

MINUTES
Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership
Executive Committee Meeting – July 19, 2022

Board Members in Attendance: Henry Art, Williamstown (Board Chair); Bob O’Connor, EOEEA; Rick Chandler, Ashfield; Kate Lindroos Conlin, Massachusetts Forest Alliance; Keith Ross, Society of American Foresters; Alain Peteroy, Franklin Land Trust; Amy Shapiro, FCCDC

Staff/Partners in Attendance: Lisa Hayden, NEFF, MTWP Admin Agent; Sophie Argetsinger, NEFF, MTWP Assistant

Guests:

- **Kristen Elechko** – Regional Director, Office of U.S. Senator Edward J. Markey
- **Chris Gongora** – Regional Director for Western Massachusetts, Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren
- **Matthew Russett** – Legislative Assistant, Office of Congressman Richard Neal
- **Christopher Cozzaglio** – County Field Aide, Office of Congressman Richard Neal
- **Koby Gardner-Levine** – Regional Director, Office of Congressman James McGovern
- **Constance Carpenter** – New York Field Office Supervisor, USDA Forest Service, New England

1. **Call to Order** at 4:02pm by Hank Art. Introductions and Land Acknowledgement.

2. **Discussion with Legislative Delegation Guests.**

H. Art gave a brief overview of the Partnership and some of the challenges facing the Partnership, including:

a. Funding issues: the Enabling Legislation for the Partnership anticipated that the Partnership would receive funding from the State by being included as a line item in the State budget for operational funds, as well as through a trust fund that could be used to give loans to businesses and purchase Conservation Restrictions. The Shared Stewardship Agreement indicated that funding would also come from the USFS. So far, these funding streams have not come to fruition. The Partnership has been the beneficiary of a large initial grant from the EEA for administrative purposes through 2025, and the Partnership has secured grants to NEFF or municipalities for specific projects, but there has been no consistent, reliable source of funds that can be controlled by the Board or the Partnership. The Partnership was set up specifically as a public body, not a private non-profit, in part because the Partnership does not want to be in competition for grants with private non-profits and other people and organizations that it is hoping to serve and collaborate with. Applying for grants takes a huge amount of time and effort and has distracted from other goals, including much-needed updates to the Partnership Plan and website.

b. Relationship with USFS: The Legislation states that a USFS representative should serve as a voting member of the Board, but an Act of Congress is needed to confirm a representative on the Board. Keith Nislow currently represents the USFS as a liaison to the MTWP.

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M. Russett said that Cong. Neal’s office has been working with the USFS to legislate some of these issues, but that the USFS has said that they won’t contribute to a “revolving loan fund” and that the Partnership should pursue grants for funding. They have drafted legislation that would allow voting participation by the USFS on the Board. Massachusetts was recently redistricted, and Neal lost about half of the Partnership region to McGovern’s district, so support from the Senators and McGovern’s office would be welcome. The staffers should put their heads together and legislate for the Partnership funding as well, if possible. Perhaps the National Heritage Corridors structure might be a model to look at.

K. Elechko thanked M. Russett for his work with the Partnership so far and said that Sen. Markey is interested in engaging with and supporting the Partnership moving forward.

K. Ross noted that the Partnership is a “new model” for working towards natural resource-based economic development—working with private landowners is very different from working on public land. The vast majority of land in the country is privately owned, and this model could be replicated elsewhere if successful.

K. Conlin said that broad economic development projects that are climate smart would do a lot for the region, a region that often feels neglected by the State; getting legislation passed would do a lot for the area and would give the stability that’s needed to do the things the Partnership knows it can accomplish.

B. O’Connor said that it is not a huge monetary ask to create a sustainable, grassroots Partnership model that could be replicated elsewhere; a few hundred thousand dollars a year would be needed to administer the program. The Commonwealth has supported the MTWP with a small grants program through the 2018 bond bill, 3-year grant for Admin. Agent. The Town of Heath has used funds for purchasing land to connect public lands and create more trails for communities and visitors.

A. Peteroy noted that when the Partnership was formed as an alternative to forming a National Forest in the region, the idea was a new model that would have an endowment that could support a staff and purchase CRs—there were certain promises and expectations. Another non-profit scrambling for grants is really not needed.

L. Hayden gave a brief overview of the Partnership’s \$1.1 million Cong. District request. Slides will be shared with guests.

There was a discussion of how much money would be needed to sustain a staff for the Partnership and a small budget for the Committees—about \$200,000 per year was suggested as an amount that would cover staffing and support.

K. Elechko and M. Russett committed to pulling their offices together. C. Gongora, K. Gardner-Levine, and C. Cozzaglio said that the discussion was informative and that they would like to remain in the loop on these issues.

3. Approval of Minutes for May 24 Executive Committee Meeting. B. O’Connor moved to approve the minutes, R. Chandler seconded. K. Ross, A. Peteroy, and K. Conlin abstained because they were not on the Committee at the time of the meeting. All other approved unanimously.

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4. **Discussion of tabled Bylaw revision proposal: Board alternates.** H. Art proposed revised language for the Bylaws that will be sent out to the full Board for further discussion. H. Art will ask for feedback on the language in this section and a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of having Board alternates. The new language was endorsed by the Executive Committee. K. Conlin suggested changing pronouns from gendered to gender-neutral where possible in the Bylaws.
5. **Remaining meetings with Select Boards.** North Adams City Council, Windsor, Clarksburg, Leyden, Hawley, and New Ashford have not yet been scheduled to meet with Partnership staff or Board members for a discussion of Partnership Plan updates. The goal is to meet with these towns in the summer or fall.
6. **Update on grant applications and requests for MTWP funding.** L. Hayden gave an update on grant proposals including grants for a study on the programs and programmatic spaces needed for a Forest Center; a web version of a Forest Center as a first step (combined with updating the Partnership website); hiring a person from an Indigenous community that could work with the Partnership to identify tribal needs, concrete outcomes, and programming collaboration possibilities; a part-time event coordinator salary; and expanding the wood residue study that was started this summer with a Williams College student.
7. **Public Comment.** None.
8. **Adjournment.** R. Chandler motioned to adjourn, and B. O'Connor seconded. The meeting was adjourned 6:15pm.