



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Executive Committee —*MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, October 8, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.
Location:	Remote meeting using videoconferencing technology
Facilitator:	Jay DiPucchio, Chair

Executive Committee Representatives Present:

- Jay DiPucchio, Regionally Elected
- Jim Basford, FRPB Appointee
- Bill Perlman, Regionally Elected
- Dani Letourneau, Council Appointee (alternate)
- Kevin Fox, Colrain Representative

Staff Members and Guests Present:

- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director
- Claire McGinnis, Finance Director
- Bob Dean, Dir. of Regional Services
- Phoebe Walker, Dir. of Community Services
- Rebekah Boyd, Admin Services Coordinator
- Jessica Atwood, Economic Dev. Prog. Manager
- Trevor McDaniel, Council Chair, Deerfield Rep
- Heather Butler, Buckland Town Administrator

1. Review and adopt 8.13.20 Executive Committee/EDD Governing Board minutes

Jay convened the meeting at 5:03 p.m. **Bill moved adoption of the 8.13.20 Executive Committee/EDD Governing Board minutes as written. Kevin seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.**

2. Convene as EDD Governing Board

Jessica Atwood recommended appointment of Rebecca Bialecki to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee, following the retirement of Patricia Crosby. Jess explained that Rebecca is the Executive Director of the Franklin Hampshire Workforce Development Board, and members of the CEDS are elated that she will be able to represent the region’s workforce.

Bill moved appointment of Rebecca Bialecki to the CEDS committee. Kevin seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Other CEDS updates

Jessica announced that FRCOG completed the RFP process to hire a contractor for local business technical assistance, funded by the EDA supplemental planning grant to mitigate economic impacts related to the pandemic. The FCCDC was selected to provide services to county businesses and entrepreneurs for a period of slightly less than two years.

FRCOG staff are working with towns and project advocates to assist with project development in preparation for possibly applying for federal EDA funds. Projects exploring this opportunity include:

- Expansion of GCC’s entrepreneurship and skills training programs to be held at the GCC Downtown Center, and at LaunchSpace facilities in Orange and Athol

- A component of Charlemont’s broadband telecom hub
- A study of Deerfield River Corridor Outdoor Recreation to examine structural issues and promote business development
- An upgrade to Erving’s #2 wastewater treatment plant requiring critical improvements

Soon staff will craft a RFP to hire a consultant to conduct a study of public water and wastewater infrastructure across the county. Also as part of this EDA grant, staff is working on a regional economic recovery and resiliency plan.

3. Receive petition and discuss public hearing logistics for relocation of Conway, Summer, and South Streets; and Conway Road in Buckland.

Bob Dean reported that Buckland is requesting relocation of county road layouts, essentially from State Street close to the iron bridge in Shelburne Falls all the way to the Conway town line. The Town seeks to rectify public safety and storm-water drainage issues along these roads, and to bring the route up to ADA compliance. Because the engineers designing the project are having difficulty locating existing county layouts, MassDOT feels the best option is to lay out the route anew, with the engineers laying out all four roads as one continuous route, based on existing layout descriptions.

In accordance with the FRCOG bylaws, Kevin will recuse himself from participation, as he is a resident of Buckland. The committee discussed replacing Kevin with an appointed person, in the event that not all can be present at the hearing and associated votes.

Jay moved to appoint Linda Dunlavy as a replacement, if needed, in Kevin Fox’s stead, when convening and voting on issues related to the Buckland road action view and hearing. Kevin seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor.

Although the town is not requesting it, the committee discussed how best to carry out a view of the route during the pandemic. Members felt that with some 45 abutters along the four roads, and many easements required, a view of some variety is needed. To do so, members suggested possibly using a drone to film the route and Falls Cable to present the video or renting a bus to drive those interested along the route. The committee ultimately decided that taking a simple phone video of the route and presenting it during a zoom meeting/hearing and possibly posting it on the website, with opportunities to comment, was regarded as the easiest, least expensive, and most COVID-cautious option.

Bill moved to receive the Buckland petition, and set 5:00 p.m., November 12, 2020, for the combined remote viewing and hearing. Jim seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor.

Bob noted that the town will need to address route easements in the future. Heather Butler, Buckland Town Administrator said that designers are aware of the required hearing and will schedule their work preparing a layout plan and written description in deference to the Executive Committee’s schedule. She also agreed to reserve the Buckland Town Hall in the event that an in-public view is needed.

4. CoMIRS (Commonwealth Interoperable Radio System) transition update

Linda told the committee that steps made towards migration to the CoMIRS system continue. To date, the MOA between FRCOG and EOTTS has been finalized, MOAs between FRCOG were sent to all users, and FRCOG has received all but nine of those. The Governor is aware of FRCOG’s role in the migration

and has authorized EOTTS to allocate money for FRCOG to hire radios programmers, with extra money for installation. FRCOG will complete and send in the \$2.7 M grant application soon.

Linda alerted the committee that staff anticipate needing to redeploy FRCOG's Dan Nietsche, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, to oversee the migration on behalf of the FRCOG. He will be needed to manage the equipment procurement process, work with EOTSS to begin and monitor migration, and trouble-shoot coverage issues among municipalities.

Bill suggested looking at antenna sites as one way to boost coverage. Trevor McDaniel asked why some towns haven't returned MOAs and if we are concerned. Linda responded that we are not concerned yet - believes the chiefs in the town simply unaware that their towns haven't returned the agreements. Staff will work to be sure all sign. The only alternative to not joining is for towns to build their own radio systems or join another system. It is incumbent on FRCOG and the FCECS oversight board to educate those who are unclear about the consequences of not signing.

The timeline and order of the system rollout has not yet been set, but municipal financial readiness may be a deciding factor. Although FRCOG suggested towns and cities should allocate the cost for joining the system in their FY21 budgets, Linda is unclear if all towns have done so and expects they have not given the COVID-related impacts to Town Meetings and municipal budgets. Dan Nietsche will join the full Council meeting next week for a Q & A.

5. Federal political advocacy

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission asked if FRCOG is interested in hiring a lobbyist that specializes in federal budgeting, policy, and legislation to look out for the needs of the region. In this era of ongoing pandemic and resulting economic uncertainty, and with the outcome of the presidential election an unknown, having a lobbyist in Washington to keep us informed of funding pots, might be a good idea, Linda explained. Jim McGovern feels it's a smart idea, she said. He allowed that though he always tries to keep his finger on the pulse, it is what lobbyists do.

The person FRCOG staff are considering for the position is Chris Ciago, with whom Linda has already corresponded. A Williams College graduate who understands rural municipal challenges, he alerted Linda that grants were available to towns to cover their COVID-related election expenses, and within hours of Linda passing along word of the funding, more than four towns were awarded \$5,000. The annual cost to FRCOG for the lobbyist is \$7,500, and he has already delivered more than that to Franklin County, she said.

Trevor and Danielle both spoke enthusiastically about the prospect of having an advocate in their corner for shovel-ready projects, funding for staffing, and as a united voice for the region. Bill felt it is a worthwhile investment, not just to identify funding sources, but as the eyes and ears in the capital.

Although Claire has yet to identify funding within the budget, the hope is that the contract might begin November 1 or in January. The Council will need to approve it if it requires use of undesignated fund balance and a budget amendment.

Bill moved that the Executive Committee recommend to the Finance Committee an expense of \$7,500 to contract for the services of a federal policy advocate. Jim seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor.

6. Appoint members to the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Board of Commissioners

The Executive Committee appoints members to the HRA board of commissioners. The HRA finds fitting candidates, and the Executive Committee then reviews resumes and makes the appointments. The HRA is struggling to find candidates, and would like members to consider their acquaintances and colleagues, and pass any recommendations along to Gina Govoni, HRA Executive Director.

7. Discussion of State Action for Public Health Excellence (SAPHE) bill.

Phoebe reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that the state’s local public health system is not adequately structured, staffed, or financed to meet large-scale public health challenges. She urged members to support the Statewide Accelerated Public Health (SAPHE) Act, which seeks to:

- Require that municipalities use credentialed health agents & public health nurses
- Set minimum public health standards and require towns to meet those standards
- Incentivize municipal sharing of essential public health services across jurisdictions
- Create uniform data collection and reporting systems
- Dedicate funding for planning, technical assistance, and ongoing sustainable operation.

Phoebe explained that Massachusetts is one of the only states that does not provide dedicated state funding to local health departments. She said that while the legislation would result in fewer entities overall, it would not touch the authority of Boards of Health. Phoebe asked the Executive Committee to vote to support the legislation and to send a letter of that support.

Bill asked if the legislation would result in an ongoing burden to local Boards of Health. Phoebe responded that it will add to the burden initially, when training and working is to determine staffing, but she’s heard no push-back from towns, as they are currently hitting a wall, and would relish this - mandated restructuring and funding. The Mass association of health boards is also in favor, she added.

Kevin moved that the Executive Committee support SAPHE legislation and asked staff to send a letter of support. Dani seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor.

6. Business not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of meeting

No unanticipated business was discussed. **Jim moved adjournment, seconded by Kevin, which passed with all in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:02 p.m.**

Documents Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft 8.13.20 Executive Committee/EDD Governing Board minutes
- Statewide Accelerated Public Health (SAPHE) Act flyer.

Minutes taken by Rebekah Boyd.