

MINUTES
The Finance & Budgeting Committee
of the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts – April 26, 2024
hybrid meeting, Windsor Town Offices / Zoom

Committee Members in attendance: *in person:* Joe Nowak (chair) – Adams; *virtual:* Bob O’Connor – MA EOEEA; Dicken Crane (board chair) – Windsor

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

Call to order and welcome

4:02 p.m.

Approval of minutes from January 12, 2024

Chair postpones approval of the minutes until the next meeting as they were sent earlier today and all may not have been able to read fully.

Follow up on April 16, 2024 joint Executive Committee/Committee Chairs meeting

K. Conlin shares that a draft of the EEA grant is written concerning “Ecosystem Services and Municipal Services” and letters of support have come in. L. Hayden to add budget details.

Discussion of funding overarching priorities: over next 18 months, how best to bridge transition through end of Agent contract with targeted grants or additional staff capacity

- Discussion of Committee ideas about what would be most helpful to accomplish in the next 18 months. L. Hayden and K. Conlin have been discussing the possibility of hiring a part-time grant writer to secure 2-3 project funds to support the Board. There are roughly \$25,000 discretionary funds for Board projects.

- What steps would help build the Partnership’s infrastructure to prepare for an Executive Director if one is funded through state/federal means? L. Hayden, NEFF budget runs April-May, by next spring we would want to know if NEFF is seriously involved. Suggests meeting with NEFF leaders.

- Do we need an accountant to clarify the various cost centers of grants, a bank account? The WP could seek to obtain its own System for Award Management (SAM) number for government grants.

- B. O’Connor we would need to front the money of any federal or state grant. That is a challenge. What kinds of funding could we use to hire an Executive Director? What are the capacity building grants? Charlemont charges a fee for business in the town – is there an outside entity that benefits from the Partnership? Another model is a national forest in Ohio that received a Bond to build a mountain bike trail network and they paid off the Bond with fees for riders.

One idea would be to use the Agent budget to hire a knowledgeable Development professional to investigate various pathways to financial sustainability.

- D. Crane – grants in various stages of completion, with large sums, he would like to see where the money gets spent to be able to show what we’ve been able to accomplish as a Partnership, as a justification for a funder to want to fund us further – he cannot fluently explain this. How far in time does the Congressionally Directed Spending go? And do other grants also go past the Agent contract? How do the sources of funds limit or encourage what we want to do? Important to say “we’re looking for funds to do _____”

- L. Hayden – yes, the CDS goes 6 months past. She will share the grant reports again and give a detailed update as needed. K. Conlin and L. Hayden will work on framing the Partnership accomplishments more

- succinctly and digestibly. - K. Conlin – Development staff could investigate not only funding pathways but community involvement and engagement.
- D. Crane – how do the Climate Plans in N. Adams and Rowe get publicized so that others can see what the planning process for and results of Climate-Smart Forestry? K. Conlin – outreach has been focused on the towns for which the plans have been written and where demonstration forests are being pursued for local approval, although several public walks were held in the past two years to discuss the climate planning for those sites. - L. Hayden – DCR has viewed NW Mass as a pilot area of sorts for this new climate-focused management plan.
 - D. Crane – Could Mass Audubon join a virtual Executive Committee meeting to discuss the ongoing projects? Feels the Partnership could be more involved in the planning that is taking place. He stressed the importance of being involved in the process of planning (as asked of Climate Chief Hoffer) and feels like we, as in the residents of the region, have not been asked what we think would work towards these goals, what is needed and what could be done.
 - All in agreement that a newsletter that has more detailed information regarding grant initiatives and happenings would provide the opportunity to engage and understand.
 - J. Nowak – grants are time-consuming, we can't stay idle or neutral, we need to keep the effort going to find sustainable funding, philanthropists, and other avenues.
 - B. O'Connor – the position wouldn't apply for the grants, but assess where we should be looking at, and assemble those resources for us. Where should this unique organization look for funding. We should highlight our major accomplishments.

Strategy to operationalize the Partnership Fund and Trust Fund

- J. Nowak – brainstorm strategy to operationalize the fund through current legislative efforts to officially change the name with Sen. Mark and he offered to reach out to Sen. Mark to ask if he can meet with us and EEA.
- K. Conlin – will reach out to Kurt Gaertner to ask who at EEA would be working on legislative action and therefore explain the bill changes to Sen. Mark's Office.

Legislative strategy development regarding sustainable funding, follow up with Joe Nowak's communication with Neal's Office

- L. Hayden – will schedule a meeting with his staffer to explain the Partnership initiatives and potential National Heritage Area Feasibility Study.
- J. Nowak – any updates on a ceremony for re-signing of new name with the USFS Shared Stewardship Framework?
- L. Hayden – Until state action occurs, a re-signing event might be premature so the June meeting will likely have a different focus.

Agent updates: Annual Summer Meeting in June; EOEEA Woodlands Partnership Implementation Grants; Agent bid task update

- K. Conlin – this year's Annual Meeting will be held at the Rowe Center in Rowe. We plan to invite Stephanie Cooper to help celebrate the launch of the virtual forest center. A draft of the EOEEA Woodlands Partnership grant is written and will be submitted by May 9.
- J. Nowak – will reach out to Greylock Glen to schedule a fall board meeting in November.

Scheduling next meeting(s)

May 23, 4-5pm

Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours

J. Nowak – importance of filling vacant seats. He can work on Cheshire.

K. Conlin – has been working on Ashfield, will prioritize filling others.

Public comment

none

Adjourn

B. O'Connor motion to adjourn, Seconded by Dicken, all in favor, 5:40 p.m.