

MINUTES

Municipal Financial Sustainability Committee
of the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts
October 8, 2024, 4:00-5:00 p.m.

In Attendance: Sam Haupt—*Peru (Chair)*; Liz Kidder—*Leyden*; Art Schwenger—*Heath*; Mark Phelps—*New Ashford*

Absent: Ron Bosley—*Florida*

Board/Staff: Dicken Crane—*Windsor (Board Chair)*; Lisa Hayden—*Administrative Agent, NEFF*; Kate Conlin—*Coordinator, NEFF*

Public: Tom Kennedy—UMass Boston Collins Center and 30 years with MA State Police; Shawn Fenn—UMass Boston Collins Center; Stephen Foley—UMass Boston Collins Center (4:10 p.m. arrival)

Call to order – 4:01 p.m.

Review & approval of August 13, 2024 minutes – L. Kidder moves, A. Schwenger second, all in favor, M. Phelps abstain.

EEA grant regarding municipal services study – finalization of a Scope of Services with the Collins Center

- Agent question as to how to reach each town in the Partnership Region for input on the survey process and to receive adequate municipal feedback. State police are responsible for state forests – seeking feedback from individual towns like third-party rescue and EMS, snowmobile clubs, incident management team. Suggestion to identify centralized locations for in-person workshops focused on public safety professionals and volunteers, focused on community leaders. The amount of stakeholders would require email/mail surveys. WP can help organize/sponsor meetings, perhaps at least one in each county.
- A. Schwenger – request to include the point of the survey, the benefit, and the date to reply by, when delivering to towns. In-person best.
- Collins Center can travel to towns as needed, though important to strategize when and how to best use resources.
- D. Crane – should survey reflect and tailor to the town department it is sent to or have multiple sections for disciplines? Important to remember that coordination may be needed between departments to fill out a survey.
- Board reps. can help facilitate town involvement in collecting data. The survey should also be posted on municipal web sites to make people aware of it.
- DCR, Environmental Police Officers, and State DOT outreach should be included in the Scope of Services.
- Grant period ends June 2025 – what's a reasonable timeframe? M. Phelps: April good timing for drafting process. There should be a two-step process where Muni. Finance can vote on the draft report and any recommendations to the Ex. Com. and full Board. Final version of report no later than May 15, leaving time for an event and outreach planning. Middle to end of June for public meeting.
- Importance of Board involvement in approving the report. June Annual Meeting, with involvement of the Board when in draft form. How to engage town representatives on the

Board outside of a full board meeting format and in an ongoing way? Agent will update the Board as the project develops. Share results of the survey. Keep people thinking about the project.

- What do we hope the outcome will provide the towns? Practical, actionable steps that towns can adopt and work towards. S. Haupt: interested in ideas as well as statistics and data.
- L. Kidder – Sen. Comerford working on ecosystem value as it relates to PILOT.
- Agent will engage Board with final draft of Scope of Services and notify them of project timeline, requesting input before it is signed.
- A. Schwenger motion for the Collins Center & Agent staff to proceed based on provided Scope of Services and conversations that can be agreed upon to conduct a study of existing public safety capacity in the Woodlands Partnership region including ideas and recommendations of how to fill gaps in current services, seconded L. Kidder, all in favor.

Scheduling legislative/administration updates

- Importance to stay engaged with our legislators re: PILOT, municipal support for communities that host parcels of conserved land and boosting local communities that rely on our forests.
- Agent will ask Sen. Comerford about the ecosystem services legislation she is putting forth as well as thank her for her letter of support she provided for the Collins Center grant.
- Importance of including DCR staff in future board meetings and continued partner events.
- Outreach to legislators regarding Collins Center study.

2024 Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network Gathering, Thursday, November 14 at UMass Amherst

- S. Haupt can no longer make the panel. Agent will find another representative to discuss the municipal perspective.
- The Woodlands Partnership is now an official “RCP” or Regional Conservation Partnership (collaborations across New England that seek to scale up conservation and stewardship)
- D. Crane and L. Hayden recently were interviewed by Highstead which sponsors the RCP Network and an article will appear soon on their web site.

Items not anticipated within 48 hours

Schedule next meeting

- Schedule offline based on Collins Center; Kate will follow up if second half of November or first week of December

Public Comment - None

Adjourn

- A. Schwenger motion, L. Kidder second, all in favor, 5:08 p.m.