

**Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership
Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting
February 10, 2021 – 2 PM**

Virtual Meeting as allowed by Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker's Executive Order dated March 12, 2020 suspending certain provision of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20.

MTWP Executive Committee

Hank Art, Chair, Bob O'Connor, Whit Sanford, Joe Nowak (Adams);

MTWP Staff Support

Tom Matuszko, Mark Buccowich (US Forest Service Liaison), Lisa Hayden (NEFF).

Others

Chair H. Art called the Ex. Com. meeting to order at 2:01 p.m. He asked if the meeting was being recorded, and though NEFF had requested the shared Zoom account call to be set up to record, it was not working, so L. Hayden will follow up on this for next time.

Minutes of the November 17, 2020 MTWP Board

B. O'Connor moved the adoption of the December 17, 2020 Minutes with H. Art seconding the motion. The motion passed with J. Nowak abstaining after W. Sanford requested a minor correction.

Update on NEFF Negotiations

B. O'Connor reported on NEFF contract is all but complete. Essentially the final piece of the contract is in the process of being signed by NEFF and EOEEA, upon which the Agent contract will be formalized.

Standing Subcommittee Update

H. Art reported on his efforts to recruit Board members to the list of Standing Committees. He has heard from everyone except Walt Quist of Rowe, Doug McNally of Windsor, and Kyle Handler of BRPC about interest in committee choices. Those responding have ranked the Forest Conservation, Natural Resource-Based Economic Development, and Education & Outreach Subcommittees each earning 5 points; the Finance & Budget Subcommittee received 4 points, and the Municipal Finance Subcommittee received 2 points.

He proposes a Board agenda item for the next meeting to have the sub-committees form, select their own leadership, and draft their own missions and products they want to work on. He suggests spending some time on Feb. 23 for Board members to share their visions for the committees. Also, each committee should peruse and discuss the original management plan and present ideas and improvement to the new revised Management Plan to help NEFF flesh out the goals, objectives, and actions of the plan for the Board.

He also asked about an annual report, which is spelled out in Art. 3, Sec. 3 of the bylaws and suggested one will be needed in FY21. He asked Board members on each committee to read through the old 2016 Partnership plan and make a list of things to address within their purview

of a new management plan. He noted the MTWP Bylaws state the Annual Meeting of the Partnership should be held in April, May, or June of each year.

USFS Relationship

It seems an Act of Congress is needed to create a Forest Service representative to the MTWP. M. Buccowich said he is not aware of any current such legislative efforts. B. O'Connor suggested the MTWP Board ask for meetings with the Commonwealth's federal Legislators. A discussion ensued about reaching out to staff of Congressman Richard Neal and other local elected officials. H. Art said he will send a letter on behalf of the Board requesting a future meeting with Congressman Neal. Also, he noted that he is not sure if the UMass Chancellor has validated the university's representatives on the Board. There was consensus that it is a good time to re-start these conversations as there is a new administration in Washington, there is a focus on rural economic development and the role of natural and working lands as natural climate solutions, and Victoria Christiansen, Chief of the USFS is supportive of the MTWP.

Covid19 extension for Hawley and other non-partnership towns in MTWP region

B. O'Connor reported that the attorney he consulted did not think the language in the law would allow for towns like Hawley to get an exemption to join the MTWP. There was a discussion of when towns could join – the consensus was five years from when the law passed, which would be about 2½ years from now. B. O'Connor said he is also looking to see if towns that voted to try to join the partnership could be eligible to apply for state grants, though preference would likely be given to member-towns if there was not enough funding available. This might be an incentive for towns like Buckland, Savoy, and Florida to vote to join. Towns can join in August 2022.

Obtaining Board insurance quotes - information needed for forms

L. Hayden explained that she contacted local insurance agents to receive quotes for Board insurance, but they require forms to be completed that include detailed information she does not have. It was agreed she will send the forms to B. O'Connor to gather the needed information.

Agenda for 6 p.m., Tuesday, February 23, 2021 - Full MTWP Board Meeting

Jeffery Thomas will be contacted to see if he would want to give a presentation about the Entrepreneur Challenge Grant Program. Possible presentations at other meetings of the Board could include: Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program grants; FRCOG projects; DCR & Forest Service project(s): Forest & Climate Initiatives.

Other Items

H. Art reported that he was notified that Treasurer Mark Phelps would like to step down from the Board, but he is disappointed to lose Mark's involvement and perspective and will ask him to reconsider as his contributions have been valued.

Adjournment

W. Sanford moved the meeting be adjourned, B O'Connor seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.