

**Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership  
Minutes of the February 23, 2021 Board Meeting**

**1. Introduction – MTWP Board Members**

Hank called to order at 6:03 and did a roll call. In Attendance:

**MTWP Board Members**

Hank Art, Williamstown; Rick Chandler, Ashfield; Kate Lindroos-Conlin, MA Forestry Alliance; Zachary Feury, North Adams; Larry Flaccus, Shelburne; Beth Girshman, Conway; Kyle Hanlon, BRPC; Jay Healy, Charlemont; Sheila Kelliher, DRWA; Steve McMahon, HRWA; Doug McNally, Windsor; Ed Munch, Peru; Joe Nowack, Adams; Bob O'Connor, EOEEA; Alain Peteroy, FLT; Nicole Pysler, BNRC; Keith Ross, MA Chapter of Society of American Foresters; Whit Sanford, GSFABA; Art Schwenger, Heath; Rebecca Stone, Clarksburg; Jeffery Thomas, Lever; Dicken Crane, Windsor Alternate

**Other Towns Interested in the MTWP**

Greg Cox, Hawley; Stacy Kontrabecki, Buckland

**MTWP Staff Support**

Mark Buccowich, USFS; Lisa Hayden, NEFF; Tom Matuszko, BRPC; Keith Nislow, USFS; Peggy Sloan, FRCOG

Introductions will be made at each meeting, so Board Members get to know each other. Also, individuals will be asked to sign in on the zoom chat section for the record.

**2. Review & Approval of Nov. 17, 2020 MTWP Board Minutes**

Whit Sanford moved that the Minutes of the November 17, 2020 Meeting be approved. Beth Girshman seconded the motion, and all those in attendance at that meeting voted unanimously to accept the minutes as prepared. (Joe Novak, Ed Munch, Jay Healy, and Rebecca Stone abstained as they did not attend the November meeting.)

**3. Update on Administrative Assistant Contract between MTWP the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF)**

B. O'Connor reported the contract between the Partnership and NEFF has been signed. It is for 3 years with a one-year extension possible. Bob welcomed Lisa Hayden who gave the Board a synopsis of her background, including land management projects, growing up on sheep farm in Connecticut, being a newspaper reporter, climate change, and landowner outreach and communications.

**4. Update on USFS appointment to MTWP Board**

Hank Art contacted Representative Neal's aide Matt Russett about the USFS appointment to the Board, which he reported is in the works. Mark Buccowich noted that the Stewardship Agreement says it allows for the appointment a USFS representative, but federal legislation must be enacted to allow the USFS to take part in the MTWP.

## **5. Standing Committee Charge & Discussion**

### A. Standing Committees Membership

Hank Art announced his appointments of Board Members to MTWP's Standing Committees (attached).

MTWP Finance & Budgeting – Keith Ross

Forest Land Conservation – Kate Lindroos Conlin

Natural Resource Based Economic Development – Andrew Kawczak

Education, Outreach & Research – Beth Girshman

Municipal Financial Sustainability – Alice Houghtaling

### B. Open Meetings

Committee meetings must comply with the State's Open Meeting Law, the basics of which include having a quorum present, and that the meetings must be announced to each of the MTWP town clerks at least 2 business days (48 hours) in advance of the meeting. Also, meetings must be open to the public, although meetings may be on zoom. Lisa Hayden will contact the town clerks to post the meetings for Committee Chairs.

### C. Mission

Hank Art asked each Committee Chair to contact Lisa to let her know when their meetings will be held and to read the goals of the Enabling Legislation and the 2015 Plan for the Partnership to establish their committee's mission or purpose. Hank noted that each committee is required to make recommendations to the Board on its project ideas and activities before it can move forward on its projects or actions.

### D. Project issues to be addressed, their components, & relation to current MTWP Working Plan

**Public Participation:** Whit Sanford asked if towns like Hawley, which is not a member Town, could attend meetings of the Standing Committees. Art noted that the meetings are open to the public, so anyone is welcome to attend the meetings but could not vote as they are not on the Board. Bob O'Connor suggested that the committees can invite people to their meetings as experts and advisors which would help them with their work.

**Committee Meetings and Notes:** Hank Art stated the committees should meet at least quarterly, and the notes of each meeting should be sent to Lisa as our Administrative Agent. She will edit the notes into formal minutes. Formal minutes will inform Board Members of the progress of each committee and ensure the Partnership meets the requirement of the Open Meeting Law.

**Forest Legacy Program:** Bob O'Connor reported that Lindsay Nystrom at EOEEA is working on having the Mohawk Trail added to the Forest Legacy Program. He suggested that Lindsay be invited to the next meeting of the Forest Land Conservation Committee or Board as funding for projects is growing and it would be good to earn the designation soon so the Partnership could submit a proposal for the next round of projects. Jay Healy asked if the Forest Legacy Program extends or has implications for other Standing Committees, e.g., the Economic Development or Education Committees. Bob indicated the USFS has the Community Forest Program which might have economic

development components to its funding. Mark Buccowich suggested Neal Winegard of the Forest Service could give a presentation on the Community Forest Program.

**Grant Opportunities:** Whit Sanford suggested that Lisa develop a list of grant opportunities (federal, state, regional, foundation and corporate) for the Partnership so it can begin to build its budget beyond its administrative needs. Hank noted this could also help the MTWP to post grant opportunities for the public.

**MTWP Website:** Beth Girshman asked who is going to manage and develop the website? She wanted to know if individual Board Members could work to help design, develop, and define its pages and content. Currently, Lisa as agent only posts meeting dates, but is looking into how to develop the site and define what the Board wants with respect to its content.

There was a discussion about methods of reaching out to the public through a variety of social and news media to keep the public informed and to ensure transparency of the Partnership. Suggestions included the MTWP website; the websites of membership towns and nonprofit groups; Facebook; local newspapers and newsletters.

**Organizational Issues:** Each Standing Committee should be thinking about the following items as it moves forward:

- 1) Define/develop its mission/purpose for the MTWP,
- 2) Complying with the Open Meeting Law,
- 3) Identifying and recommending procedures, projects, and ideas to the Board that the Partnership could take on to further its mission and goals as set out in the MTWP Plan, and
- 4) the sustainability of the MTWP.

Jay Healy understands the need for transparency, but the state process and procedures for the Partnership is extremely slow. He pointed out that it has taken seven years to get to this point and that we need to find a way to move forward quickly, especially as people age out of the process. Gaining traction and momentum with our specific projects will be vital to the sustainability of the organization.

**Climate Change:** Dicken Crane suggested that the Education, Outreach & Research Committee focus on the topic of Climate Change since it is a “hot” issue for the public. The Committee could organize a research project to: summarize and gather the facts and information about the issue; devise or find models to help land owners, farmers, municipalities, nonprofit groups, and communities remedy the issue, and show how forest helps mitigate climate change. Doug McNally noted that the State thinks the Berkshire Mountains are key to addressing climate change in Massachusetts.

#### E. Reporting of proposals back to the full MTWP Board

Rebecca Stone suggested that the Standing Committees create a time frame and schedule to make sure each can report their progress at each quarterly Board Meeting. The Executive Committee will work with the Committee Chairs to schedule these meetings annually.

**6. Presentation on Climate & Forestry Projects, and Adams and Williamstown MVP Grants**

Josh Rapp and Maria Janowiak presented a power point program that NIACS, NEFF and Mass Audubon have been working on – “Climate Smart Forestry: Managing Forests with Climate in Mind.” (Attached.)

He noted the Municipality Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Grant Program is important to implementing specific carbon and/or resiliency practices on privately owned or municipal held lands. The Towns of Adams and Williamstown are the lead on an MVP grant with the BRPC and FRCOG organizing the work and a few environmental groups doing the work. The goal is to design a pilot program to help landowners implement practices that enhance forest resiliency and store carbon.

**7. Lever: Mohawk Trail Entrepreneurial Challenge**

Jeffery Thomas of Lever, Inc. gave a presentation the Mohawk Trail Entrepreneurial Challenge. The goals of the program are to:

- 1) Increase economic development related to sustainable forestry and natural resource-based tourism.
- 2) Increase forest conservation and sustainable forestry on private and municipal lands.

They received 12 applications and chose 5 project proponents that will move onto pitching their projects on March 11. The challenge focused on goal one. The finalists are: Adventure East which will bring international visitors to tour the region in luxury; Berkshire Bike Road and Bike Tours with Luke Torrito; Dave Eve has Remote Harvest Sensors to monitor soil erosion for sustainable forestry (Conway); Katie and Patrick Banks launched Foolhardy Hills an outdoor lodging experiences for folks; Lea King and Wayne Gelanis give people woodland experiences through Western Wigwam Summit.

**8. Update on Hawley & Other Towns’ Request for Extension to Join MTWP due to Covid-19 Potential Eligibility for State Woodland-related Grants**

Bob checked with the powers that be at EOEEA and discovered that it is not possible at this time for non-member towns to qualify for grants through the Partnership. He plans to explore this idea with the state for towns that were not able to meet the deadline for joining the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership like Hawley in 2020. The Board wants these towns to continue to be interested in the Partnership by finding ways they can be involved in the grants and other activity.

**9. Annual Meeting Date and Agenda Items: Suggested Forum to Share Towns’/Region’s Grants, Projects**

The tentative date for the Annual Meeting is June 8<sup>th</sup>. Hank and Lisa will send out a google poll to have the Board set the date and time.

It was suggested that we carve out time at full board meetings for the Standing Committees to meet and have an opportunity for people to share. People thought that after the Board meeting might be best for the Standing Committees to meet.

**10. Public Comment/Other Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of the meeting.**

Whit Sanford noted that the Mohawk Trail has now been designated a National Scenic Byway and its designation might be a good topic the Annual Meeting presentation.

Peggy Sloan explained that this stemmed from the State Scenic Byway designation and it is the oldest Scenic Byway in the Commonwealth. She noted that these designations help to market the region and protect farmland, forests, scenic vistas and rural values like the Mohawk Trail region.

**11. Adjourn**

Kyle Hanlon moved and Jeffery Thomas second the motion to adjourn the Board Meeting at 8:04.

Attachments: Standing Committees,

“Climate Smart Forestry: Managing Forests with Climate in Mind” PowerPoint