

MINUTES  
The **Municipal Financial Sustainability Committee**  
of the **Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts**  
December 10, 2024, 4:00-5:00 p.m. - *virtual*

Committee members in attendance: Sam Haupt—*Peru (chair)*; Liz Kidder—*Leyden*; Mark Phelps—*New Ashford*; Art Schwenger—*Heath*

Board members in attendance: Dicken Crane—*Windsor, Board Chair (4:30 p.m. join)*

Absent: Ron Bosley—*Florida*

Staff: Lisa Hayden—*Neff/Admin. Agent*; Kate Conlin—*NEFF/Coord.*

Guests: Stephen Foley—*Collins Center*; Stephanie Lessing—*Collins Center*; Shawn Fenn—*Collins Center*

Public:

1. **Call to order:** 4:01 p.m.
2. **Review & approval of November 21, 2024 minutes:** moved by A. Schwenger, seconded by L. Kidder, all approved as modified (striking Municipal Modernization Act from the minutes for lack of context).
3. **Snapshot of the municipal public safety study data collection table so far (by the Collins Center):** S. Lessing presents spreadsheet of emergency response data. S. Foley recently attended the state 911 commission – Governor signed bill to transfer Berkshire 911 over to the state. It’s been difficult to access accurate dispatch information. The State 911 Director assured him that the interim Director would work with the Collins Center to collect the necessary data. He is meeting with the Dispatch Supervisor in Shelburne this upcoming Thursday. Next Monday, he is meeting with fire chiefs in the area. As soon as the survey is finalized, they, along with the lieutenants, will help distribute to police, fire, EMS. M. Phelps mentions New Ashford had paid 8K to the regional 911 service. Now that the state will be running and funding it, will the town be reimbursed? S. Foley recommends towns reach out to the Berkshire County Sheriff to inquire.
4. **Discussion with the Collins Center: workshop draft survey (provided by the Collins Center), strategize dissemination of the survey, locations for in-person meetings and dates, workshop/draft invitation and outreach strategy for listening tour**  
“Clear sense of what we want to learn. Easy to ask everything.”

Public Survey (perception of the problem)

*Committee input:*

- EMS should be spelled out and/or referred to as “ambulance.”
- Survey Monkey, etc. can randomize the responses, perhaps this could avoid bias (S. Lessing will investigate if this would be helpful or burdensome to the survey taker)
- There are really two levels of response time – the minimally trained and then the ambulance. Totality of response should be spelled out (first responder and then transporter)
- Open-ended question at the end with opportunity to include anecdotal evidence about a particular experience. People will want to share their stories. No need to organize or condense these stories – it is important to collect and share. A word limit will help.

- Missing person scenario with volunteers that might conduct a search. This will not affect the survey as police are notified first and then loop in fire and EMS. This survey doesn't take into account police response. Suggestion to add "rescue" to "fire, EMS"
- Remove question 7 regarding funding. In many cases, not a question of money but of people. Also, not wanting to create the idea that burden of funding lies solely with municipalities.
- Add: what would make you interested in volunteering in your community? (free training, etc.)
- Effects of tourism, concerns: dangerous situations parking on rural roads, no cell service, housing availability and affordability, community quality of life/cohesion, trespassing issues, accidents, commute times, environmental degradation, trail damage (top 3 will be selected)
- Once finalized: Agent staff will send this to the full Board for input. Release to the public after the holidays.

First Responders Survey (how does this affect your work, pain points in provision of service (time delays, quality, resources)

*Committee input:*

- Ask respondent their role(s) and function(s)
- Training is onerous and expensive and affects staffing
- Road closures, washouts, and construction
- Seasonal dirt roads – GPS will send people unfamiliar down the roads and they will get to a point of no return (can't go forward or back)
- Focuses a lot on tourism – the survey will ask more open-ended questions about challenges (not all towns in the Partnership Region have a lot of tourism) and then identify how tourism may exacerbate this
- Highway crews are often involved in emergency situations (plowing for access, etc.) or the aftermath – they should be given the survey as well – avenue to DPW through Selectboards (who should receive public survey also), as well as to Mass DOT
- Climate change (rainstorms, road washouts, ice storms, fire) impacts
- Open-ended question about department resources not necessarily about tourism
- S. Lessing will send out revised surveys to Agent staff, who will consult the full Board on any edits.
- Distribution ideas: Municipal alert systems, town website with links, tax bills, etc. Some QR code. Paper option but not default.

**5. Agent Update, December 2, 2024 Board Meeting including Heritage Area discussion:**

The hybrid Board meeting at Heath Community Hall featured a successful conversation around the Woodlands Partnership Region and defining its "nationally distinctive" characteristics for the Heritage Area designation.

**6. Items not anticipated within 48 hours:** none

**7. Schedule next meeting:** January 13, 2025, 4-5pm – K. Conlin will facilitate committee edits to the survey as well as a list of survey outreach venues.

**8. Public Comment:** none

9. **Adjourn:** M. Phelps move, L. Kidder second, all approved. 5:16 p.m.