

MINUTES  
The Finance & Budgeting Committee  
of the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts - January 12, 2024  
*hybrid meeting, Windsor Town Offices / Zoom*

**Committee Members in attendance:** *in person:* Joe Nowak (chair) – Adams; Chris Cozzaglio – Berkshire Regional Planning Commission; Dicken Crane (board chair) – Windsor; *virtual:* Keith Ross – Society of American Foresters (present 4:20-4:30 p.m.), Massachusetts Chapter; Bob O'Connor – MA EOEEA

**Staff/Partners in attendance:** *virtual:* Lisa Hayden, NEFF/Admin Agent; *in person:* Kate Conlin, NEFF/Coordinator

1. **Call to order and welcome** - 4:03 p.m.
2. **Approval of minutes from November 3, 2023 and November 29, 2021 (review of legal advice from the MA Assistant Attorney General regarding approval of past minutes)\* note: this is a change from the meeting agenda, which listed an incorrect date.**
  - Joe made a motion, seconded by Dicken, to correct that minutes approved last time were from Nov. 29, 2021 at 3 pm (and not July 15, 2021). All in favor.
  - Motion to approve the minutes made by C. Cozzaglio, seconded by D. Crane, all in favor.
3. **Update on the Natural Heritage Area endorsement by the Executive Committee and next steps (Agent staff & Committee discussion) feasibility study**
  - C. Cozzaglio recommends the Partnership reach out to legislators about the Feasibility Study as they could earmark funding to make it possible and could also recommend alternative paths to federal recognition.
  - B. O'Connor – could we have someone from the National Park Service come to the next meeting? Congressman Neal investigated a new type of designation but ran into bureaucratic challenges. They may be thrilled to be involved in something that is an established entity.
  - B. O'Connor requests an estimate as to how much it would cost to fund the required Feasibility Study and he could try to add it to the NEFF budget through EEA.
4. **Discussion of proposed March joint Executive Committee/Committee Chairs meeting and long-term capital expenditure budget drafting or other desired outcomes**
  - D. Crane, ideally the Finance & Budgeting Committee would be making presentations to the Executive Committee about the Partnership budget, when the Partnership becomes more autonomous. Do we, as the Partnership, want to have our own Executive Director or have funding opportunities go directly to NEFF or another organization? The state arrangement with NEFF has been successful. Federal funding would be necessary, to complement state funding, to make that jump. Premature to judge the outcome and whether we can be fully autonomous. Make the best of what we got while we got it.
  - Committee Chairs will meet at a Summit to connect, cross pollinate, and to update the Ten-Year Plan (if needed, asked to do so on an annual basis). This is an opportunity to think about funding needs.
  - C. Cozzaglio says it's important to figure out what funding is necessary to prioritize, to have financial planning for the future, a model of finances for the Board, and that it is crucial to connect with Anne Gobi and others to advocate for our needs.
  - J. Nowak – important to keep the focus on federal and state partnership on private lands.

- B. O'Connor – the goal should be for the Partnership to be financially independent with a Trust Fund, since players change at the state level so often it is difficult to have any state program continue over the long term. If we could fix the name, fix the Trust Fund language from the original bill, and get a Bond account, that would give us another 5 years.

**5. Agent updates: Federal Funds and Infrastructure Office (FFIO); EPA Climate Justice Grant**

- EEA Climate Justice Grant is a large, competitive program (would likely be a \$10 million grant). The initiative is currently being led by BRPC and involves multiple partners. The towns in the Partnership region that qualify for this grant are Adams and North Adams. Some ideas so far include funding home pre-weatherization such as asbestos remediation and electrical work that often prohibit insulation work and exterior home improvement with local wood. K. Conlin will connect Joe Nowak and Mark Phelps to this initiative. Replacement outdoor wood boilers could be a component, which would improve air quality – this idea comes from Mark Phelps of New Ashford.
- D. Crane noted the Clean Heat Standard makes the assumption that the cost of electricity won't go up – the concern is that heat pumps are the only listed clean heat, there is a coalition letter being drafted that the WP should consider signing.
- Friends of Conte – they have a bill in congress for funding and may serve as a model for us. They have indicated they would share their progress in this effort with us.

**6. Continuation of Circuit Rider conversation or other ideas for next year's WP Implementation Grant through EOEEA (usually proposals due early summer)**

- C. Cozzaglio reminds that it is important not to offer a service that can't be funded long term.
- Topic can be an agenda item for the April Chair Summit or other meeting.

**7. Scheduling next meeting(s) - April 26<sup>th</sup> 4:00-5:30 p.m.**

**8. Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours**

- L. Hayden – there is a plan to meet with Climate Chief Hoffer and Undersecretary Cooper in a couple of weeks.

**9. Public comment - none**

**10. Adjourn - C. Cozzaglio motion, D. Crane second, 5:32 p.m.**