

MINUTES

Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts Executive Committee Meeting—September 12, 2023, 12-1:30 p.m.

Committee Members in attendance: Dicken Crane, Windsor (Board Chair); Art Schwenger, Heath (Vice Chair); Jeffrey Thomas, Lever Inc. (Treasurer); Alain Peteroy, Franklin Land Trust (Clerk); Bob O'Connor, MA EOEEA; Constance Carpenter, USFS acting liaison

Board Members in attendance: Liz Kidder, Leyden; Russ Richardson, MFA

Staff/Partners in attendance: Lisa Hayden, NEFF/Admin Agent; Kate Conlin, NEFF/Coordinator

1. Call to Order at 12:01, D. Crane

Welcome by D. Crane and Land Acknowledgement read by K. Conlin

2. Minutes from 7/24/23

Not ready for review and approval.

3. Regional Organization vacancy on Exec. Committee

- Discussion of possibly rotating the position to share with more organizations (among those organizations that are not currently represented on Ex. Com. due to their representative now serving a Board officer term). A. Schwenger suggests polling for term length. C. Carpenter suggests organizations could appoint alternates (this would require broader bylaw changes as Board alternates are not now allowed to vote).
- D. Crane suggests a questionnaire to poll board members on these ideas. L. Hayden and K. Conlin will report back at the next meeting with the poll results.
- D. Crane pointed out that there are already two board members wanting to be part of the Exec. Committee (Rhonda Anderson and Russ Richardson have expressed interest).
- B. O'Connor suggests that any board member can join an Exec. Com. meeting and be able to speak as if an appointed committee member. Should we add this to the bylaws? Kate and Lisa will come up with language for the Ex. Com. to review at the next meeting.

4. Adding Policy Focus to Finance & Budgeting Committee

- L. Hayden reported on the continuing effort to organize committees with consideration of a shift to include a policy focus at the Finance & Budget Committee level related to outreach/advocacy to increase funding opportunities for the Partnership, as state and federal legislative support will be crucial to sustaining long-term funding for the Partnership's goal to one day hire its own staff, beyond the Administrative Agent contract. K. Conlin is reaching out to towns to confirm representatives.

5. Board Membership of Additional Towns

- Hancock has expressed possible interest in joining the Partnership. Hancock is a rural and forested town. Discussion to continue on how the Partnership considers adding new towns. Colrain and Savoy have still not voted to join, though D. Crane indicated he did not think we would wait for all 21 to join before expanding to additional towns as Peru was added based on local interest.

- D. Crane says geographically Hancock fits in, characteristics are similar, and it has a major maple producer, managed forestland, and a vibrant agrotourism operation. The town would bring examples of rural economic development we are interested in.
- L. Hayden recalls Ed Munch said Hinsdale may want to join at some point.
- Language is needed to clarify the process by which towns not in the original regional designation in the enabling law would join. B. O'Connor noted that communications should be clear with each town's Select Board/government that the Partnership is not pressuring new towns to join but is open to considering expansion on a town-by-town basis if there is broad local interest. Agent/Coordinator to work on draft language to review at the next meeting.

6. **Agent Update**

- Both Rep. Blais and Sen. Mark have agreed to sponsor drafted legislation recognizing the Partnership's name change and reworking language regarding formation of a trust fund.
- Seems likely this will happen but may take a while.
- B. O'Connor said the Partnership should consider reviewing the IRA landowner assistance grant that is due October 21st, there is \$150 million available.
- L. Hayden updated on the website redesign for the Partnership, occurring alongside creation of a Virtual Forest Center web site and asked for feedback on several possible names for the "VFC". J. Thomas suggested that "of Northwest Massachusetts" be used for consistency as this is also being considered by the Woodcraft Collaborative.
- L. Hayden and K. Conlin are working with Cider House Media. They hope to share a view of the new Woodlands Partnership homepage at the board meeting in November.
- Bylaws for Partnership need to be reviewed and cleaned up for future reference.
- L. Hayden reports USFS meeting was positive. Bob Lueckel (deputy regional forester out of Milwaukee and author of the Shared Stewardship Framework Agreement) suggested we look at current USFS grants – IRA landowner assistance grant, the Partnership could be a subcontractor to someone else who has a DUNS number. She and D. Crane think we need to be in closer touch with USFS.
- Congressionally Directed Spending is signed between NEFF as Agent via grant with USFS, partnering with Mass Audubon, with shovel-ready sites that already have climate plans (Rowe and North Adams) and will be identifying a small group of private landowners. NEFF as Agent awarded 75k from EOEEA that will compliment this.

7. **November full board meeting**

- Announcement that former Sen. Anne Gobi, now serving as MA Director of Rural Affairs, is guest speaker at the Partnership's upcoming full board meeting in November. D. Crane suggests we layout our priorities. J. Thomas recommends we speak with her staff beforehand and share what makes the Partnership unique as a rural initiative.
- WP Ten-Year Plan can help guide the making of a fact/priority sheet that would be useful with policy makers and general outreach. Agent and Coordinator will work on this.
- B. O'Connor mentions the need to investigate economic development grants from Gobi's office as well as the office of USDA rural development. J. Thomas is happy to help with this.

8. Items not anticipated

- D. Crane suggests we continue to pursue federal legislation as described in section 6 of the Partnership Ten-Year Plan. B O'Connor agrees, says this idea of a "special designation" was one of the key early ideas and it would be powerful to have the state law creating the Partnership be mirrored by a federal endorsement – and means to create an endowment.
- R. Richardson shares that Appalachian Forest Discovery Center in Elkins, WV is a possible model.
- L. Hayden serves on the volunteer board of Last Green Valley. Potential for National Heritage Corridor designation could be further investigated.

9. Public Comment none

- 10. Adjourn** – A. Schwenger moved and A. Peteroy seconded to adjourn, passing unanimously at 1:35 p.m.