

MINUTES
Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership
Annual Board Meeting – June 7, 2022
Berkshire East, Charlemont and Online (Hybrid Meeting)

Board members in attendance (in person): Henry Art, Williamstown (Board Chair); Alain Peteroy, Franklin Land Trust; Amy Shapiro, Franklin County Community Development Corporation; Art Schwenger, Heath; Ed Munch, Peru; Elayne Murphy, Hoosic River Watershed Association; Joe Nowak, Adams; Keith Ross, Massachusetts Society of Foresters; Larry Flaccus, Shelburne; Paul O’Neil, Leyden; Sheila Kelliher, Deerfield River Watershed Association.

Board members in attendance (online): Bob O’Connor, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs; Doug McNally, Windsor; Emily Johnson, Franklin Regional Council of Governments; Hannah Poplawski, Rowe; Jeffrey Thomas, Lever, Inc.; Kate Lindroos Conlin, Massachusetts Forestry Alliance; Kyle Hanlon, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission; Rick Chandler, Ashfield; Zachary Feury, North Adams.

Staff/partners in attendance: Lisa Hayden, NEFF, Administrative Agent (in person); Sophie Argetsinger, NEFF, Assistant (in person).

Guests: Laura Brennan, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (online); Matthew DiBona, National Wild Turkey Federation (online); Brian Rhodes, iBerkshires (online); Bella Levavi, Greenfield Recorder (in person).

Board members absent: Alice Houghtaling, Monroe; Beth Girshman, Conway; Jay Healy, Charlemont; Mark Phelps, New Ashford; Nicole Pyser, Berkshire Natural Resources Council; Paul Catanzaro, UMass; Rick Peltier, UMass.

1. **Call to Order** at 6:08pm by Hank Art.
2. **Roll Call of Board Members and Approval of Minutes.** Art Schwenger motioned and Joe Nowak seconded to approve the minutes from the March 15, 2022 MTWP Board meeting. Suggested amendments: (1) Note that Elayne Murphy has replaced Andrew Kawczak as the Board representative from the Hoosic River Watershed Association. (2) Add a note that the “Rivers Run Through It” grant is a USFS grant matched by the EOEEA. (3) Make sure that Emily Johnson is on the meeting attendance list. Vote: Joe Nowak and Paul O’Neil abstained (absent from March 15th meeting); all other Board members voted to approve the minutes.
3. **Updates on and Discussion of MTWP 10-year Partnership Plan.** Hank Art noted that the hope is to be able to approve the Plan by Board vote at the October 11th Board meeting. The full draft Plan, along with a portal for public comment, is now available on the MTWP website at <http://www.mohawktrailwoodlandpartnership.org/partnership-plan.html>. The MTWP is about halfway through reaching out to town Select Boards in the MTWP region to inform them about the Plan updates and to ask for feedback. Lisa Hayden plans to send out a brief notice that towns can include in their local newsletters about the Plan, a call for comments, and information about two scheduled public Plan listening sessions on August 24th at 4pm (online) and September 14th at 7pm (online).

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4. **Review of and Voting on Executive Committee Recommendations for Changes to Bylaws**
- a. Article I, Section 2 – MTWP Board Members (pg. 2). Proposed addition: “Municipalities, organizations, and agencies are allowed to appoint an alternate, for a term of 3 years, to represent them should the board member be unable to attend a Board Meeting. If possible, the alternate board member should consult with the primary board member regarding agenda items for the meeting at which the alternate will be the representative to the Board.”
- Larry Flaccus asked that clarification be added concerning the privileges of alternative Board members, i.e., whether they can serve on committees.
- Ed Munch agreed that the wording needs to be clearer—will two representatives from the same town both have full power?
- Hank Art emphasized that “one town, one vote” will still be in place, and that an alternate will only vote in the absence of the primary representative, even if both members are in attendance.
- Doug McNally suggested that allowing alternates would encourage more active participation on the Board, especially from small towns.
- Larry Flaccus suggested that this proposed change be sent back to the Executive Committee for re-wording.
- Doug McNally motioned to table the amendment, and Ed Munch seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.
- b. Article I, Sections 5, 6, and 10 – Officers of the MTWP Board, Chair’s Duties, and Executive Committee of the MTWP Board (pgs. 3-4). Proposed changes: the Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, and Clerk will all serve on the Executive Committee (Chair and Vice Chair will be representatives of municipalities); proposed increase of Executive Committee membership from 5 to 7.
- Bob O’Connor noted that these are important changes for getting broader involvement and representation on the Committee; the Executive Committee does a lot of work for the Board and is responsible for making a number of decisions, so it would be beneficial to have increased representation.
- Ed Munch motioned to approve this amendment, and Sheila Kelliher seconded. The Board unanimously approved the amendment.
- c. Article II, Section 5 – Voting (pgs. 6-7). Proposed addition: “Hybrid meetings and virtual attendance is permitted as allowed by Massachusetts State Law and regulations.” It was proposed that hybrid options remain available indefinitely to increase Board member access to meetings, as long as permitted by Massachusetts State Law.
- Larry Flaccus moved to approve this amendment, and Art Schwenger seconded. The Board unanimously approved the amendment.

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5. Review of and Vote on Standing Committee Membership and Leadership Roles.

Hank Art reminded the Board that all Standing Committee assignments and leadership roles must be approved by Board vote. Hank was able to give most Board members their first choice of Standing Committee, but the leadership positions of Clerk and Treasurer are currently vacant.

Alain Peteroy nominated herself for the Clerk position.

Keith Ross agreed to remain in his role at Treasurer for one more year, as there were no other nominations.

Standing Committee Chair nominations were as follows: Forest Land Conservation: Alain Peteroy; Finance and Budgeting: Keith Ross; Natural Resource Based Economic Development: Jeffery Thomas; Education, Outreach, and Research: Kate Lindroos Conlin; Municipal Financial Stability: Ed Munch; Executive Committee: Hank Art.

The Board voted unanimously to approve all proposed Standing Committee assignments and leadership roles.

6. Updates on Current Grants and Funding Opportunities.

Current Active Grants: Lisa Hayden gave an update on some current active MTWP grants, including (1) the 'Rivers Run Through It' grant (\$60,000 state MTWP grant with matching \$60,000 3-year USFS grant). So far, the grant has funded a tree planting and riparian restoration project at South River Meadow in Conway. A volunteer planting day was hosted by the MTWP at the site on May 26, 2022. (2) Grants for Forest Climate Stewardship Plans, including 2 new plans in North Adams and Shelburne Falls Fire District, and funding for climate updates to existing plans in Conway, Rowe, and Heath.

Current Funding Efforts: Lisa outlined current MTWP effort to secure more funding, including (1) a proposal to Sen. Hinds' office for \$200,000 for an MTWP executive director, municipal circuit rider, annual programming, and regional trails; (2) A Congressional Directed Spending (earmark) to Sen. Warren's and Sen. Markey's offices for \$1.11 million (Action on Forest Climate Resilience); (3) An MVP proposal from Rowe that includes a virtual Forest Center concept, town open space plans, and funds for implementing climate forest practices.

Bob O'Connor discussed the USDA Climate-Smart Commodities grant, which would include partnering with local technical colleges that have underserved populations to provide climate-smart forestry training, maintaining demonstration forests that use harvesting techniques meant to enhance climate storage (lumber would receive a climate smart forestry label), working with Sean Mahony and DCR to set up a regional wood bank, partnering with Hall Tavern Farm in Charlemont to process local, climate-smart wood, and partnering with Hilltown CDC to provide climate-smart wood to local residents for home repairs.

Art Schwenger motioned, and Ed Munch seconded for a Board vote in support of continuing to pursue the USDA Climate-Smart Commodities grant. The motion was unanimously approved.

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7. Focus on the Forest Center

- a. **Guest Speaker: Laura Brennan from BRPC on Greylock Glen Outdoor Center in Adams.** Laura Brennan gave an update on the Outdoor Center on behalf of Donna Cesan (Community Development Director, Town of Adams). Groundbreaking for the Center is planned for June 2022, with completion expected in October 2023. The master plan includes a trail system, campground, lodge, conference center, performing arts amphitheater, and the Outdoor Center, which will include an education wing, retail and rental space, a café, and an exhibit hall. The Outdoor Center will be a zero net energy building, with an \$8.3 million project cost. In 2020 and 2021, MTWP grants provided funding for the Town of Adams and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to develop an exhibit plan and an environmental education plan for the Center and to examine the potential for a Forestry Center at the site. Both the exhibit plan and the education plan focus on three main themes: climate change mitigation and resiliency techniques for the region, the biodiversity and natural communities of Greylock Glen, and the value of land conservation. It was determined that the Center will not have the space, budget, or staff to support the MTWP proposal for a Forest Center.

Questions/comments:

Elayne Murphy asked if there was a plan to provide more parking at Greylock Glen. Laura said there is a plan for extensive parking with permeable asphalt (not confirmed).

Jeffery Thomas emphasized that what is most important for keeping an operation like the Outdoor Center vibrant and relevant is the programming and staffing. He wondered what operational and staffing planning work has been done. He also suggested that the proposed vendor model may want to be reconsidered, as this model depends heavily on visitor flow to remain viable.

- b. **Discussion of MTWP Forest Center Vision.** Hank Art stated that the Williams College 2021 student report, *Envisioning the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Forest Center*, is available for download at <https://ces.williams.edu/environmental-planning-papers/>. He emphasized that the Forest Center project is still not “shovel ready” and that a site has not been selected, but that it may be possible to realize a physical Forest Center in 5-7 years.

Jeffery Thomas said that we should also have a business plan for the Center, including plans for operations, budget, and staffing. The success or failure of the Center will be based on the quality of the programming and the involvement generated by the Center.

Doug McNally said that we should tap into the network of other environmental centers in the region and make engagement with existing resources a central part of planning for the Center.

Bob O’Connor discussed the possibility of starting with a virtual forest center (as part of the Rowe MVP grant) that would involve building a website with an interactive guide for forest landowners that is a one-stop center for sustainable practices. This could be a good steppingstone to a physical forest center and a way to gauge areas of interest. Demonstration forests that host educational walks could also be a part of the Center.

Hank Art proposed that the Education, Outreach, and Research and the Natural Resource Based Economic Development Standing Committees put their heads together on next steps for the Forest

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Center, including discussions on location and a business plan. If money for the project comes in, the MTWP will then be able to move more quickly.

Joe Nowak raised the concern that lack of infrastructure in certain locations might make construction prohibitively expensive.

Kate Lindroos Conlin recommended the relevant documentary *Root Hog or Die*, available at <https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/126052>.

8. **Public Comment.** None.
9. **Any topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of the meeting.** None.
10. **Next Meeting.** October 11th is proposed as the next full Board meeting.
11. **Adjournment.** Art Schwenger moved to adjourn, and Ed Munch seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:11pm.