



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Franklin Regional Planning Board— *MINUTES*

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| Date & Time: | Thursday, January 27, 2022 @ 6:00 p.m. |
| Location: | https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81870639716#success Meeting ID: 818 7063 9716 |
| Facilitator: | Jerry Lund, Chair - FRPB; Peggy Sloan, Planning Director - FRCOG |

FRPB MEMBERS

- Jerry Lund**, Chair, Leyden At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Steven Blinder**, New Salem Planning Board
- Julia Blyth**, Clerk, Northfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee, Rep. to the Connecticut River Streambank Erosion Committee, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Marybeth Chichester**, Colrain Planning Board, FRPB Executive Committee
- Ann-Mary Cloutier**, Deerfield Planning Board
- Ron Coler**, Ashfield At-Large
- Jennifer Gross**, 1ST Vice Chair, Wendell Select Board, FRPB Executive Committee
- Elizabeth Irving**, Montague Planning Board
- Emily Johnson**, Deerfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Richard Nathorst**, Leverett Planning Board
- Charles Olchowski**, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Phil Pless**, Ashfield At-Large
- Dana Roscoe**, Sunderland Planning Board
- Jane Shaney**, Ashfield Planning Board
- Joseph Strzegowski**, Conway Planning Board
- Alec Wade**, Orange Select Board
- Gisela Walker**, Charlemont Planning Board
- Chuck Washer**, Shelburne Select Board, FRPB Rep. to the REPC
- Jon Wyman**, Buckland Planning Board

FRCOG STAFF

- Peggy Sloan**, Planning & Development Director; **Maureen Mullaney**, Transportation & GIS Program Manager II; **Laurie Scarbrough**, Transportation Planning Engineer

PRESENTERS/GUESTS

- John Gould**, Buckland Planning Board
- Michael Hoberman**, Buckland Planning Board
- Alyssa Larose**, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority
- Kathy Sylvester**, Deerfield Planning Board

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| 1. Introductions and Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes | J. Lund, Chair – FRPB & FRPB Members |
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J. Lund convened the meeting at 6:04 p.m. A round of introductions followed. **C. Olchowski moved to adopt the 11/4/21 minutes, M. Chichester seconded the motion. The motion passed by roll call vote with one abstention (E. Johnson). J. Blyth, R. Coler R. Nathhorst, J. Strzegowski, G. Walker and J. Wyman arrived after the vote on the Minutes.**

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| 2. Presentation and Discussion of Zoning for Affordable Housing in Buckland | J. Gould & M. Hoberman, Buckland Planning Board, and A. Larose, FCRHRA |
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Former FRCOG Senior Land-Use & Housing Planner, A. Larose provided history and perspective on the Buckland Zoning project -- the goal of which was to change zoning to increase housing options in the Town. Following an assessment of housing needs by FRCOG staff, municipal officials and volunteers in 2016, Larose prepared the Buckland Housing Plan. In 2017, the FRCOG secured a grant that enabled Larose to work with the Planning Board to implement some of the recommendations of the Housing Plan. These included zoning changes, an assessment of historical patterns of housing development and preparation of graphics to illustrate infill housing development patterns. The Planning Board hosted public forums in 2019 and 2020. While much attention was focused on the village of Shelburne Falls, with its water and sewer infrastructure advantages, the rural areas of Town were also considered. Larose provided a link to handouts on the topic shared at Buckland’s October 2021 Special Town Meeting, and referred attendees to the Buckland Planning Board web page for additional documentation.

Gould noted citizens’ emphasis on preserving the rural nature and agricultural resources of the town, and for providing in-village (in-fill) housing for senior citizens, first-time homebuyers, renters, and people with disabilities – all populations predicted to grow. The Planning Board focused on preparing zoning changes for allowing detached accessory dwelling units (ADU), reducing minimum lot size in the village center, and encouraging cluster development, each of which had precedent in the traditional shaping of the village and would deter sprawl. An earlier bylaw addressed both residential and commercial cluster development outside the village.

Hoberman reviewed feedback from the first public forum, pointed to FAQs and reference materials available on the planning board website, and stressed the importance of addressing residents’ questions, concerns and ideas on an ongoing basis. Gould noted the serendipity of the State’s 2021 Housing Choice Legislation, which aided the planning board in its work and jumpstarted their efforts after approximately a year of pandemic-related delay. The legislation enabled best practices pertaining to ADU’s to be approved by a simple (rather than 2/3) majority by Town Meeting, thus making it easier for communities such as Buckland to approve zoning supporting housing-options. Both Hoberman and Gould identified the FRCOG’s creation of “before-and-after” visual aids -- images of existing homes overlaid with hypothetical ADUs -- as critical to helping residents and board members visualize and understand the potential impact of the proposed changes.

They emphasized the important role that Larose specifically, and FRCOG generally, has played in the Planning Board’s ability to take on significant planning issues in the Town over many years. Larose noted that particularly interesting for her, was the process they went through to consider a smaller

minimum lot size and road frontage for residential building lots. Having been prompted by community members to make these possible changes real in their minds, she walked neighborhood streets, photographed characteristic homes, identified and mapped those that would not have been allowed under current zoning regulations, and then created slides illustrating existing conditions and limitations. Questions and concerns preceding the vote at Special Town Meeting prompted Planning Board members to clarify several things: that owner-occupancy of dwellings having an ADUs would be required; that short-term rental regulations would soon be addressed; that the changes would not force demographic clustering; and that design guidelines for ADUs could be included. The helpful testimony of a resident who successfully created a cluster development in 2005 was gratefully acknowledged. There was some discussion regarding the general desirability of attached vs. detached units, and single vs. two-story units, and about Sunderland’s unsuccessful attempt to pass a similar bylaw. Lunt heartily thanked the presenters, specifically noting the helpfulness of the housing graphic images, and congratulated them on their work.

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| <p>3. Presentation & Discussion of Transportation Planning Projects (Passenger Rail, Rural Road Guide, and the Transportation Improvement Program)</p> | <p>M. Mullaney, Transportation & GIS Program Manager II and L. Scarborough, Transportation Planning Engineer - FRCOG</p> |
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Mullaney began her update on passenger rail service noting that North-South service via The Valley Flyer and the Vermonter has resumed full service making single day travel from Greenfield to NYC and back possible. She noted that the Valley Flyer and Vermonter service had been cut since the start of the pandemic to the summer of 2021. Full service resumed in July of 2021. Similarly, the Valley Flyer marketing campaign was set to launch in April 2020 but was delayed until September 2021. The marketing campaign was designed by “the watsons”, a marketing firm out of New York City, working directly with the FRCOG, PVPC, local legislators and other important stakeholders. Early metrics indicate that the campaign is producing positive results on ridership and ticket sales. The Valley Flyer/Vermonter route is one of the most successful in the Northeast, and the Greenfield station has had the greatest growth in ridership although the Northampton-NYC route has the highest ridership. FRCOG and PVPC have begun discussions with MassDOT about making the service permanent. Sharing some images, Mullaney summarized the multi-media campaign occurring last Fall, which included billboards, digital/social media and print/newspaper ads, and radio spots. These playful ads featured rural and urban recreational attractions, cuisine, and the history/culture of communities along the route. The campaign is season-based, and has now shifted to an all-digital format with winter promotions underway and those for spring ready to go. Mullaney explained that the watsons, are closely monitoring the effects of digital marketing, adjusting things as needed such as recently increasing the social media presence to boost click-through rates toward ticket sales. FRCOG has recently submitted an application to the MA Office of Travel and Tourism for additional funding to continue the campaign. In response to a question, Mullaney indicated that the firm is not likely collecting data on racial or other demographic makeup of passengers coming north. In response to another question, Roscoe said that MassDOT is unable to determine if train travel on the route has reduced car traffic on Rt. 91 toward VT ski slopes this winter. Finally, while the contracts of MassDOT and the watsons provide them with some information regarding Amtrak revenue, the FRCOG does not have access to that proprietary data.

On the topic of a proposed east-west rail along Route 2 through the northern tier of the state, Mullaney had additional good news. MassDOT kicked off an 18-month study of the feasibility of this North Adams-Greenfield-Boston route in December 2021 thanks to funding secured by Senators Comerford and Hinds. The study will consider potential ridership, infrastructure needs, costs, alternatives, etc., and can be followed via the website <https://www.mass.gov/northern-tier-passenger-rail-study>. FRCOG's Linda Dunlavy is a member of the advisory committee. Mullaney is honored and excited to work on this long-awaited project, she said, and will keep the FRPB updated.

Projects on the rolling, 5-year Transportation Improvement Program list projects slated to receive federal money. Projects are prioritized by the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization, to which the FRCOG provides staff and support. The FFY 2021 projects slated to begin construction this spring include: the 2-year reconstruction of four intersecting streets in Buckland; the reconstruction of Wisdom Way in Greenfield; and the replacement of Northfield's Schell Bridge for bicyclists and pedestrians. FFY 2022 TIP Projects include: the second year of reconstructing the four Buckland streets; the replacement of a bridge on East Oxbow Road in Charlemont; the erection of suicide-prevention barriers on the French King Bridge; the resurfacing of Route 2 in Gill and Erving; and the installation of wayfinding signs along the Franklin County Bikeway.

Projects in line to be advertising in FFY 2023 include: improvements to the Big Y intersection in Greenfield; and the replacement of bridges on Upper Road in Deerfield, Route 112 in Colrain, and North Poland Road in Conway. Cost increases to the long-awaited and complex reconstruction of North Main Street in Orange need to be reviewed to make sure it can stay in FFY 2023, she said. Remaining FFY 2023 TIP funds will be used to improve electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure in the county. FFY 2024 projects on the TIP currently include: the second year of Orange's North Main Street improvements; work on bridges in Northfield, Leverett, Rowe and Montague; and the resurfacing of Route 2 in Erving. The FFY 2025-26 TIP includes the \$14 million renovation of Haydenville Road in Whately. FRCOG staff will be reviewing each of these with MassDOT and the Transportation Planning Organization beginning in two weeks, and "TIP Season" will conclude with an updated list in May 2022.

Lund expressed ongoing concern regarding the urgent need for safety-related improvements for pedestrian residents accessing the Leyden Woods complex in Greenfield. Mullaney indicated that FRCOG continues to advocate for the City of Greenfield to fund the design of these improvements with the idea that TIP funding could cover the construction. The project has not been forgotten, she said, nor have the logistical and social complexities been overlooked. Transportation projects take a long time to come to fruition, she indicated, citing current examples of Orange's North Main Street and Whately's Haydenville Road projects lasting more than a decade. Lund first expressed his concern to the Leyden Planning Board upon moving to that town 28 years ago, he said, and has since continued to fear that a fatal accident may occur.

Scarbrough provided an overview of the Rural Road Guide that she spearheaded and wrote in 2021. It has been distributed to Select Boards and DPWs county-wide, and is available on the FRCOG website. Intended as a quick reference guide to answer common questions regarding roadway operations regulations, standards, policies and best practices, it includes information on federal, state and regional policies programs and grants -- with active links to reference materials -- and will be updated regularly. As FRCOG's transportation engineer, she conceived of this "living guide" over 7-8 years fielding questions from town staff. It covers:

- asset management strategies (the monitoring, maintenance and funding of pavement and culverts);
- addressing concerns related to the passage of heavy commercial vehicles through rural communities;
- the jurisdiction and classification of roads;
- understanding the nature and importance of roadside elements (clear zones, guardrails, barriers, safe slopes, signs, etc.);
- roadway safety planning (implementing countermeasures and best-practices, conducting audits);
- speed limit considerations (speed zoning in MA, implementing new and revised limits)
- stormwater management (best management practices, culvert sizing, tips for maintaining unpaved roads);
- selecting and installing traffic control devices (sign uniformity, pavement markings, etc.)
- intersection control (methods and standards, signs, signals, roundabouts)
- types, uses and requesting of traffic counting studies
- and rural road resources (local, regional and state programs, funding and training)
- and a reference section (URLS to legislation, policies, manuals and guides, as well as FRCOG and MassDOT contact information)

Responding to a question about cell phones and distracted driving, Scarbrough indicated her awareness of new research into the possibility of identifying these drivers. Once the technology advances, and privacy concerns are addressed, she expects it will become available. Distracted driving is second only to intoxication as the cause of both single and multiple-vehicle accidents, she added. In conclusion, she directed attendees to the Rural Road Guide on the FRCOG website, highlighting useful links to a variety of topics. Scarbrough closed by encouraging feedback from FRPB members.

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| 4. FERC Update on Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Facility | P. Sloan – Planning Director, FRCOG |
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The recreation stakeholders group (of which FRCOG is a member) continues to meet to consider FirstLight’s responsibility to provide recreational facilities and improvements near the Northfield pumped storage and Turners Falls hydro-electric stations prior to their re-licensing, Sloan said. She mentioned that other stakeholder groups are addressing flows and fisheries, cultural resources and other topics and that all deliberations are subject to a confidentiality agreement. If consensus among stakeholders and FirstLight is reached, and proposals for recreational assets are developed, they will become publicly available.

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| 5. Other Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting/Adjourn/Public Comment | J. Lund – Chair, FRPB |
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The FRPB Executive Committee will meet on February 7th, and **the full FRPB will meet on March 24, 2022.** FRPB Members with specific requests for topics to be covered at future meetings are encouraged to contact Sloan or Lund. Chichester noted that the Small Town Housing Working Group will next meet on March 15. **Irving moved to adjourn the meeting, Blinder seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 PM by roll call vote.**

Documents Distributed / Presentations Viewed:

- Agenda
- FRPB Minutes, November 24, 2021 – DRAFT
- *Buckland Proposed Zoning Changes for Housing - Public Hearing Sept 2021*
- *Buckland Summary of Proposed Zoning Changes for Housing - STM Oct 2021*
- *Transportation Planning Projects - FRPB 1 27 22*
- *Rural Road Guide Presentation - FRPB Jan 2022*

Copies of documents are available; contact Liz Jacobson-Carroll at ljc@frcog.org or 413-774-3167 x101.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Blyth, Clerk - FRPB