

MINUTES
**Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts
Executive Committee Meeting – December 11, 2023, 3:30 – 5:00p.m.**

Committee Members in attendance: Dicken Crane, Windsor (Board Chair); Alain Peteroy, Franklin Land Trust (Clerk); Bob O'Connor, MA EOEEA; Russ Richardson, Massachusetts Forest Alliance; *arrival after 4pm:* Rhonda Anderson, Ohketeau Cultural Center; Art Schwenger, Heath (Vice Chair); Constance Carpenter, USFS acting liaison

Staff/Partners in attendance: Bob Wilber, MA EOEEA; Lisa Hayden, NEFF/Admin Agent; Kate Conlin, NEFF/Coordinator

Call to Order at 3:34 p.m., D. Crane

Welcome by D. Crane and Land Acknowledgement read by K. Conlin

Approval of minutes from October 12, 2023 Executive Committee meeting

A. Peteroy motion to approve, seconded by B. O'Connor, unanimously approved (R. Richardson abstained).

Follow-up on legislative initiatives: name change bill & long-term funding needs – next steps

- In a previous discussion, Sen. Mark and Rep. Blais communicated concern that the proposed name change legislation would dissolve the current Partnership and its funds.
- B. O'Connor – the bill language comes directly from the Executive Office for Administration and Finance (A&F) and is modeled after another program that operates with a trust fund.
- D. Crane will call Sen. Mark.
- Potential meeting with legislators and all interested parties to clarify next steps in January.
- B. O'Connor – in reference to a past meeting with the Budget Bureau, Peggy Sloan, and Tom Matuszko, another way to secure funding for the Partnership would be a traditional earmark in the budget (a line item).
- The Budget Bureau made it clear that bond funds cannot go into a trust fund.
- It would be helpful to have a paragraph stating the Woodlands Partnership is eligible to receive capital funds. B. Wilber – agrees that new bond could be possible and EOEEA could put the WP in the long list of accounts they want, which then gets submitted to the Governor for her proposal. B. Wilber said it is just starting to be talked about and he will notify us as the process moves along. B. O'Connor will write a paragraph as draft.

Friends of Conte: invitation to support initiative and therefore be eligible for future funding

A. Peteroy motion to support the Friends of Conte, seconded by B. O'Connor, unanimously approved.

Scheduling February Board Meeting: Invite speaker(s) on National Heritage Areas (<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas/feasibility-studies.htm>) and/or Appalachian Forest (<https://www.appalachianforestnha.org/>) – Discuss endorsing Finance & Budget Committee recommendation to pursue federal funding through such a designation

- Feasibility Study would be needed. Kate and Lisa will do research on how to start the process.
- B. O'Connor- Bob Lueckel said the US Forest Service could have an agreement with the National Park Service so the principal federal agency would be the USFS. The Shared Stewardship

Framework is the only one focused on a particular landscape and is an important model for the rest of the country.

- C. Carpenter – confirms that we could keep our current relationship with USFS.
- A. Peteroy – Dierdre Rose did an extensive review of the types of natural heritage areas, do we have those notes? Previous Plan had a section on different national models. Peggy or Tom might have from the records. B. O'Connor will look for report.
- B. O'Connor – past conversation with Congressman Neal's office revealed a new program for federal recognition would be bogged down by technicalities and that joining an existing national model would be easier.
- R. Richardson – our national heritage, almost entire area was cleared for farmland at one point, more stonewalls in New England than the rest of the world.
- R. Richardson motion, A. Schwenger seconded, "the Executive Committee of the Woodlands Partnership votes to direct the Administrative Agent to take action to investigate a Feasibility Study for the Partnership to become a National Heritage Area" – all in favor.

Discuss revising the Partnership's Land Acknowledgment and how the Board will "*commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all*": Consider a special working group on Indigenous outreach & DEIJ initiatives (\$10,000 in current USFS grant), or integration into Exec. Committee priorities; Review of current legislative bills of Indigenous interest

- R. Anderson – the importance of recognizing present-day Native Peoples, learning their needs. Better ones are not rote or self-congratulatory. It is not the place of Indigenous Peoples to write a land acknowledgment. Non-native folks need to 'do the work.' It is recommended to make a short one, just a few sentences, as informational as possible (how you're here, who benefitted from dispossession of land, who is here now, how do you help) and to also craft a longer one for written work or longer meetings. She is willing to review a draft statement(s). LA should say what we are trying to do. Action. Call. She suggests a smaller working group of board members who are excited about this to meet and present their findings and a new LA (short and long) that group could stay up on changing needs of indigen communities in area.
- D. Crane – it isn't about the final product, but about continuing to make the effort.
- R. Anderson – agrees, it is about building trust.
- L. Hayden – USFS stewardship grant has 10K in funds to hire Ohketeau Cultural Center or an Indigenous consultant to continue building educational programming, or for DEIJ training for the Board. Ohketeau is already a partner in the matching Rowe MVP grant and have planned Indigenous-led walks and workshops. Board input is needed to determine use of these funds.
- D. Crane – How can we prompt relationship building with this money? Potentially better than training for the Board.
- R. Anderson – Money could be used for guest speakers, so that other people within the Partnership region can learn what's happening in the state and how they can support—one of the best ways to build relationships, trust, and gain understanding.
- A goal of the working group would be to come up with a plan to use the 10K to build relationships with Indigenous communities, and to consider how the land acknowledgement interacts with WP mission and updating the 10-year Plan. Rhonda motion to "form a working group to build relationships and invite members of Indigenous Communities to come speak with us and to do our homework." B. O'Connor seconds. All in favor.
- R. Anderson briefly reviewed five state bills of interest to Indigenous People on topics including protecting Native American heritage (some items such as pipes now sold through auction houses), removing racist mascots, curriculum including Native American culture and history, and improving educational outcomes for Native youth.

MassDEP Clean Heat Standard – recent draft guidance on renewable energy no longer considers wood renewable. Coalition forming opposing adoption. Discuss Partnership stance and action.

- D. Crane – the grid doesn't have capacity, hardship on rural people, coalition forming to have modern wood heat and thermal solar be included, was hoping we would pay attention and consider supporting.

Agent update: Website, Logos, Virtual Forest Center or "Forest Center of NW MA," Resilient Lands, Federal Funds and Infrastructure Office

- Partnership website to be finished soon – A. Peteroy requests the old CR example be taken off. A. Schwenger suggested sending a memo to Board giving a chance to review web design and content.
- Virtual Forest Center focus groups to be held January 10 and January 24, 5:30-6:30pm.
- Federal Funds Infrastructure – EPA Climate Justice Grant is being worked on by B. O'Connor and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.
- B. O'Connor – working with FCCDC and Ohketeau to involve youth in conservation careers and traditional practices in forests. – just starting on a three-year grant.
- R. Anderson – excited, already in the process of hiring a program coordinator so they can begin working with Native youth and organizations already doing this work. Focus on getting into the woods and hands in the ground.

Unfinished business from Oct. 12 – proposed language for towns interested in joining from outside the designated region; inviting board member participation at committee meetings

- Language regarding Board member encouragement to comment at committee meetings is nice to clarify. No need to vote, agreed.
- Hancock – direction needed, if the Board wants to expand at this time. A. Schwenger motions to propose this language to the full Board to see what they think, seconded by B. O'Connor, all in favor.

Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours None

Public comment none

Adjournment H. Art moved, seconded by A. Peteroy, all in favor, 5:26 p.m.