DRAFT MINUTES

Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts

Board Meeting: June 20, 2023, 6-8 pm

In-person: Berkshire East

**Board Members in Attendance:** Henry Art, (Board Chair), Rick Chandler (Vice Chair), Alain Peteroy (Clerk), Bob O’Connor, Jeffrey Thomas, Amy Shapiro, Marybeth Chichester, Greg Cox, Art Schwenger, Elayne Murphy, Mark Phelps, Sam Haupt, Hannah Poplawski, Larry Flaccus, Dicken Crane

Board members absent: Jay Healy, Paul Cantanzaro, Paul O’Neil, Rick Peltier, Alice Houghtaling, Joe Nowak, Sheila Kelliher, Doug Brown, Keith Ross, Ron Bosley, Russ Richardson, Constance Carpenter (non-voting), Keith Nislow (non-voting)

**Staff/Partners in Attendance:** Lisa Hayden, NEFF/Admin Agent

**Guests:** Lee Halasz, Kestrel Land Trust; Robin Sears, Williamstown Rural Lands; Rhonda Anderson, Ohketeau Cultural Center; Lindsay Nystrom DCR/Forest Legacy speaker

1. **The meeting was called to order** by Chair H. Art at 6:03 p.m. with a welcome and Land Acknowledgement.
2. **Introduction of Woodlands Partnership Coordinator & roll** call: Agent L. Hayden announced that Kate Lindroos Conlin has stepped down as a volunteer Board member and began June 1 in the advertised position of full-time Coordinator reporting to Lisa, who will remain Administrative Agent and liaison to the Partnership from New England Forestry Foundation, under contract with EOEEA. A small group of Board members conducted interviews among finalist candidates. Kate, who was ill and unable to attend, will support Board and Committee meetings and events, public and municipal relations, web site management and support for grant writing and reporting.
3. **Minutes from January 31, 2023:** Approved unanimously with roll call vote, with Mark Phelps abstaining.
4. **Review and vote on proposal to amend membership to include Indigenous Peoples representation on the Woodlands Partnership Board by inviting Ohketeau Cultural Center in Ashfield to make an appointment to the Partnership Board:**

A question was raised if the partnership needs to have legislation updated to add board members. H. Art explained that the size of the Board would increase as is allowed by the by-laws with a 2/3 majority vote for adding organizations deemed consistent with the Partnership mission. As long as a majority of the Board are municipal representatives, additional seats may be added. A by-law update is not needed, other than adding the new organization to the Appendix of Board members.

**Motion by Mark Phelps and seconded by Larry Flaccus to include a representative of Ohketau Cultural Center, a non-profit organization, on the Partnership board.** Rhonda Anderson, Ex. Dir. and co-founder of Ohketeau Cultural Center, in attendance, would serve as Board member. As Western Massachusetts Commissioner on Indian Affairs, Anderson is in communication with many tribes in the region including the Nipmuc, Abenaki, and the Stockbridge Munsee. She described Ohketeau as Nipmuc-centered and multi-tribal. J. Thomas raised the question of why the Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohicans is not being asked to join as a federally recognized tribe. Consensus from the discussion was that the Partnership is not precluding relations directly with the Munsee and he suggested reaching out to see if there is interest.

*Per Sec. 91 (e) (3) of the state enabling law, the following motion was adopted by unanimous vote (and applause):* **The Ohketeau Cultural Center of Ashfield, MA, an organization devoted to providing a safe haven for the Indigenous community in the region and having a mission that aligns with those of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (operating as the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts), the Woodlands Partnership Board hereby votes to expand its membership by including a representative of the Ohketeau Cultural Center effective November 1, 2023.**

1. **Proposed Election of the following slate of Officers for a 3-year term (beginning at close of meeting):**

Dicken Crane of Windsor for Board Chair

Art Schwenger of Heath for Vice Chair

Jeffrey Thomas of Williamstown, Lever Inc. for Treasurer

Alain Peteroy of Worthington, Franklin Land Trust staying on as Clerk

**Motion to support all appointments passed unanimously.**

1. **Woodlands Partnership Municipal grant application announcement by EOEEA**: Soon to be posted on website. Any of the 21 towns in WP region can apply if their town votes to join before a contract is signed. Grants increased up to $25,000 for municipal proposals, and from $60,00 to a maximum of $75,000 for organizations working on environmental, economic development and cultural activities in the region. Applications are due by July 10th. Goals include economic development, sustainable natural resource/forest conservation; no match required. Work must be implemented within one year.
2. **Forest Legacy:** Lyndsay Nystrom, DCR coordinator for the program, presented slides and reviewed highlights for MA. There is a statewide committee reviewing all applications. A match of 25% is required from bargain sale or other funds. The program is nationally competitive based on Importance/Threat/Strategic/Climate/Carbon/underserved communities. Must be 75% forested tracts with a MA forest stewardship plan. MA already completed 124 properties conserving 19,841 acres. Categories include; Large Landscapes, Strategic Small Tracts and State/Tribal holdings. There is about $90 million annually, and the program is looking for strong themes, readiness and public access for portion of tracts. A. Peteroy noted that the region’s land trusts are aware of the available funding and discussing potential proposals.
3. **Hall Tavern Farm Update:** J. Thomas of Lever, Inc. reported on the effort over the past year to seek a grant for under-utilized properties to fund restoration of the 5000-square-foot former dairy barn at Hall Tavern Farm in Charlemont, to investigate if it could serve as the home of the Woodcraft collaborative concept for a consortium of local wood producers, education space, sale of local lumber and event space. MA Rural Development funding for economic development is being assessed. He shared the update that the barn/building exclusion in the Agricultural Preservation Restriction is too small to accommodate the well, septic, parking, and there would be significant costs for fire protection and access. The likely outcome is that another location will need to be found for the Collaborative.
4. **Agent Update:** L. Hayden reported on efforts to get more municipalities involved; warrant language was sent and Buckland and Florida have just voted to join the Partnership (as of Nov. 1 will be eligible to have a voting representative on the Board). K. Conlin, a resident of Buckland, was invited to introduce the warrant article on May 6 – and after discussion residents in attendance overwhelmingly voted to join. Former Board member Whit Sanford also attended to speak on behalf of the Partnership.

The Agent hosted a May 22 Zoom informational forum co-hosted by a Savoy resident & former Select Board member who supports that town joining; WP Board members and other non-member towns were invited to participate. Two days after the info session, residents of Florida who had attended at invitation of resident & Board member Sheila Kelliher – shared the Partnership at the Florida Select Board, which voted to join. Florida’s representative will most likely be Ronald Bosley.

The Agent attended the Savoy Annual Town Meeting and answered numerous questions & attempted to dispel some misconceptions (such as there is no cost to join and no commitment to member towns to take any specific actions). Ultimately, a Select Board member moved to table to item.

In Colrain, the Agent attended a Select Board meeting with resident Marybeth Chichester and Bill Dornbusch, and answered questions. One concern raised was not enough support for forestry businesses. We plan to follow up to support the last 2 eligible towns to join.

* In other Agent updates, trees and shrubs were planted on Earth Day in Williamstown on a bike path and Housing Authority property. At least 2 more riparian planting sites need to be identified for the USFS grant.
* Upcoming events include a second Stakeholder Focus Group for the Virtual Forest Center on Mon. June 26 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. – part of the Rowe MVP grant with NEFF, Mass Audubon, Ohketeau Cultural Center, MWI & other partners. A web design vendor – Cider House Media from Easthampton completed an initial home page design mock-up for the first year grant deadline this month – screen shot was shared. The meeting is to gather feedback on what services and resources are needed.
* The $540,000 “Action on Forest Climate Resilience” proposal for Congressionally Directed Spending is being implemented as a USFS grant to NEFF as Agent and the Partnership, but with the bulk of the funds to implement practices. L. Hayden asked for feedback on whether NEFF should submit a regional $75,000 proposal on behalf of the Partnership Board to support Mass Audubon and NEFF to implement the practices fund, or if there are other ideas? After some discussion, there was general support for crafting a proposal to provide staff outreach & administrative capacity to complement the Earmark implementation of climate-smart forestry practices. Because the Partnership & NEFF are already working with Mass Audubon is already working to support demonstration forests at member towns that have gotten climate-smart stewardship plans and monitoring to measure climate resilience or carbon benefits from the work.
* **Plan for Legislative Outreach & action on Partnership name change:** A late July meeting with Rep. Blais and Sen. Mark will be scheduled to re-visit the need for name change legislation – as well as ongoing need for long-range stable funding for core staff salaries – beyond the Agent contract which expires June 2025. They each responded to Hank’s email following up on late winter conversations - & the sharing of a bill drafted by EOEEA legal staff.

One idea for discussion with the Exec. Committee is if the Board wants to create a Policy committee or ad hoc working group that could help to keep pushing the Partnership’s legislative priorities over the coming year – which will be a critical time period for progress. If Board members have thoughts about this, they should email Lisa, Dicken, Hank or Kate.

In a brief presentation, L. Hayden thanked Hank Art for all his work and leadership as the Partnership’s first Board Chair. He will still stay on as the Williamstown rep.

1. **Public Comment/Items not Anticipated:** none
2. **Unanimous vote to Adjourn at 8:05 p.m.**