

MINUTES
Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts*
Full Board Meeting – November 15, 2023
Shelburne-Buckland Community Center, Shelburne Falls (hybrid)

Board members in attendance: *In person:* Hank Art; Marybeth Chichester; Greg Cox; Dicken Crane; Deb Donaldson; Larry Flaccus; Sam Haupt; Jay Healy; Sheila Kelliher; Liz Kidder; Bob O’Connor; Alain Peteroy; Mark Phelps; Russ Richardson; Art Schwenger; Chris Skelly; Jeffrey Thomas.

Virtual: Rhonda Anderson; Chris Cozzaglio; Elayne Murphy; Keith Ross; Amy Shapiro, Doug Brown

Board members absent: Ron Bosley; Constance Carpenter; Paul Catanzaro; Alice Houghtaling; Keith Nislow; Joe Nowak; Rick Peltier; Hannah Poplawski

Staff/partners in attendance: Lisa Hayden – Administrative Agent/NEFF; Kate Conlin – Coord./NEFF; Bob Wilber – EOEEA Division of Conservation Services

Guest Speaker(s): Anne Gobi, Director of Rural Affairs, Executive Office of Economic Development; Kristen Elechko (*virtual*), Western Massachusetts Director, Office of Governor Maura T. Healey; Alan Spooner, The Cruckfather, LLC

Guests: Tom Brule – Florida; Robin Keeney – Hancock Conservation Commission; Stacy Kontrabecki – Buckland; Bella Levavi – The Greenfield Recorder; David Pomerantz – Leyden Emergency Services; Markelle Smith – The Friends of Conte; Christine Spooner – The Cruckfather, LLC; Adrian St. John – The Woodcraft Collaborative

1. Call to order and Land Acknowledgement

- 6:05 p.m. D. Crane – Board Chair, Land Acknowledgment K. Conlin

2. Welcoming new Board Members (and new Towns/Org. seats)

- L. Hayden welcomed new Board members: Rhonda Anderson, Co-Dir. of Ohketeau Cultural Center in Ashfield, voted onto the Board in June representing Indigenous perspectives; representatives from two towns that just voted to join the Partnership: Chris Skelly from Buckland, and Ron Bosley from Florida (who was just appointed and unable to attend) and members appointed to fill vacancies: Deb Donaldson of Conway, Liz Kidder of Leyden, Russ Richardson from Massachusetts Forest Alliance, , and Chris Cozzaglio from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

3. Bob O’Connor and Peggy Sloan recognition

- D. Crane expressed appreciation for the important work B. O’Connor and Peggy Sloan did in getting this unique effort off the ground and giving rural communities a voice.

4. Roll Call Attendance of Board & Guests

- K. Conlin

5. Review and approval of June 20, 2023 Board Minutes

- Motion by Mark Phelps to table minutes approval until next meeting, as the incorrect version of the minutes was sent out to the board, seconded by Hank Art, unanimous approval.

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6. Guest Speakers: Anne Gobi - Director of Rural Affairs, Executive Office of Economic Development; Kristen Elechko - Western Massachusetts Director, Office of Governor Maura T. Healey

- Anne Gobi spoke about the Wetmore Center for Forest and Wood Products at Mt. Wachusett Community College and the importance of elevating forestry both in the public consciousness and in policy. She shared that the Department of Agricultural Resources will be releasing a report “the Farmland Action Plan” in December about local products and she will encourage the inclusion of forest products.
- J. Healy mentioned the absence of wood products in the state’s Buy Local campaign.
- K. Ross stressed the need for more targeted funding for land conservation for interested owners.
- D. Crane wondered if the HIP program used for agriculture could be borrowed to support local wood, perhaps on publicly funded building projects.
- M. Phelps mentioned the lack of education surrounding wood products and craft.
- A. Gobi suggested a one-pager could be incorporated into the Envirothon, or that the event itself could have the theme of local wood.
- R. Richardson suggested that vocational schools in the area be considered as the most effective places to introduce such material.
- K. Elechko expressed support for A. Gobi’s work and interest in supporting the Partnership with its goals moving forward. She urged the board to reach out with any ideas or suggestions.
- L. Flaccus shared that Open Space Plans are a heavy lift for small towns and that if regulations requiring updated plans every 7 years were to be changed it would make a huge difference.
- B. Wilber shared the sentiment that there is limited capacity in rural areas to pursue grant opportunities. He shared that a new grant program, still in draft form, would address this by providing technical assistance to towns. He also mentioned the Resilient Lands Initiative that will be used to achieve clean energy climate goals for 2030/2050.

7. Jeffrey Thomas, Lever, Inc. Q+A/discussion with Alan Spooner of The Cruckfather, LLC and economic development updates

- J. Thomas interviewed Alan Spooner about his business - which has worked on major projects at the Wilder Homestead in Buckland and Berkshire East in Charlemont - about his future plans and current challenges. The Cruckfather, LLC was a recipient of a Lever, Inc. grant through the Woodlands Partnership Implementation Grants through EOEEA. Spooner hopes to create timber frame kits for solar sheds, gazebos, cabins, etc. and scale up his business to be vertically integrated, or serve multiple market segments. He currently has six employees and is growing. The code regarding native structural lumber, which must be graded #2 or better, results in native lumber leaving the state for Canada and then being dispersed elsewhere. A change in regulations would allow native lumber to be used in-state. Can the Woodlands Partnership help create a grading resource?
- J. Healy shared that when the Legislature outlawed native lumber in building projects, it compromised by allowing it in outbuildings and garages. He expressed dismay that regulations from USDA and the State don’t consider lumber a crop. Canada, on the other hand, subsidizes infrastructure and provides zero interest loans and grants to promote the wood industry.

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- R. Anderson shared that she built her house with locally milled green lumber. She asked how that could be the case if it's considered against code. A. Spooner shared that local building inspectors will sometimes approve projects using local lumber, as they have that authority.
- J. Healy shared that Vermont has an easier process to use local lumber. The Partnership should investigate how other states approach this issue.
- G. Cox said that Massachusetts Forest Alliance will look into this and related issues with that the state's building codes.
- J. Thomas introduced Adrian St. John, who has just joined The Woodcraft Collaborative and will be working to strengthen the local wood economy. The model they are working from is "Marty's Local" which has recently had 10-million dollars in revenue for local food.

8. Public Comment

- Markelle Smith, from Friends of the Conte, explained that the refuge is the only one that includes a whole watershed boundary, 410 miles long and 7.2 million acres. Founded in 2005, Friends of the Conte includes 70 organizations with the goal of securing conservation funding in the Connecticut River Watershed. She shared how her organization is pursuing, with the help of a lobbyist, federal funding through recently introduced legislation by U.S. Rep. McGovern that is similar to the Chesapeake Wild, and Delaware River Watershed programs. If successful, grant money, hopefully \$10-15 million, would be funneled each year through Fish & Wildlife to various entities for land conservation.
- D. Crane asked that since the Deerfield River Watershed is in the Partnership Region, could we be a partner? M. Smith replied that we could sign on as a supporter of the legislation and would be eligible to receive funding.

6. Board vote on bylaw change to expand Executive Committee membership and vote on vacant seat(s)

- Motion to approve bylaw change to expand the Executive Committee to an odd number of voting members for voting purposes and to include all members currently interested in serving on the Ex. Com. by M. Phelps, seconded by S. Haupt. Unanimously approved.
- G. Cox moved to vote the Executive Committee candidates in as a slate (Rhonda Anderson and Russ Richardson). M. Phelps seconded. Unanimously approved.

7. Chair Update: 1) Committee assignments approval by Board 2) Committee Ten-Year Plan directive & Federal Designation 3) Forests as Climate Solutions, 4) Communication with Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohicans

- J. Thomas motion to approve updated Standing committees slate, M. Phelps seconded, unanimous approval.
- D. Crane called attention to Chapters 6 & 7 of the Partnership Ten-Year Plan and the intention to receive federal acknowledgment and funding. B. O'Connor mentioned the National Heritage Corridor Program and suggested that the Partnership could pursue stable annual funding through the U.S. Forest Service working in partnership with the National Park Service. This matter will be brought to the attention of the Executive Committee as a first step.
- D. Crane reports that the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative does not have any updates.

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- D. Crane will be sending a letter to the Stockbridge-Munsee to extend an invitation to meet with the Partnership and explore a dialogue.

8. Agent Update: Website (VFC and WP), CDS, Resilient Lands, Ten-Year Plan updates

- L. Hayden reports that progress on the grant-funded Virtual Forest Center web site is moving along and focus groups will be held in January to gather feedback on needed content. Likewise, the WP website is in progress and will be ready to share soon.

- L. Hayden reports that the Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) for forest climate resilience will be supported by a Woodlands Partnership Implementation grant in order to administer funding for on-the-ground practices, working with Mass Audubon.

- L. Hayden will be attending a Resilient Lands Initiative meeting and will report to the board.

- L. Hayden reminds that edits to the Ten-Year Plan should be made on an annual basis when needed.

9. Woodlands Partnership Municipal Grant Awards by EOEEA

- B. O'Connor shared the successful distribution of grant money this cycle, including 12 grants totaling \$464,000, the largest ever in the program.

10. Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours

- none

12. Adjournment 8:20

- H. Art motion to adjourn. J. Thomas seconded. Unanimously approved.

*On Oct. 11, 2022, the Board of the public body created in 2018 voted unanimously to change its name from the "Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership" in its bylaws to operating as the "Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts" and requested the state legislature and USDA Forest Service to officially establish and recognize the new name.