

MINUTES
Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts*
Natural Resource Based Economic Development Committee Meeting
March 21, 2023

Committee Members in Attendance: Jeffrey Thomas, Chair; Jay Healy; Amy Shapiro

Staff/Others in Attendance: Mary Beth Chichester, Henry Art, Robert O'Connor, Lisa Hayden, NEFF, Administrative Agent

1. Call to order: J. Thomas called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

2. Approval of minutes from January 11, 2023 NRBED Committee meeting: J. Healy moved and A. Shapiro seconded to approve the draft minutes; unanimous approval.

3. Formulate next action steps for accomplishing Partnership Plan goals. (Econ. Dev. Focus in Section 4; Programs focus in Ex. Summary, & Section 7): The Committee discussed the Partnership plan as approved in Oct. 2022, related to committee activities, economic changes and drivers. There was extensive discussion of challenges to wood product markets, such as finding uses and markets for low-value wood materials that result from thinning and other practices, as well as economically viable higher end uses of the tree to product, such as furniture or timber framing. B. O'Connor noted that for years the issue has been the cost of trucking to paper mills is more costly than the producer would be paid for the lower-quality material. J. Thomas updated on the Wood Collaborative project and a focus on market drivers. A combination of capital and labor are downward forces. J. Healy said the benefit of a collaborative includes a social media and marketing umbrella that would help promote local products.

- A list of potential economic development activities and products compiled by an earlier Woodlands Partnership Natural Resource-Based Economic Development Standing Committee was reviewed and other ideas emerged from discussion.
- Ideas for small-scale pilot program:
 - Opportunity for wood to go to affordable housing projects;
 - If the state adopted a program for low-impact logging, there could be a market for timber mats.
 - Get producers to talk with legislators to help people in their woods access funds (DCR/MDAR) for wood industries.
- There was discussion and interest in the opportunity to get state funding for equipment as a goal for the woodland cooperative. Availability of a grinding machine locally could allow for material to be ground up into animal bedding or other by-products. B. O'Connor noted that operational funding can be harder to obtain than capital funding.
- The idea of inviting the new Agriculture Commissioner to a meeting was suggested to discuss the potential of applying for a Farm Viability Grant – and seek to try this program in WP region applied to forests and forestry. Contacts mentioned include Gerard Kennedy, Director of Agricultural Conservation and Technical Assistance, and Mary Jordon in Marketing, and Anne Gobi, new Dir. of Rural Affairs.
- Other suggestions included more sustainable approaches (not use hydraulics but rather newer tractors), creating forestry mats designed to allow salamanders to travel beneath them, sawmills with solar power on roofs to save money, and apprenticeships that provide housing for labor for businesses.

4. Revisit discussion of “quick facts sheet” about the Partnership region: The suggestion to create such a fact sheet is on hold due to other pressing projects, but could be developed for use with legislators or

MINUTES
Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts*
Natural Resource Based Economic Development Committee Meeting
March 21, 2023

fundings (and made available with the Partnership existing brochure.) L. Hayden noted an FAQ will likely be developed with the new web site.

5. Any follow-up on summer intern role description for when mentor capacity may be available: There was brief discussion of a summer intern to develop WP baseline metrics to track. A. Shapiro was open to exploring the idea, noting the college pays \$4500 for the summer. <https://careers.williams.edu/alumni-sponsored-internship-program/> However, J. Thomas stated he thinks we need to pass for summer 2023 due to lack of someone who can supervise.

6. Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours: L. Hayden reported that the \$540,000 earmark came through. Consensus was to schedule the next meeting after new WP executive team can meet in May. There was a suggestion to invite the Ag. Commissioner as speaker for upcoming board meeting.

7. Public comment: None.

8. Adjournment: J. Healy motioned and A. Shapiro seconded to adjourn; motion passed unanimously at 5:18 p.m..

Natural Resource Based Economic Development Committee Members: Jeffrey Thomas, Lever, Inc. (chair); Jay Healy, Charlemont; Amy Shapiro, Franklin County Community Development Corporation.

*On Oct. 11, 2022, the Board of the public body created in 2018 voted unanimously to change its name from the "Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership" in its bylaws to Doing Business As the "Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts" and requested the state legislature and USDA Forest Service to officially establish and recognize the new name.