designation. The state determines the amount of the planning grant for each town and towns must commit to a match of 100-120 hours (possibly fewer for this end of state) from members of town boards/committees. Maintaining the MVP designation is relatively easy, she noted. In the awarding of action grants, preference is given to projects utilizing nature-based solutions such as river corridor management strategies. Towns must provide a 25% funding match. Project categories include:

- detailed vulnerability and risk assessment
- public education and communication
- local bylaws, ordinances, plans and other management measures
- redesigns and retrofits
- nature-based storm-damage protection, drought prevention, water quality, and water infiltration techniques
- nature-based, infrastructure and technology solutions to reduce vulnerability to extreme heat and poor air quality
- nature-based solutions to reduce vulnerability to other climate change impacts
- ecological restoration and habitat management to increase resiliency.

K.N. MacPhee explained that the concept behind the open and flexible program is that it effectively enables towns to address their specific infrastructural and societal vulnerabilities, in part by utilizing their particular strengths -- all of which they know best. "What are your town's strengths and how can you build upon them to prepare for problems caused by climate change?" she posited. MVP workshop participants may include members of town boards and departments, business owners, social service agency employees, church volunteers, etc. to capture local knowledge and experience.

By way of example, K.N. MacPhee summarized Buckland's work with a planning grant. It identified 6 areas of concern relating to neighborhoods/populations, specific culverts, roads and bridges; risks posed by the railroad going through town; a vulnerable town/historic buildings and communications infrastructure; and two threatened ecosystems. It identified 6 strengths: self-sufficiency of "locals" and "old-timers"; well-protected wastewater and sewer systems; the ability for fire and police to re-locate outside flooded zones; ample alternative road routes; digitized town records in cloud storage; and a town hall daytime heating/cooling center with a generator and kitchen. The town identified priority actions, including: developing action plans for evacuating at-risk neighborhoods in the event of a train derailment; replacing failing culverts; protecting recreational property from erosion; creating a map and inventory of areas with poor communication capabilities; and identifying alternate sites for a temporary town hall and police station.

In closing, K.N. MacPhee encouraged town officials to consider applying for MVP planning grants when the next grant round opens (probably November) and referred them back to the possible project categories, listed above. She emphasized the ease of the 5-step application process, and offered her

help. Finally, she indicated that towns may want to align this work with updating their Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plans for FEMA, as well as other possible federal grant programs to which they may apply.

Discussion turned to culverts and small bridges, and state-funded programs to repair and replace them. A need for standards to re-design culverts was identified, as was the fact that these are not anticipated anytime soon. K.N. MacPhee pointed out that a community could use MVP planning funds to assess culvert vulnerability, and then implementation funds to hire an engineer to re-design them. It was noted that data being used by the state (and FEMA) to re-design small bridges is outdated, and results in replacements no more resilient than their predecessors. K.N. MacPhee pointed out that having design work which explicitly indicates, with data, the need for modified/larger designs increases a community's chances of getting funding to build resilient infrastructure.

J. Lund's expression of thanks was followed by a round of applause.

5. Updates on FERC Relicensing of the Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Facility & Recreational Marijuana Bylaws	P. Sloan, Planning Director - FRCOG
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K.N. MacPhee reported that, in June, the CT River Conservancy had filed a letter asking FERC for new additional information, and continued to request that First Light be required to study the feasibility of an off-line and lower reservoir as an alternative to pumping directly from the river; it is not clear where it is in the review process.

There will be a meeting on October 9th to study FERC's recently issued licensing process plan, and to talk about the appended erosion-causation study. We have an opportunity to submit comments on the latter, which looks at the effects of using all of the storage in the upper Northfield reservoir, she said. FirstLight will likely file its amended final license application with FERC next July 2019.

Once the amended final FERC license application is filed, FirstLight will file an application with MassDEP for a 401 Water Quality Certificate permit. This process will provide towns and the FRCOG with another opportunity to be involved and comment. The FRCOG has been looking at town open space and recreation areas within the FirstLight project area, and will soon contact towns to review its findings. The goal is to be well-positioned, to make requests of FirstLight as the FERC process is winding down, she said. This is an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fund new and repair existing facilities and the implementation of recreation management plans.

P. Sloan reported that Conway residents voted unanimously to lift the moratorium on recreational marijuana establishments and to approve zoning bylaw amendments proposed by the Planning Board - with the addition of an amendment on Town Meeting floor indicating that those using organic methods will be given preference in the permitting process. Discussion included ways to address the conundrum regarding the federal government's purview over organic certification and its laws outlawing marijuana cultivation. Other towns are in various stages of drafting and adopting bylaws including Sunderland, Buckland, and Charlemont. Colrain may start discussions on the topic. Leverett and Warwick have determined that they do not need changes to their zoning bylaws. Erving and Whately zoning amendments have passed at Town Meeting and have been approved by the AG's office.

Sloan noted that FRCOG’s recent workshop on growing hemp in Massachusetts was well attended and informative. At that workshop, Dr. Darby described the UVM Agricultural Extension’s research on hemp cultivation in New England and a MA Department of Agricultural Resources representative described the new Hemp Program process for applying for a grower’s license. P. Sloan noted that in MA, hemp is an agricultural product eligible for a zoning exemption.

J. Lund’s expression of thanks was followed by a round of applause.

6. Other Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of the meeting/ Adjourn/Public Comment	J. Lund, Chair - FRPB
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T. Lund moved to adjourn the meeting, T. Cady seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:37 PM.

Documents Distributed / Presentations Viewed:

- Agenda
- FRPB Minutes, June 28, 2018 – DRAFT
- Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Factsheet
- “Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program” PowerPoint presentation

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, November 1, 2018. Copies of all documents are available. Please contact Liz Jacobson-Carroll at ljc@frcog.org or 413-774-3167 x101.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Miner, 2nd Vice Chair - FRPB