

MINUTES
The Executive Committee
of the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts
July 30, 2025, 4 – 5:30 p.m. – Virtual via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Dicken Crane – Windsor (Board Chair); Art Schwenger – Heath (Board Vice Chair); Russ Richardson – Massachusetts Forest Alliance; Robert O’Connor – MA EOEEA;

Absent: Alain Peteroy – Franklin Land Trust (Clerk); Chris Cozzaglio – Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (Treasurer); Rhonda Anderson, Ohketeau Cultural Center

Others Present: Board member Liz Kidder, Leyden; **Staff:** Lisa Hayden – Admin. Agent; Fundraising consultant Stephanie Schilling

1. **Call to order and welcome:** 4:09 p.m.; Reading of latest version of Land Acknowledgement
2. **Approval of June 6, 2025 minutes:** A. Schwenger moved, B. O’Connor seconded; unanimously approved.
3. **Discussion of finalist candidate interviews and decision to hire consultant to complete an Indigenous-focused Natural & Cultural Inventory as part of National Heritage Area feasibility study:**

R. Richardson sat in on both interviews and stated that Dr. Dolan is very articulate, already well versed in the history of the area and the candidate needed for the consultant role. B. O’Connor moved that the Woodlands Partnership hire Jessica Dolan, Ph.D. to complete the Indigenous-focused inventory; seconded by A. Schwenger. In a 4-0 unanimous roll call vote, the Committee approved the motion.

4. **Review of 3-year fundraising plan and prospect list with consultant Stephanie Schilling (10 min); Committee discussion (5 min each) of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats re: prioritizing future grant proposals; Final feedback on report due to Agent & consultant by Aug. 7 for Aug. 15 plan deadline:**

Consultant S. Schilling reviewed key points in her final draft of the 3-year fundraising plan. She highlighted key questions surrounding the Partnership’s organizational structure including:

- a) Fiscal sponsorship – an additional function beyond the Admin. Agent would be ability to accept donations on behalf of the Partnership.
- b) Gift vehicle policy – set up a fund that will accept donations.
- c) Employer Identification Number (EIN) or tax ID that would allow the Partnership to open a bank account.
- d) Board fundraising committee: creating this focus for a committee would help get efforts off the ground.
- e) Executive Director job description: the role is often heavy on program management but she suggests a split with fundraising duties and goals to grow the organization in all areas, not just one, i.e. being able to use funding that is received.

S. Schilling is adding additional sections on these topics to the 3-year Plan. She also shared a link to a shared document (that will remain active) with list of project foundations and a calendar of grant deadlines, which the Committee briefly reviewed with the Agent. Her goal is to submit a couple proposals if a fit. Among upcoming deadlines, the Conservation Alliance emphasizes an intersectional approach, and The New England Grassroots Environment Fund does not need a 501c3 but does need a bank account. It was discussed that Rotary Foundation with a large amount to award to identified projects could be beneficial to build relationships locally. A. Schwenger could help with introductions to the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. L. Kidder noted that one on the list, the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts, is further to the East and does not include Partnership towns.

B. O'Connor noted the list should be very useful. With fiscal sponsor agreement, any volunteer could submit grant proposals. He plans to check with BRPC if they use the same Board for their 501c3 as their public body. He noted a fee of about \$600 to do an IRS filing which takes 6-8 weeks to get an official 501c3, which would mean the Board would take on responsibility to do an audit and tax requirements every year if determined allowable within the legislative authority creating the Partnership.

The Committee thanked Stephanie for her good work and advice and wished her luck in a new executive director role with a start-up beginning soon.

5. Chair report: Outreach to Rural Affairs & legislative offices:

D. Crane reported that he and L. Hayden met by Zoom on July 28 with Anne Gobi, Dir. of Rural Affairs for the Healey administration, for updates about the Partnership. On the PILOT issue, she suggested that Small Town Administrators of Massachusetts or STAM would be a good organization to connect with (professional organization for chief administrative officers in towns of 12,000 population or less). L. Hayden and D. Crane also met with Christine Sullivan of Rep. Barrett's office on July 14 regarding outreach about the environmental bond bill.

6. Agent report:

L. Hayden asked for any feedback from the Committee on what are high priorities and what members would like to see as NEFF works on a proposal to EOEEA to continue service as Agent for the next 3-year contract. D. Crane would like discussion with EOEEA about having a say in NEFF's fulfillment of Agent duties so it is more of a 3-way interaction and the Partnership Board has a say in staffing and more opportunity to understand the Agent contract and grant budgets. He finds it unusual to have an outside agency determine who is hired to work with a board.

B. O'Connor noted that he was involved in writing many of the early state and USFS grants NEFF manages and assumed getting projects funded would be positive for the Partnership. He suggested the Board should agree on what kind of projects they want to do and use that list to seek appropriate funding.

A. Schwenger stated that the next 3 years will likely focus on how to manage with federal cutbacks and he suggested tourism and recreation could be a fruitful area of conversation related to the Heritage Area study. D. Crane stated he would like to consider how to leverage the Heritage Area feasibility study for other purposes, such as legislative outreach and this a topic that should be considered with the new Agent contract with conversation about what can be accomplished by 2028. Goal setting should involve the Agent and the Board. It was suggested

the fall Board meeting as a venue, or a separate dedicated meeting. Committees could also each set their goals to prepare for the next contract.

Other Agent updates:

-L. Hayden submitted testimony by deadline on the Mass Ready Act & environmental bond bill that was signed by D. Crane, A. Schwenger and S. Haupt.

-The Collins Center public safety study is posted online & printed copies are available.

-Among upcoming events: Board and public are invited to an event Friday, Sept. 19, 4 pm: Brian Donahue will read from his new book *Slow Wood*, at Williams College bookstore in Williamstown.

-Planning needed to organize a fall multi-region webinar on PILOT reform proposals, hopefully with Auditor's office, and the next speaker for Education, Outreach & Research Committee's educational series. The June Webinar video for "How Do Forests Grow?" is posted under Past Programs.

7. Scheduling Sept. Committee meeting & Fall Board meeting – TBD.
8. Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours – None
9. Public comment - R. Richardson commented that there are current laws against growing rare plants and limiting economic activity that essentially rob or appropriate Indigenous knowledge about medicinal plants. Suggestion that herbalists should be part of Heritage Area.
10. Adjourn at 5:55 p.m., motion made by A. Schwenger, 2nd by D. Crane, unanimously approved.