



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Franklin Regional Planning Board — MEETING MINUTES

Date & Time:	Thursday, May 23, 2019 / 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Location:	JW Olver Transit Center, 12 Olive St., Greenfield, MA – 1st Floor Conference Room
Facilitator:	Jerry Lund, Chair

FRPB MEMBERS

- Jerry Lund**, Chair, Leyden, At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- John Baronas**, Deerfield At-Large
- James Basford**, Orange At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee, FRPB representative to the FRCOG Council, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Julia Blyth**, Northfield Select Board, FRPB Executive Committee, FRCOG Council
- Ted Cady**, Warwick Planning Board, FRPB Executive Committee
- Wayne Hachey**, New Salem Select Board, FRCOG Council
- Kenneth Miller**, Ashfield Planning Board
- Thomas Miner**, 2nd Vice Chair, Shelburne At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Richard Nathhorst**, Leverett Planning Board
- Charles Olchowski**, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Micki Paddock**, Shutesbury At-Large
- Mike Shaffer**, Erving Planning Board
- John Ward**, Gill Select Board, FRCOG Council alternate
- Chuck Washer**, Shelburne Select Board, FRPB Representative to the REPC

FRCOG STAFF

- Peggy Sloan**, Planning & Development Director
- Maureen Mullaney**, Transportation and GIS Program Manager II
- Jessica Atwood**, Economic Development Program Manager
- Liz Jacobson-Carroll**, Administrative Services Assistant

PRESENTERS/GUESTS

- Steve Long** and **Sarah Jackson**, The Nature Conservancy

1. Introductions	J. Lund, Chair – FRPB & FRPB Members
J. Lund convened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. A round of introductions followed.	
2. Review and Approval of March 28, 2019 FRPB Minutes	G. Walker, Clerk -- FRPB
T. Cady moved to adopt the March 28, 2019 minutes, J. Baronas seconded the motion, and the motion passed with 4 abstentions. (Baronas, Hachey, Olchowski, Lund)	
3. Presentation on Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy	J. Atwood, Economic

J. Atwood presented the fourth and final update to the 2015 CEDS Plan. Submission of this annual report ensures eligibility for certain federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding opportunities for the 26 towns of Franklin County plus the towns of Athol, Amherst and Phillipston, she said, then summarized significant updates since her last presentation.

To the Economic Conditions chapter, updates include:

- discussion of the comprehensive 2020 Regional Transportation Plan
- an updated map of broadband coverage in the region
- revised population figures and projections
- employment data indicating a continuing drop in unemployment, a growing labor force and a rising employment rate
- indication that local residents continue to work in non-profits and government, or for themselves, more so than other areas in the State and Nation
- confirmation that local income and wages remain much lower than the State averages, and slightly higher than national averages, and further confirmation that Franklin County's average wage per job remains the lowest in MA
- notice regarding the absence of County Business Pattern data due to a delay in its release, accompanied by 2016 data showing the private-sector industries employing the most people locally
- new "Non-Employer Data" indicating a decline in the number of establishments and an increase in annual receipts
- the addition of 2017 Census of Agriculture data indicating an increase in the numbers of farms, but a decrease in the number of acres farmed, since 2012

J. Atwood commented that the exceptionally low unemployment, and jumps in both the size of the labor force and the numbers of individuals employed, may be due to the return of people to the workforce who left as a result of the recession, or to the retention of older people in the workforce. She noted that the figures do not account for the under-employed. Regarding the decrease in farmland, she indicated that staff will look deeper into the finding as they develop the 2020 CEDS Plan.

To the Strategies and Action Items chapter, updates include information regarding:

- the growth and success of the Manufacturing Skills Initiative, a collaboration between MassHire Franklin-Hampshire, GCC, FCTS and local businesses
- a successful summit in March of regional and local business associations and their on-going meetings
- the identification and inclusion of last-mile solutions on the January 2019 Broadband Status map
- the closeout of the latest EPA Brownfields grant, and the pending application for another
- recent Brownfields clean-up awards for industrial sites in Erving and Turners Falls
- development of a statewide Rural Advisory Policy Commission plan
- the 2019 launch of a two-year pilot project expanding North-South passenger rail service on the Connecticut River Line
- exploring a micro-transit model for flexible and dynamic services
- the opening of the Olive Street parking garage

- Complete Streets project awards in four towns
- progress toward the opening of a makerspace in the Orange Innovation Center (OIC) and in Athol
- the completion of OIC parking lot project
- the opening of the Center for Wellness, co-located with the Community Health Center of Franklin County and the Center for Human Development in Greenfield
- the completion of the Monroe Bridge Overlook Park
- the commercial center study in South Deerfield
- the creation of an Economic Development Vision for Whately
- a Mapping and Promotion Project for downtown Orange
- the success of the FCCDC Lending Program in leveraging investments and creating jobs
- passage of the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership legislation, and the requirement that 11 of 21 towns “opt in” for the MTWP Board to receive funding

J. Atwood reviewed the 2019 CEDS Annual Report schedule, noting that the FRPB will be asked to endorse the final version at its June 27 meeting. In response to a question about the Brownfield building site adjacent to the Monroe Bridge Overlook Park, she described that the next step is to conduct a Brownfield Site Assessment on the remainder of the property.

J. Atwood outlined the Opportunity Zone (OZ) Program’s goal of incentivizing private investment in low-income communities, and its tax advantages for investors in business or real estate projects in federally designated, economically distressed areas. She explained how the program works, and then summarized her efforts with local towns to secure OZ designation and prepare community profiles. FRCOG staff held a workshop for investors and project advocates in Springfield in March, and has plans to offer another on local capacity-building. In response to questions, she noted that it would be difficult to combine private investments in the program with public funds for housing development, and that we do not yet know if the program will work in our rural area. She explained that OZs have been designated in all or in parts of the following Franklin County towns: Colrain, Charlemont, Erving, Greenfield, Hawley, Heath, Monroe, Montague, Orange, Rowe, Warwick, and Wendell.

J. Atwood briefed attendees on emerging local efforts to ensure a thorough accounting of Franklin County residents for the 2020 federal census. FRCOG is forming a Complete Count Committee and invites all interested stakeholders to a kick-off event at 3:30 on June 5th in the 1st floor meeting room at the JWO Transit Center. The Committee will consider how to prepare households for the census, how to increase access to the now on-line census, how to help residents recognize the official postcard versus scam mailings, etc. The Committee’s work will be driven by the importance of a complete count to the designation or re-designation of legislative districts, and in determining eligibility for federal funds from multiple programs.

4. Presentation & Discussion on Transportation Options to Reduce Carbon Emissions and Preferences for Rural Areas	M. Mullaney, Transportation & GIS Program Manager II & P. Sloan, Planning Director -- FRCOG
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M. Mullaney announced that FRCOG had recently entered into an agreement with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to hold listening sessions to gather information for the Transportation & Climate Initiative (TCI), a consortium of energy, environmental and transportation agencies from a dozen

Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states, plus the District of Columbia (DC). The aim of the session is to find out what rural residents would be most interested in implementing to reduce carbon emissions and greenhouse gases in order to move toward a clean-energy transportation system. Mullaney introduced S. Long and S. Jackson of TNC.

M. Mullaney explained that discussion and action pertaining to clean energy tends to focus on urban centers, often leaving rural communities with disadvantageous results. She said that the FRPB has been identified as a group of local experts representing the towns and the region; and that a group of local business leaders will be similarly consulted. In addition, sessions with the public are being explored. While Mullaney referenced possible revenue streams, she noted that the goal of the listening sessions is to gauge interest in, and brainstorm, potential solutions.

M. Mullaney outlined Governor Baker's statement of support of the TCI, highlighting and explaining his references to the "cap and invest" strategy, a more resilient transportation infrastructure, and substantial reductions in transportation sector emissions that provide economic and social benefits. Mullaney reviewed MA transportation emissions statistics, and summarized results of TNC's recent polling of rural and small-town voters' views of transportation and climate.

Polling indicates that local transportation habits center on private cars, with existing transit alternatives seeming infeasible; that significant drive distance/time is inevitable; that a mutual reliance between friends and neighbors for assistance with pick-up/drop-offs and running errands is necessary; that some residents experience frustration at being stuck behind large vehicles; and that many residents are dissatisfied with the long travel times, circuitous routes, and inconvenience of public transportation so therefore choose not to use it, if possible. Polling also indicated a strong desire to spend less time in a car; a tendency to drive somewhat less when gas prices rise; an inability to identify practical alternatives to driving; and the continued use of private cars in the visions of even the most forward-looking participants.

A "cap and invest" financing system would require importers of fuels to purchase permits/allowances based on the resultant emissions, M. Mullaney said. This revenue would be used to implement the selected solutions to reducing emissions. Other potential funding solutions could include a gas tax, a vehicle miles-traveled tax, and congestion tolling on interstates and other limited-access highways, however these options are not the subject of the evening's meeting. The tax options are unpopular in rural areas as most people have little choice but to drive. More popular is the idea of a clean-transportation fund under which polluters would pay.

M. Mullaney led the group in an activity where participants voted for proposed solutions, then she summarized and led the discussion, with S. Long, on the most popular options. These included incentives to promote cleaner vehicles, more reserved parking and/or free charging stations at municipal lots, more park-and-ride lots, and employer-sponsored vanpools from population centers. D. Travers suggested that incentives to drive less would be most effective if they were developed in combination with each other. Commuters would be more likely to drive electric vehicles and utilize public transportation if they were able to charge for free at park-and-ride lots or use a subsidized pass for transit, for example.

J. Ward explained the benefits of the regional energy grid, which generally does not use oil or coal, except at rare times of very high energy use. Ward noted that our grid is cleaner than our cars, and

that by electrifying the fleet we would reap significant reductions in carbon emissions. As co-owner of the Solar Store and driver of an electric car, Ward offered to share his thoughts with interested individuals outside of the meeting. Others referenced the ChargePoint system, UMass parking/charging practices, Big Y’s “win-win” option providing free charging to shoppers, East-West passenger rail, and hybrid vehicles. Other topics of interest to the group were the conservation of forests for carbon sequestration, the purchasing and returning of house lots to forest, and incentivizing infill and higher density housing development.

The concept of eastern MA compensating struggling western MA communities for the environmental services they provide was discussed. Broadband to support working from home, incentives for employers to sponsor vanpools, micro-transit options, and the design and construction of bike routes between employment and population centers were deliberated. The extensive increase in truck emissions due to long detours around Gen. Pierce Bridge and other local construction sites is problematic.

P. Sloan suggested an advertising campaign, similar to those used by MassSave, to educate people about electric vehicles and other options. M. Mullaney explained current challenges in establishing a micro-transit program in a rural area. It was noted that the FRTA provides rides to appointments for senior citizens with a 24 or 48-hours notice.

S. Long thanked members for their input, then sought and received suggestions for other local audiences. A round of applause concluded the session.

5. Nomination & Vote for Nominating Committee for FRPB 2019/2020 Annual Elections -- J. Basford, C Olchowski & G. Walker	P. Sloan, Planning Director – FRCOG
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P. Sloan hoped that members currently on special committees are willing to serve for another year, but that any wishing to decline re-appointment should contact her. She noted that there are two At-Large positions opening up, and that the Nominating Committee welcomes suggestions.

T. Hutcheson moved to appoint J. Basford, C. Olchowski and G. Walker to the Nominating Committee, T. Cady seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

6. Updates on FERC Relicensing of Bear Swamp and Northfield Mountain Hydroelectric Facilities	P. Sloan, Planning Director – FRPB
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Regarding the relicensing of the Northfield Mountain facility, P. Sloan said that FERC has not yet ruled on FirstLight’s request to transfer ownership of the projects to new LLCs. First Light held a meeting on March 29th to discuss recreation and erosion issues, and study updates. It received many requests to improve recreation facilities. FirstLight continues to maintain that it is not responsible for the continuing erosion. FirstLight has requested an extension of time, to October 18, 2019, to complete the Archeological Evaluation of 17 sites, up from 14, following a MA Historical Commission request. FirstLight plans to file the Amended Final License Application with FERC on April 30, 2020. FRCOG staff will be working with stakeholders to refine our Adaptive River Management Plan and Recreation Plan. Montague recently sent FirstLight a list of needs related to recreational facilities.

Regarding the re-licensing of the Bear Swamp Facility, FRCOG responded to the open comment period for the MassDEP 401WQC by sending in the letter it had previously filed with FERC and requesting that the MassDEP consider the comments in FRCOG's letter. FRCOG's filing with MassDEP during the public comment period for the 401WQC preserves FRCOG's rights to appeal the water quality certificate when issued. Bear Swamp has responded to stakeholders' comments in a 23-page letter.

7. Other Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting/Adjourn/Public Comment	J. Lund, Chair - FRPB
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T. Cady moved to adjourn the meeting, W. Hachey seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned at 7:48 PM.

Documents Distributed / Presentations Viewed:

- Agenda
- FRPB Minutes, March 28, 2019 – DRAFT
- *Presentation to the Franklin Regional Planning Board, May 23, 2019*, by Jessica Atwood
- "Help Prepare for the 2020 Census!" flyer
- *Rural Transportation Listening Session with The Franklin Regional Planning Board, May 23, 2019*, by M. Mullaney

The next meeting will be Thursday, June 27, 2019. Copies of all documents are available. Please contact Liz Jacobson-Carroll at ljc@frcog.org or 413-774-3167 x101.

Respectfully submitted,

Gisela Walker, Clerk - FRPB