

MINUTES
Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts
Natural Resource Based Economic Development Committee Meeting
January 19, 2024

Committee Members in Attendance: Amy Shapiro — *Franklin County Community Development Corporation (chair)*; Chris Skelly — *Buckland (notetaker)*; Jay Healy — *Charlemont*; Russ Richardson — *Massachusetts Forest Alliance*

Staff/Others in Attendance: Dicken Crane – *Board Chair*; Lisa Hayden – *Administrative Agent*; Kate Conlin – *Woodlands Partnership Coordinator*; Adrian St. John – *Woodcraft Collaborative*

1. **Call to order and welcome** – 3:04 p.m.
2. **Review & approval of November 13, 2023 minutes** – C. Skelly motion to accept, seconded by A. Shapiro, all in favor.
3. **Completion of a detailed space needs analysis and study report outlining the WP’s programmatic plans and uses for a physical Forest Center to be sited in the WP region**
 - \$18,000 available in a USFS grant for 2024 analysis and study to be done by a consultant.
 - Because of Greylock Glen, likely would be looking at Franklin County.
 - Williams College student study identified 4 potential sites: Berkshire East, Hall Tavern Farm, Whitcomb Summit, Mohawk Trail State Forest.
 - Agent needs guidance on how to move forward. We could hire a local planning agency or a private consultant.
 - R. Richardson – location of center should be Charlemont/Shelburne Falls since it’s a gateway into the Berkshires before paths split and is a hub of recreation and traffic. Center doesn’t need to be open all the time but can simply be a place for information dispersal, one Saturday a month for instance. “Go in the woods with a forester on a Saturday morning.” There was concern noted about Whitcomb Summit having periodic bad weather and being ‘off the beaten track’ and a concern about featuring forest management on a state forest.
 - J. Healy – Always thought the power of a forest center would be the demonstration forest and the ability of tourists or others to see how good forest management happens. Though he ranks Hall Tavern Farm high on the list, mentions he has a conflict of interest and wouldn’t vote on it. Hall Tavern Farm would be open to hosting but wouldn’t be able to do everything with staffing, renovation, upgrades. Potential to build up slowly with a small spot and have demonstrations on Saturdays. We should agree on the space’s function which will drive site selection and size.
 - C. Skelly – Shelburne Falls area is the best location before heading further into the hills. Hall Tavern Farm sounds like the best location. There’s a need for a more robust visitor area in the Shelburne Falls area.
 - A. Shapiro – She noted this area could also provide access for visitors from Vermont. Could the consultant parse out the best location for the target audience, the cost and feasibility of putting up a separate structure or renovating a small spot, and costs that would be needed going forward?
 - D. Crane – demonstration forests showing the effects of different types of management are sorely needed, places where people can visualize what they generally don’t understand. Having a functioning forest laboratory with ongoing activity is crucial. Important that any consultant understands that goal. Maybe there’s a way to get money from the Forest Service to help support if we include an ongoing research opportunity.
 - Staffing issues and overall purpose(s) of the space are general concerns of the committee.
 - L. Hayden stated – we will need to decide soon how best to use the grant funds, such as hiring a consultant to consider location & this will need to go to the Executive Committee. The process

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of describing specific space needs through a study could help the Board to further develop its Forest Center vision and evaluate locations.

4. National Heritage Area feasibility study for Woodlands Partnership – Committee role?

- K. Conlin – if designated, this could support a Forest Center’s ongoing operations. Congress can ask for the National Park Service to conduct a feasibility study, but there is a backlog. Completing one requires many public comments, interviews and a report of about 100 pages.
- R. Richardson – signage in the Appalachian Heritage Area is very successful, artisans in the area have benefited a lot with a web site to market & sell local products.
- C. Skelly – manufacturing is another sector to consider. One way a Heritage Area feasibility study may differ from the Partnership’s Plan is that the former would not just focus on forestry.
- L. Hayden – planning for winter board meeting to invite other Heritage Areas and National Park Service to learn more about this program.

5. Plan for inviting Agricultural Commissioner Ashley Randle to a future meeting

- L. Hayden – if the Committee agrees, we can reach out for the next meeting late spring. Perhaps after the joint committee chair meeting when we have forward motion.
- J. Healy – we should formulate specific requests ahead of time – for instance, could MDAR handle marketing for the forest industry rather than DCR?
- A. Shapiro – what statistics and information do we want to provide as background for these requests? Agent will provide information from the Ten-Year Plan at next meeting.
- D. Crane – Ashley Randle stressed the relationship between maple producers and MDAR at a recent Massachusetts Maple Producers Association event. There is an opportunity to further connect other forest products. Winton Pitcoff, Deputy Commissioner / Legislative and Policy Director at MDAR should be included as well. HIP program for food could be a model to support purchasing of local forest products.

6. Discussion of potential action items and next steps, such as:

- (1) MDAR’s Buy Local Campaign;**
- (2) definition of “crop” excluding perennial, long-lived tree crop;**
- (3) wood banks – LIHEAP program subsidizes no. 2 fuel and gas for heating homes while local wood and firewood is not considered; WP helping coordinate more efficient regional wood bank approach rather than town by town**

- J. Healy – programs for two acres of corn are supported but 300 acres of woods are not seen. MDAR suggested DCR as a contact.
- R. Richardson – promote one Saturday a month for a walk in the woods with a forester, 10-12 times a year.
- K. Conlin – if this committee wants to pursue this, this request could be brought to the Committee Chair Summit on April 16.
- L. Hayden – capacity and funding need to be considered.
- D. Crane – agrees that getting people out into the woods is vital. It would be good to work with Mass Forest Trust 501(c)(3), an educationally focused trust associated with MFA, since they have a lot of experience with this kind of thing and have a large and growing membership and promotional network.

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- J. Healy – the farm would be happy to support this. It would be inexpensive. Public education and reporter notification are crucial if we host any events.

7. Update on Charlemont/Hawley Wood Bank – Jay Healy

- Hawlemont Regional Elementary is hosting the wood bank, which is great for providing connection to students and families in need, a secure location, and is paired with the hearty agricultural program at the school. It's difficult to get dry firewood this time of year, but some will be available late winter, and it will be geared up for next year. It would be stronger if we had a way to communicate with other local wood banks, regional sharing of equipment and ideas, maybe get FRCOG involved, but it's off to a great start.

8. Agent update – Forests as Climate Solutions; EPA Climate Justice Grant

- L. Hayden – Forests as Climate Solutions Report - Executive Summary emphasized disagreement within the Committee of experts, but in terms of the actions being recommended, it seems on the whole positive and suggests future investment (the Woodlands Partnership is mentioned as a priority)

- K. Conlin – EPA Climate Justice Grant application led by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission involves pre-weatherization work, local wood for exterior and structural rehab, replacing outdoor wood boilers, and more. North Adams and Adams are the only eligible municipalities in the Partnership region.

9. Items not anticipated within 48 hours – none

10. Schedule next meeting – April 12, 2024 3:30-5:00 p.m.

11. Public Comment – A. St. James is looking forward to learning about what we are working on and where he can fit in.

12. Adjourn 4:34 p.m. C. Skelly motion, seconded by J. Healy. All in favor.