

## MINUTES

The Executive Committee of the Woodlands Partnership  
of Northwest Massachusetts & Committee Chairs  
April 16, 2024

**Present:** *in person:* D. Crane—Windsor, Board Chair; A. Peteroy—Franklin Land Trust, Clerk; J. Nowak—Adams; S. Haupt—Peru; L. Hayden—Administrative Agent; K. Conlin—Coordinator; *virtual:* Bob Wilbur—EOEEA; B. O'Connor — EOEEA; A. Schwenger—Heath, Vice Chair; K. Ross—Society of American Foresters; J. Waite—FCCDC; H. Art—Williamstown; M. Chichester—FRCOG

**Call to order by Board Chair Dicken Crane and welcome - 4:06 p.m.**

**Agent overview of accomplishments and ongoing projects to inform Board decisions and direction:**

### **Snapshot of Agent contract & estimate of discretionary funding**

- 4-year \$475,000 contract with EOEEA took effect Jan. 2021
- Contact extended from June through Dec. 2025 with NEFF
- Increase of \$97,000 to total \$572,000 contract
- Includes \$50,000 NHA study and \$47,000 to cover staff time for extension
- Projected balance in revised Agent contract as of 6/30/24 is \$257,489

### **Seeking strategic direction on big-picture priorities**

**Forest Center – Gauge Board support for the Vision of a physical Forest Center for the Woodlands Partnership & discuss possible re-allocation of available study funding.**

**Does a location need to be identified as a first step, or could a plan for space needs be more clearly articulated without a site? – Lisa**

- Consensus that an in-person Forest Center is not worth pursuing at this time. The virtual Forest Center, as well as partner programming at existing venues, such as the Greylock Glen (set to open by early fall), should be the priority. There could be potential in sharing a space inside another venue, rather than having a building that might periodically sit empty. Some local schools are sharing space with agencies like YMCA.
- H. Art noted the idea of a physical center was aspirational; the Virtual Forest Center web site makes good sense as a first step. Other ideas include more partnering with the state, such as sharing staff at a specific state park in region or with the regional planning agencies.

**Heritage Area Feasibility Study – Agent will be investigating capacity needed to accomplish a study – Forest Center may be a component.**

**Legislative strategy – Agent update on name change bill and long-term funding needs; planning future meetings with legislators - Lisa & Kate**

- Name change bill filed by Sen. Mark
- Need for ongoing communication with key agencies/offices

**Allocation of DEIJ funds – proposal to host a well-advertised and promoted educational forum featuring an Indigenous scholar on aboriginal rights (FY25) 🗨️ Kate & Lisa**

- Idea to host similar presentation for the Partnership Region that Pam Ellis & others made at the recent Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition conference.

**Committee Chair updates (5 minutes each) followed by group discussion around Committee needs and strategy to support those needs, both in the long- and short-term, and next steps 🗨️**

**Municipal Financial Sustainability – Sam Haupt**

- Advocate for PILOT & Ch. 90 reform; education and school transportation reimbursements
- Partner with MA Municipal Association (MMA) and Select Board Association to learn where we can collaborate on issues related to gaps in town capacity such as grant management, administrative support, etc. including direct outreach to towns
- Continue engagement with legislators and administration to address needs and barriers
- Reinvigorate the spirit of volunteerism and community service
- Committee recommending a regional assessment of fire and EMS services because reimbursement rates make it difficult for smaller emergency services to function (Adams Ambulance had to close) – goal to strengthen region-wide EMS, fire and rescue services. Voted on April 11, 2024 to “recommend to the Executive Committee that the Partnership apply for a regional EOEAA grant to survey the public safety capacity, contracting with the Collins Center for Public Management at UMass Boston, for a baseline assessment in the WP region”

#### **Forest Conservation – Alain Peteroy**

- License plate design contest: Should this idea be referred to EOR Committee?
- Mapping the land conservation that has taken place in the region in the last 5 years (2019-2024) – Alain shared maps showing additional 6,250 acres conserved
- Forest legacy projects moving forward led by Kestrel LT
- How to bridge gaps between interested landowners and the appropriate conservation entity to help bring a project across the finish line
- Geospatial models – potential to provide funds to Agent or partner orgs to look at the region and to figure out priority conservation parcels, using relationships between those in the towns – ultimately providing money for land trusts or identifying landowners

#### **Natural Resource Based Economic Development – Amy Shapiro/Jay Healy**

- Focused communication (with specific requests) with Agricultural Commissioner Ashley Randle and Mass Dept. of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)
- “Buy Local” – joining logging and farming to promote locally sourced products
- Routine connection with Director of Rural Affairs Anne Gobi
- Frequent forester public walks at Hall Tavern Farm and elsewhere – can space needs study funds be repurposed?
- Encouraging the use of local wood in certain building projects by incentive, relationships, or regulation; Greylock Glen exterior is all wood; Audubon supporting environmental science/ educational programming – suggestion for a future Board meeting to be held there

#### **Education, Outreach & Research - Marybeth Chichester**

- Feedback requested on the updated web site, due to go live soon
- EOR would like feedback from other Committees on what kind of events they want to promote & what else Outreach can help them do – suggestion for a project form to make requests to EOR; Also suggestion for each Committee to identify 1 priority action area & focus on that accomplishment
- Logo contest – idea for local college art contest needs to wait for school year
- Newsletter, annual report are needed
- Committee suggesting need for upgraded hybrid meeting equipment
- Identify and fund research needs
- Professionally filmed event(s) that could be posted online & shared; interest in featuring videos of landowners & other local people
- Mailings to towns

- Seasonal calendar of annual outreach events such as town reports, educational events, different outreach tasks to guide effort; start a Speakers' Bureau list to begin to plug in events by appropriate season

#### **Finance & Budgeting – Joe Nowak**

- Sustainable funding need from state and federal sources
- Need for Board to understand the funding that is allotted through grants and funding gaps
- Communication with legislators about the Feasibility Study as they could earmark funding to make it possible and could also recommend alternative paths to federal recognition
- Congressman Neal investigated a new type of designation but ran into bureaucratic challenges
- Discussion of autonomy vs. Agent contract
- EEA hopefully to file a bond account on behalf of the Partnership
- Overview of meeting with Climate Chief Hoffer

#### **Executive Committee – Dicken Crane**

- Name Change Legislation – Sen. Mark
- Environmental Bond Bill
- Federal Designation – Ch. 6 of our Ten-Year Plan
- Working group, Relationship Building with Indigenous Peoples
- Forest Center space needs – would like to allocated grant funds for this purpose
- New Bond Bill - EEA could list the WP in list of accounts submitted to Governor – B. Wilber said he will notify us – B. O'Connor has draft language

#### **Discussion re: Strategy & Next Steps to Meet Committee Needs; Discussion of how Committees might work together to accomplish goals and best communicate, Agent role in facilitating**

- Consistent and focused legislative (state and federal), town (boards, etc.), and community (businesses, public) outreach needed—including programming and assistance (for policy reform, town capacity, land conservation, and businesses)
- Securing sustainable funding for the Partnership
- How best to facilitate Committee cross-pollination?
- Staff capacity and priorities
- Long-term funding and Agent contract end (Dec. 2025)

#### **Ten-Year Plan yearly updates – suggestions for additions or edits are welcome**

#### **Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours - None**

#### **Public comment and Adjournment**

- No comments, 6:13 p.m. adjourn, A. Peteroy motion, S. Haupt seconds, all in favor.