

**MINUTES**  
**Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership**  
**Board Meeting – March 15, 2022**

**Board members in attendance:** Henry Art, Williamstown (Board Chair); Alain Peteroy, Franklin Land Trust; Beth Girshman, Conway; Bob O’Connor, EOEEA; Doug McNally, Windsor; Ed Munch, Peru; Elayne Murphy, Hoosic River Watershed Association; Emily Johnson, FRCOG; Hannah Poplawski, Rowe; Jeffrey Thomas, Lever; Kate Lindroos Conlin, Massachusetts Forestry Alliance; Keith Ross, Massachusetts Society of Foresters; Larry Flaccus, Shelburne; Mark Phelps, New Ashford; Nicole Pysler, Berkshire Natural Resources Council; Rick Chandler, Ashfield; Sheila Kelliher, Deerfield River Watershed Association; Zachary Feury, North Adams.

**Staff/partners in attendance:** Mark Buccowich, USFS; Lisa Hayden, NEFF, Administrative Agent; Sophie Argetsinger, NEFF, Assistant.

**Guests:** Amy Shapiro, Franklin County Community Development Corporation (new Board member to be voted in); Dicken Crane, alternate board member; Conway School student team (Haly Rylko, Claire Baglien, and Karen Tassinari); Mary Byrne, Greenfield Recorder.

**Board members absent:** Alice Houghtaling, Monroe; Art Schwenger, Heath; Jay Healy, Charlemont; Joe Nowak, Adams; Kyle Hanlon, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission; Paul O’Neil, Leyden; Paul Catanzaro, UMass; Rick Peltier, UMass; Whit Sanford, GSFABA; Keith Nislow, USFS ex-officio; new member from Cheshire, Jennifer Morse.

1. **Call to Order** at 6:03pm by Hank Art.
2. **Roll Call of Board Members and Approval of Minutes.** Doug McNally motioned and Jeffery Thomas seconded to approve the minutes from the November 9, 2021 MTWP Board meeting. Emily Johnson asked for a minor revision to be made; and with that change, the motion to approve the minutes was passed unanimously.
3. **Board Vote** on unanimous proposal by Executive Committee to replace the Greater Shelburne Falls Area Business Association (GSFABA) (no longer in existence) with the Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC) as an appointing entity for the Board, as per the enabling legislation lines 2467-2469: “Should any of the entities of the aforementioned members cease to exist, the partnership board may, by majority vote, name a likely entity to represent the interests of the original member entity represented.” Amy Shapiro would be the new Board member appointed by the FCCDC.

Ed Munch moved to take the vote and Mark Phelps seconded. Jeffery Thomas heartily endorsed bringing on the FCCDC as the new appointing entity, as a group truly focused on economic development in the region. The vote passed unanimously, and Amy Shapiro introduced herself, noting she is from North Adams, has lived in Ashfield for more than 30 years, and through the CDC works to help businesses start, stabilize and grow (it is home to the W. Massachusetts Food Processing Center, a commercial kitchen). She also noted that GSFABA is reinventing itself and likely to become a new entity as well.

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4. **Miscellaneous Board Business.** Hank Art noted that between now and the Annual Meeting in June there will be an opportunity for Board members to switch to a different Standing Committee or shift leadership roles, if desired. Board members should look out for a forthcoming email on this topic. Board members should also expect an email from the Agent about whether or not they are up to date on Open Meeting Law and Conflict of Interest Law trainings and paperwork. As a public body, it is necessary for the Partnership to have this information on file.

Elayne Murphy has replaced Andrew Kawczak as the Board Representative from the Hoosic River Watershed Association.

5. **Guest Speakers:** The Student Team from the Conway School of Landscape Design (Claire Baglien, Haly Rylko, and Karen Tassinari); gave a Project Presentation on the Riparian Buffer Study they conducted for the Deerfield River Watershed supporting the “Rivers Run Through It” USFS grant to MTWP, administered by NEFF.
- a. The grant: a \$60,000 urban and community grant for identifying riparian restoration need areas close to where people have settled and there are impervious surfaces near the floodplain. U.S. Forest Service grant matched by the Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs.
  - b. Project Goal 1: Plant a minimum of 150 trees at 4 sites over 3 years. A volunteer day will be planned for the first site planting this spring.
  - c. Project Goal 2: Create a replicable Site Selection Toolkit that can be utilized to select appropriate restoration sites in the future in both the Deerfield River and Hoosic River watersheds.
  - d. Project Goal 3: Create reusable Planting Templates that can be used to guide site plantings based on site conditions (sun, shade, stressors present), and will include best management practices, maintenance plans, and suggested climate-adapted trees species lists.

The students gave background on climate impacts within the Deerfield watershed, including more than 200 landslides that occurred during storm Irene, and “100-year floods” are occurring every 2 to 3 years, and meanwhile multiple dams and other infrastructure on the river are aging. They conducted more than 20 interviews and described their work which included visiting potential planting sites and creating a checklist of what to look for when evaluating future tree-planting sites.

6. **Overview of Draft Revision of next 10-year Partnership Plan.**
- Lisa Hayden reviewed the key elements of the Plan that are required by the enabling legislation, as well as progress on revisions to the Plan, and outlined the further work required (addressing remaining gaps and questions, copy-editing, incorporating Board member comments and revisions, outreach to the Partnership towns and the public and incorporation of public comment, profile interviews of a cross-section of perspectives related to Partnership priorities). Lisa reminded the Board that the Plan is a living document that should be reviewed annually.
- The draft Plan will be shared with Partnership region towns over the next few months at Select Board meetings. Volunteers are needed to attend these meetings, and a small working group will hopefully be formed that can travel to the meetings and present briefly on the Partnership and the

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Plan revisions. There was a suggestion to share the Plan with Member towns through newsletters to provide an opportunity for feedback.

--Suggestions are needed for individuals to interview for the local profiles that will be included in the Plan, so send ideas to Lisa Hayden.

--A target date for a public listening session on the Plan revision in webinar format is the 9<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> of May.

**7. Brief Reports from Standing Committee Chairs.**

a. **Finance and Budgeting (Keith Ross).** Keith will be sending out a draft budget created by the Finance and Budgeting Committee that each Standing Committee can fill in with their own predicted or aspirational budget needs. A letter was sent to Sen. Hind's office by the Executive Committee in February requesting \$200,000 in funding at the State level for the Partnership. He invited Board members to join this important Committee.

b. **Municipal Financial Sustainability (Ed Munch).** Ed expressed the importance of meeting in person again. The Committee voted in Sept. to recommend to the Ex. Comm. to take up the important issue of PILOT payments to municipalities and encourage the Board to advocate for rural towns for improvements to the PILOT formula. The Ex. Comm. brought the issue to MA legislators in fall meetings that could be scheduled. Doug McNally suggested sharing an annual review of Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness state grants that are awarded in the region that may be useful for towns to learn from and share resources. These large grants require infrastructure to implement, report and receive reimbursement. There was also brief discussion about regional cooperation on current volunteer EMT resources for fire and river rescues or the potential need for a paid system.

c. **Forest Conservation (Kate Lindroos Conlin).**

--The possibility of a forest-themed license plate has been discussed as a source of permanent revenue for the Partnership, but there is concern about the feasibility of implementation—750 plates would need to be purchased by individuals ahead of time at \$40 each before the plates would be printed by the DMV. Jeffery Thomas suggested that an Indigogo or other crowdfunding campaign could be a possible route to success.

--Bill Keaton, a researcher at UVM, has agreed to do a webinar for the Partnership in the fall.

--Emily Boss (Massachusetts Woodlands Institute) presented at the Forest Conservation Committee meeting in February about the Institute's Local Wood Directory. This web-based Directory needs to be updated and expanded, which may be a project well suited for the Economic Development Committee.

--The Forest Conservation Committee hopes to host a series of wood walks in the near future.

--The Committee has also discussed the possibility of dropping "Mohawk Trail" from the Partnership's name (becoming "Woodlands Partnership") to be respectful of indigenous groups with which the Partnership would like to be working with collaboratively.

d. **Education, Outreach, and Research (Beth Girshman).** The EOR Committee held an excellent, well-attended, broad-reaching webinar in December on Oak Resiliency. The Committee is

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hoping to do more webinars in the future (relatively cheap public events that can reach a broad audience). The Committee is also hoping to host forest walks in the future focused on local knowledge and practices and regional connections. The hope is to host 2-4 public education programs annually, and/or perhaps an all-day event with different informational tracks for

people to choose from. Updating the Partnership website and increasing the Partnership's social media currency are also high priorities.

- e. **Natural Resource-based Economic Development (Jeffery Thomas).** The Committee had no specific recommendations or updates at this time. Jeffery noted that Lever, Inc.'s second Mohawk Trail Entrepreneur Challenge is holding an event at Foolhardy Hill in Charlemont on April 27 from 1-4pm. Email Avril at [avelesque@leverinc.org](mailto:avelesque@leverinc.org) with questions.

**8. Board Chair Report (Hank Art).**

--Hank gave a brief update on outreach that the Executive Committee has done to the EEA and the Chief of the Forest Service regarding the Shared Stewardship framework. No response has been received yet, but Mark Buccowich noted that a response to the Board's letter to the Forest Service has been drafted and awaits signature in the USFS Washington Office.

--The Executive Committee has also done outreach to state lawmakers to discuss long-term funding for the Partnership. A response from Cong. Neil's office was received and the office has been in contact with the USFS, learning that it would be necessary to draft legislation for the USFS to be able to appoint a voting member to the Board. There have been a series of discussions with the offices of Sen. Hinds, Sen. Barrett, and Sen. Comerford that have not yet resulted in any concrete progress. Hank noted that two more years of Agent support are guaranteed (the contract with NEFF runs out in 2025), but the Partnership needs to determine how it will be supported financially into the future.

--The Executive Committee is facilitating a study by students from Williams College and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts on waste wood in the Partnership region. The hope is to determine how much waste wood is produced in the area as well as possible uses (manufactured wood products) and an analysis of highest and best use.

--Bob O'Connor also noted that an MVP grant proposal is being discussed with the town of Rowe that would include climate stewardship implementation in towns, elements of a virtual forest center and demonstration walks and including climate resilience in open space and recreation plans.

**9. Public Comment.** None.

**10. Any topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of the meeting.** None.

**11. Next Meeting.** June 7<sup>th</sup> at 6pm was proposed as the next full Board meeting (Annual Meeting). A poll will be sent out to determine if this time will work or if another date or time is preferred. The meeting may be held in person at Berkshire East, with a possible hybrid option available.

**12. Adjournment.** Ed Munch moved to adjourn, and Alain Peteroy seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 pm.

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