

MINUTES

Municipal Financial Sustainability Committee
of the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts
August 13, 2024, 4:00-5:00 p.m.

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

Absent: Ron Bosley—*Florida*; Mark Phelps—*New Ashford*

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

Call to order – 4:03 p.m.

Review & approval of April 11, 2024 minutes – A. Schwenger moved, L. Kidder seconded. Discussion - One change on 3rd page, S. Haupt points out that Adams hasn't built a tram, but, for instance, the community years ago considered building a tram." Unanimously approved with amendment.

EEA grant regarding municipal services study announced – strategy and plan for involvement

- S. Haupt - Collins Center already engaged in similar studies. He shares that Peru was approached by the town of Dalton about a regionalization effort for fire and EMS that the Collins Center is undertaking. Challenges include lack of volunteer participation and lack of Medicare reimbursements for ambulance services. Peru is up to 45-min response time for ambulances.
- L. Kidder – Leyden has worked with the Collins Center, a public agency, and its affiliates, such as Stephen Foley, who she recommends highly. Assessment of baseline situation needed. Legislation requiring advanced training for EMS could have disastrous effects in the WP region.
- The WP focus could be unique in considering tourism/significant amount of state land and resulting diminished tax base which is related to PILOT payments.
- Scope of services for contract between WP and Collins Center must be developed: answers to questions and a report that is useful for action and 21-town knowledge, Heritage Area designation effect, pressure of tourism, 2 focus group presentations. Study must include strategies to solve these systemic issues. Provide the full Board opportunity to provide input to this proposal, drafted by Agent staff.
- Over time, we should focus on road maintenance and other stressed municipal services beyond emergency management and climate-change effects (road washouts, ice storms). Important to not lose focus on broader goals of this committee as we work on this study, or the local need to take care of residents as well as tourists. April Chair Summit follow-up needed.
- EEA planning documents: "How can the Commonwealth support communities that have significant parcels of state land? How can we boost local communities that rely on our forests?" Pressure needed on specifics to achieve these goals.
- Outreach should be planned to each town in the WP region to express thanks, announce the grant, its intent, and attach the press release. Press release to newspapers announcing our grant as well.

Items not anticipated within 48 hours

- No updates on State Auditor PILOT study timeline.
- Need to re-engage with Anne Gobi, Kristen Elechko, need for regular phone calls. Ask what they are doing to serve western Mass more than in the past and to share our work with each other.
- Recent Ch. 90 increases have been effective.

- Sen. Commerford wrote a letter of support for the Collins Study grant. She could be re-engaged on this as the study progresses.

Schedule next meeting

- October 8, 4-5pm

Public Comment

- none

Adjourn

- A. Schwenger moved, L. Kidder, all approved 5:06 pm.