

**MINUTES**  
**Municipal Financial Sustainability Committee**  
**of the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts**  
**June 13, 2025, 3 – 4:30 p.m.**

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

**Board/Staff:** Dicken Crane, Board Chair; Lisa Hayden—*Administrative Agent, NEFF*

**Guests/public:** Collins Center staff Stephanie Lessing and Stephen Foley

1. **Call to order** – 3:01 p.m.
2. **Review & approval of May 12, 2025 minutes** – A. Schwenger moved & M. Phelps seconded, all in favor.
3. **Presentation from Collins Center team on completed Emergency Services survey & overview of draft report for Committee feedback**

S. Lessing and S. Foley presented results from the two surveys they conducted, of first responders, and of community members, regarding perception of emergency services in the 21-town Partnership region (raw responses included about 52 first responders and 102 community responses but this counts all online surveys started).

The First Responder survey (including fire, police and highway staff) received responses from all towns except Clarksburg and Monroe (despite the survey deadline being extended with emails to towns encouraging participation). Paper copies were also distributed at public meetings. S. Foley reported that the issues ranked highest for concern were “insufficient staffing” and “lack of communication.” Regarding lack of personnel and equipment, he noted that an order today for a new ambulance can take at least two years to be fulfilled. Regarding call volume during high tourism periods, results indicate that there may be more calls, but response times do not seem to be affected, though some towns may be more affected than others.

One difficulty noted at public forums is visitors calling for help but not knowing where they are. Thus, locating callers in outside spaces can add to response time, and points to the need for ‘training for tourists.’ Agent suggested more communication at trailheads could remind hikers and others headed to the back country that they are on their own and to be sure they are well equipped –

suggestion that Appalachian Mountain Club could be a good partner in this. M. Phelps suggested signs at trailheads reminding people to be sure their GPS is on; there may be some gaps in cell services and question about broadband bandwidth.

Western MA rescue teams include high angle training and swift water response as well as environmental police. First responders noted general awareness of these resources but also asked for GPS and ATV training. Fire Chief in Windsor noted difficulty in getting training from State Fire Academy. S. Foley noted that the dispatch statistics for 2024 are likely not the only calls for service in specified recreation areas but what the team was able to gather with varying data formats used by call centers.

S. Lessing shared results from the community survey, administered by Qualtrics to the 21 towns in the Partnership region, and there was at least one response from every town, following outreach. Of responders, 64% have called 911 at some point during the time living here. Of those, 55% were satisfied with the response time, while 33% perceived the response as slower than ideal.

Regarding the potential impacts of tourism, 55% selected concern about environmental impacts; 34% about limited parking and 32% about housing availability and affordability. The community members did not seem to observe effects of tourism as much as the first responders.

S. Foley said the final report will include recommendations for how different entities can address deficiencies, not all of which are monetary, such as more interaction and cooperation between the towns than now exists, and more inter-agency training. L. Hayden will share the draft report for Board & Committee review.

A. Schwenger noted that this report, funded by MA Ex. Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs, is by the Collins Center and not necessarily the recommendations of the Woodlands Partnership Board. He suggested the Ex. Committee may want to have a discussion of the report results in Aug. or Sept.

4. EOEEA grant funding this work closes June 30 – discuss use of funds for printing, promotion

L. Hayden noted there is about \$2000 left in the grant for a video about the study as well as a line item for printing the final report, and inquired if this was the best current use of these funds from the Committee's perspective. S. Haupt made a motion, seconded by L. Kidder & approved unanimously, to direct the Agent to use discretion to make a decision on the best use of these funds.

5. Update on PILOT reform next steps – ongoing review of various legislative reform proposals [Rep. Blais bill: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H3032>; State Auditor DiZoglio study: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/pursuing-equitable-state-owned-land-reimbursements-for-municipalities/download>] & status for WP recommendations

S. Haupt reached out to Sen. Mark's office but doesn't have any updates yet to report regarding proposals for PILOT reform. M. Phelps agreed that he doesn't see the Committee taking a position at this time. He plans to reach out to the MA Selectman's Association to discuss the PILOT issue and building a coalition. He expects a lot more towns than in the WP area are affected by formula inequities and the Auditor's report should be the baseline for recommended action: i.e. not taking funding away from municipalities, but bringing WP towns and other rural areas up to parity. He noted that the WP region acting alone lacks political clout. L. Kidder suggested that a lot of legislators have second homes in W. MA and may want to keep taxes low. We should ask legislative offices to let us know of any hearings on the PILOT reform bills.

6. Items not anticipated within 48 hours – None.
7. Schedule next meeting – After discussion, July 22 at 4-5 pm was agreed as the likely next meeting date.
8. Public Comment – None.
9. A. Schwenger motioned to adjourn, second by L. Kidder, all in favor. Adjourned at 4:30 p.m.