

MINUTES
Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership
Natural Resource Based Economic Development Committee Meeting
December 15, 2021

Committee Members in Attendance: Andrew Kawczak, Hoosic River Watershed Association (chair); Jay Healy, Charlemont; Zachary Feury, North Adams; Jeffery Thomas, Lever, Inc.

Staff / Guests in Attendance: Henry Art, Williamstown (board chair); Lisa Hayden, NEFF, Administrative Agent; Sophie Argetsinger, NEFF, Assistant; Sean Mahoney, DCR; Glen Ayers; Jade Schnauber, Lever, Inc.

1. **Call to Order** at 3:36 p.m. by A. Kawczak.

2. **Approval of Minutes from Natural Resource Based Economic Development committee meeting on 8/24/21.** Z. Feury motioned to approve the minutes and J. Healy seconded. Unanimously approved.

3. State forestry discussion + Q & A with guest Sean Mahoney (Director of Wood Utilization, MA Department of Conservation and Recreation).

S. Mahoney: Past wood utilization programs in the Partnership region have included a 2010 grant focused on forest products and economic development in the Berkshires, and the Commonwealth Quality Program, a brand designed to identify locally sourced products that are grown, harvested, and processed in Massachusetts—this program has the possibility of being restarted in the region. Once the grant ended, support idled. A. Kawczak wondered how many wood working businesses are out there, and S. Mahoney said there are a set of sectors from loggers to timber framers to saw mill owners.

S. Mahoney suggested some ideas to focus on in the future:

a. Use a Business Retention and Expansion program (BRE) as a model. BRE is a 6-to-9-month process that attempts to understand a local business environment through engagement of a diverse task force, press releases, public input, and peer-to-peer interviews with businesses. A data report is published and action items are developed based on the collected data. As a result, business owners can feel like “someone cares about me.” The University of Minnesota offers an 8-week online BRE course. From their website: “A healthy, vibrant local economy depends largely on the strength of existing businesses. Community leaders can help local businesses grow and thrive through business retention and expansion (BRE) programs.” Cost per person: \$575; 3-5 person team: \$1,300.

b. Find ways to utilize forest products respectful of the environment and businesses already present in the region rather than relying on outside money. Listen to people and businesses in the community—how can forests address some of the pressing social issues in the region? For example:

--Wood banks can provide energy assistance to low-income people in the region and can employ local people and youth. Aid organizations can connect people that need assistance to a wood bank. Initial costs for starting a wood bank are high, and equipment and processing needs are intensive. The U.S. Energy Information Agency reports in a residential energy survey that 2500 households statewide have a wood stove, skewing to rural areas. An ideal scenario would be about 50 cords per year per town from storm damaged trees cleared from roads, within what the forest can sustainably supply. J. Healy said

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such a program would be invaluable to his farm but the challenge is getting dry wood to people in the community.

--A carbon storage building project could partner with a local housing organization to use local wood to build affordable housing in the region.

c. Engage local architects, designers, and builders to use wood produced in the region.

4. Lever Mohawk Trail Entrepreneur Challenge 2022.

J. Thomas: There are four finalists for the 2022 challenge: Coopers Wood Products, a wood-based sign company in North Adams; Hall Tavern Farm, a tree farm and sawmill in Charlemont; The Cruckfather, a traditional timber-framing business in Shelburne; and Larkitecture, a company that designs and builds small recreational trailers using local materials in North Adams.

A kickoff event will be held at Wells Provisions in Charlemont on January 26th at 1pm. The four finalists will be featured as well as and last year's winners.

5. Review draft of Standing Committee Summary Sheet and select priority projects.

The NRBED mission statement has been approved by the Committee, but more discussion and agreement are needed for the goals, interests, and concerns of the Committee, and buy-in is needed from the Committee on a draft list of potential priority projects, said A. Kawczak. In discussion, J. Thomas suggested that a visitor center may not be highest priority – this is not a fully formed opinion, but he would like to understand more issues around the needs and costs for a center and there needs to be a business model. A center could dominate the work of the Partnership for several years so there needs to be solid planning. It was noted the Forest Center concept is highlighted in the state law creating the Partnership. Z. Feury noted that on the tourism side, North Adams has seen a lot of interest in glamping and is looking at developing a regulatory framework and design standards for these kinds of businesses.

J. Healy said his bias is for projects that make a difference in people's lives and he favors a targeted approach – he'd like to get "dirt under our fingernails to prove we're making progress." J. Thomas asked what the Committee can achieve, noting it's difficult to define sustainable parameters for wood-related businesses in the area, such as not cutting down mature, carbon-sequestering trees or developing remote areas that require new roads to be built. What does sustainable forestry look like for our region and how can they help create income? H. Art noted that he is in touch with local colleges to try to launch a student team to study and develop an inventory of how much waste wood is created from municipal Departments of Public Works and utility companies in maintaining roadsides in the area.

6. Item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours.

The Williams College student team gave a presentation on their project that was focused on giving recommendations to the Partnership on the potential uses and locations for establishment of a Forest Center in the region. The presentation took place and the North Adams Public Library on December 13. A link to the presentation will be provided soon.

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7. Public comment.

G. Ayers noted that a bill sponsored by Senators Hinds and Comerford, S1880: An Act to Create a Forest Carbon Incentive Program to Enhance Carbon Storage on Private Timber Lands, should be of interest to the Partnership. He mentioned several other bills that he said are critical for the region, including: H912: An Act Relative to Forest Protection, and S2197 and H3333: An Act to Prevent Biomass Energy to Protect the Air We Breathe, which will eliminate subsidies for biomass production. He noted he understands the Partnership is not pursuing biomass. Ayers also suggested the Partnership should advocate for the revision of Chapter 61 to include incentives for storing carbon.

8. Adjournment.

Z. Feury motioned to adjourn and J. Healy seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 5:22 p.m.