

MINUTES

Joint Meeting via Zoom of the **Executive Committee** and
Finance & Budgeting Committee
of the **Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts**

Friday, December 12, 2025 from 1:30 - 3 p.m.

Ex. Com. members present: Dicken Crane – Windsor (Board Chair), Art Schwenger (Vice Chair), Alain Peteroy – Franklin Land Trust (Clerk), Russ Richardson – Massachusetts Forest Alliance, Robert O’Connor – MA EOEEA, Rhonda Anderson – Ohketeau Cultural Center

Finance & Budgeting Committee members present: Chair Joe Nowak – Adams, Keith Ross – MA Society of American Foresters, Bob O’Connor – MA EOEEA, Dicken Crane – Windsor

Absent: Chris Cozzaglio – Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (Treasurer)

Other Board Members Present: Sam Haupt (Peru)

NEFF Staff Present: Lisa Hayden – Administrative Agent; Ryan Owens – Ex. Dir.; Andi Colnes – Dep. Dir.; Maria Garcia – Finance & Administration Dir.

MA Ex. Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs Staff Present: Vanessa Farny – Forest & Land Grant Program Manager; Lisa Primiano – Director, MA Division of Conservation Services

1. Call to order: 1:34 p.m.
 - a. Ex. Com. by Board Chair Dicken Crane;
 - b. Finance & Budget Committee by Chair Joe Nowak.
2. Scope, timing and responsibilities of Agent contract:
 - o State contract funding – Ex. Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs:

V. Farny stated she has been working with L. Hayden to fine tune the scope and budget for the state’s Agent contract with NEFF for providing staffing, administrative services and Board and Committee support for the Partnership. She welcomed the Board’s ideas and input on how the role should support the Partnership’s work. L. Primiano added this is a time to build in what the Ex. Com. wants the Agent’s time to be spent on. Because the Agent contract is paid by capital funds, they are wiped clean at the end of the fiscal year. Because consultants are to be paid at the conclusion of their work in the spring, there may be a situation where the current Agent contract continues until spent down, even while the new 3-year Agent contract kicks in for FY26 ending June 30.

- Overview of 3-year contract proposal accepted by EOEEA – New England Forestry Fd.; Chart and timeline of active grants:

L. Hayden shared slides with background on the 5-year Agent contract, which has been extended and increased to \$572,000. Other active grants, with varying overhead rates based on the funder, include three US Forest Service grants and one state grant through June focused on outreach to schools, landowners and video story telling. There was interest in seeing a chart of current grant balances and expenses more frequently. In addition to covering Agent salary and monthly Partnership Board expenses, there is likely flexibility to hire part-time administrative or website capacity in the new contract, for which members expressed support.

Agent accomplishments since 2021 include: Creation of a 10-year Partnership Plan posted on a redesigned website; securing more than \$1 million in grants for programs including \$540,000 for resilience forestry practices; passage of state name change legislation & welcome of Indigenous-led NGO to Board; advocacy on the PILOT formula inequity issue; study of recreation impacts on municipal public safety completed last summer; 3-year Fundraising plan & grant prospect list from consultant hired through 25k private foundation grant; 3 more towns joined Partnership (20 out of 21) & some border towns have expressed interest in joining.

- Questions and discussion re: Board priorities for next contract period:

K. Ross noted interest in a circuit rider for NW MA who could help woodland owners to navigate funding programs though A. Peteroy was unsure such a role is needed with work local land trusts are doing. Though funding specifically for town conservation projects could be beneficial.

L. Primiano suggested the Board should consider how to best leverage the funding under the Agent contract now while continuing to work on a fundraising plan, prioritizing the timing for other grants. L. Hayden stated that about \$20,000 is included in the proposed budget for Board-directed projects. There was also discussion of wanting to avoid the Partnership competing with the projects of organizations represented on the Board.

B. O'Connor reviewed the grant prospect list (5-6 deadlines each month) from fundraising consultant Stephanie Schilling, and noted most require applicants to have nonprofit status. Therefore, it seems important for the Partnership to pursue a 501(c)3 arm. A. Peteroy questioned whether this would require a separate Board of Directors. The example of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission was noted, in which a public body, the regional planning agency, has a non-profit affiliate.

2. Scheduling January meetings re: Heritage Area study themes, Indigenous community outreach and interest by new towns:

Work is underway by Jessica Dolan, Ph.D., on the Indigenous-focused natural & cultural assets inventory, and both Regional Planning Agencies to meet the feasibility study criteria. L. Hayden and B. O'Connor are working with the consultants to pull together the various chapters of the suggested report outline, but there are decisions for the WP Board to consider regarding the potential for sharing governance and/or potential federal funding from a Heritage Area with Indigenous communities. The Ex. Com. may meet again in January to discuss these issues as the report is being drafted.

3. Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours: None
4. Public comment: None
5. Adjourn: R. Richardson moved to adjourn, seconded by A. Schwenger, unanimously adopted at approximately 3 p.m.