



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Franklin Regional Planning Board— *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, May 26, 2022 / 6:00 p.m.
Location:	Virtual. Zoom Meeting ID: 857 6393 1119
Facilitators:	Jerry Lund, Chair - FRPB; Peggy Sloan, Planning Director - FRCOG

FRPB MEMBERS

Jennifer Gross, 1ST Vice Chair, Wendell Select Board, FRPB Executive Committee

Julia Blyth, Clerk, Northfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee

Barry Del Castilho, Buckland Select Board

Brant Cheikes, Whately Planning Board

Robert Cherdak, Ashfield Planning Board

Ron Coler, Ashfield At-Large

Marybeth Chichester, Colrain Planning Board, FRPB Executive Committee

Emily Johnson, Deerfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee

Richard Nathorst, Leverett Planning Board

Charles Olchowski, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee

Don Sluter, At-Large Whately, FRPB Executive Committee

Joseph Strzegowski, Conway Planning Board

David Travers, Heath Select Board, FRPB representative to the Transportation Planning Organization

Chuck Washer, Shelburne Select Board, FRPB Rep. to the REPC

Jon Wyman, Buckland Planning Board

FRCOG STAFF

Peggy Sloan, Planning & Development Director

Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager

Liz Jacobson-Carroll, Administrative Services Assistant

PRESENTERS/GUESTS

Joshua Rapp, Conservation Scientist – Mass Audubon

Hannah Davis, Community Development Administrator, Town of Whately

Tricia Yacovone-Biagi, Planning Board, Town of Shelburne

Nancy Hazard, Greening Greenfield

1. Introductions and Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes	J. Lund, Chair – FRPB & FRPB Members
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J. Gross convened the meeting at 6:02 p.m. A round of introductions followed. **D. Sluter moved to adopt the 3/24/22 minutes. J. Blythe seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote. R. Coler, J. Strzegowski, and B. Del Castilho arrived after the vote on the Minutes.**

2. Presentation and Discussion on the Forest Climate Resiliency Pilot Program for the MTWP Region	J. Rapp, Conservation Scientist - MassAudubon
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J. Rapp introduced the Forest Climate Resilience Program (FCRP) of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (comprised of towns in the western portion of Franklin County and the northern portion of Berkshire County, NGOs and regional planning agencies). He noted that two Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grants to the towns of Adams and Williamstown have enabled Mass Audubon to assist MTWP towns to implement adaptation and mitigation practices enhancing the resiliency of town forest land. Mass Audubon’s goal, following the success of this pilot, is to work statewide with both municipalities and private landowners. Successful participation by towns can serve as a model for other landowners.

Rapp spoke of the existing impacts of climate change – such as increasing invasive pests and pathogens previously limited by cold -- and of smart forestry practices offering adaptation solutions along a continuum: a ‘resistance’ approach for forests in good shape; ‘resilience’ tweaks for forests accommodating some change; and ‘transition’ practices to assist struggling forest systems toward a new ecology. Rapp explained that climate-smart forest practices were developed in three stages: scientific literature review, consideration of regional context, and evaluation/refinement. He made a point of mentioning the many organizations in MA and VT that worked together to create the “one list to rule them all” of climate-smart forestry practices.

Adaptation practices in the FCRP include the removal of invasive vegetation, protecting seedlings/saplings from deer browse, planting trees, enhancing the adaptive capacity in northern hardwood and spruce-fir forests, and enabling climate-informed access and operations. Rapp then summarized the three steps to forest stewardship climate planning: the landowner obtains a funding to complete a Forest Stewardship Climate Plan; funding for implementation practices based on the recommendations of the Climate Plan is sought from several potential sources; and monitoring of the implementation, management and outcomes of these practices. Rowe, in conjunction with Heath, Conway and Shelburne, has submitted an application for FY23 MVP funds. If funded it will include research/demonstration forests, educational resources and events, and a virtual forest center.

In response to a question from Cheikes, Rapp indicated that the pilot program’s focus is to reduce stressors and improve the structure/diversity of the forests. Measurable indicators include the prevalence of invasive plants, forest density, tree width, and the volume of carbon storage. Rapp is hopeful that recent State climate legislation will soon help to increase funding for forest resiliency. In response to questions from Johnson, Rapp indicated that the MTWP’s involvement in the program will provide a blueprint for other Franklin County towns to participate, and that while members of various town committees (Planning Board, Select Board, Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, Park Commission, Water District, etc.) may be involved, those with jurisdiction over the town land are key.

Additional conversation topics included the existence of a native species list to help develop transitional forests, the fact that towns’ forest management plans are not necessarily stewardship plans (so may not take climate change into consideration), and the differences between the FCRP and the Family Forestry Carbon Program run by The Nature Conservancy.

3. Presentation and Discussion of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Annual Report	J. Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager - FRCOG
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Atwood reminded attendees that FRCOG’s participation (as a federally designated Economic Development District) in the CEDS planning program maintains the region’s eligibility for certain EDA funding programs. Atwood noted that this is the second annual report on the CEDS Plan which articulates goals, provides updated socio-economic data, notes progress made on Action Plan projects, and includes multiple sections specific to the pandemic. The regional economic dashboard provides key data from the U.S. Census, the American Community Survey, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Atwood shared statistics regarding the county’s population decline and aging, lack of racial diversity, and flat per capita income, among others. Graphs indicated changes in employment rates over 15 years, in home sales and median sale prices in recent years, average annual pay, and numbers of employees and establishments by industry sector.

Atwood shared several pandemic-related statistics and items of note. An already struggling early education and childcare sector saw 17% of care programs close statewide, according to a recent study, she said. Atwood noted new health care/social assistance programs that began operations including Baystate Franklin Medical Center’s family medicine residency and the new Community Health Center of Franklin County located in Orange. In addition, substance use disorder programs have expanded. She reviewed how Franklin County businesses and organizations took advantage of the response/recovery funding options from various federal and state programs. These include: the Paycheck Protection Program (\$136 million); Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program (\$34.6 million); Shutter Venue Operators and Restaurant Revitalization Funds (\$6.4 million); Food Security Infrastructure Grant (\$6.9 million); MGCC Sector-Specific Relief Grant Program (\$3.8 million); and Local Rapid Recovery Plan funding for three downtown/village centers.

Atwood provided key project updates regarding:

- business technical assistance grants/access to capital;
- LaunchSpace’s \$1 million federal earmark,
- the launch of ArtsHub Western MA,
- the Deerfield River Outdoor Recreation Study,
- the Franklin County Water and Wastewater Systems study,
- investment and planning in the Turners Falls’ Canal District,
- planning for industrial land in Orange,
- pre-development of the Erving IP Papermill site,
- last mile broadband efforts,
- the return of the Valley Flyer and additional east-west rail studies,
- innovative transit pilot projects,
- MassHire Franklin Hampshire workforce initiatives and
- the Franklin County Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan.

She requested feedback on the draft 2022 CEDS Annual Performance Report by June 9.

4. FERC Update on Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Facility	P. Sloan, Planning Director -- FRCOG
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Sloan shared highlights of the FirstLight re-licensing Agreement-In-Principal (AIP) pertaining to the recreational assets associated with the Northfield and Montague facilities. Highlights of the AIP include: an inventory and assessment of facilities to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); the formation of a Recreation Advisory Committee to advise FirstLight over the term of the license; additional river access and park facilities; and an assessment of Cabot Camp in Montague with an eye toward redevelopment to preserve the historic structures. Next steps for staff include working with FirstLight and other stakeholders to finalize the Recreation Management Plan (RMP); continue working with the Franklin County legislative delegation to address erosion; and participating in the State 401 Water Quality certification process.

Ten-year reviews of the RMP will be important, Sloan said, adding that this set of recreational facilities is critical to the nature-based tourism industry in the region. In response to questions, Sloan indicated that the re-licensing negotiations are expected to wrap-up in the fall. The legislative delegation has been an important partner in advancing discussions. Updates can be provided at future FRPB meeting and monitoring of erosion will be a relevant concern for decades to come.

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 next meeting will be held on Thursday, June 23rd. Agenda items will include annual elections and the Franklin County economic resiliency plan.

D. Sluter moved to adjourn the meeting, B. Cheikes seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:20 PM.

Documents Distributed / Presentations Viewed:

- Agenda
- FRPB Minutes, March 24, 2022 – DRAFT
- Forest Resilience in the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership, 5/26/22, Josh Rapp, Mass Audubon
- DRAFT 2022 Franklin County CEDS Annual Performance Report, Jessica Atwood, FRCOG
- FERC Relicensing Update, May 26, 2002

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

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Blyth, Clerk - FRPB