

MINUTES
**Finance & Budgeting Committee of the
Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts
November 3, 2023 - Hybrid Meeting: Windsor Town Offices & Zoom**

Committee Members in attendance: *in person:* Jow Nowak (chair) – Adams; Chris Cozzaglio – Berkshire Regional Planning Commission; *virtual:* Keith Ross – Society of American Foresters, Massachusetts Chapter; Bob O’Connor – MA EOEEA

Board members: *in person:* Dicken Crane (board chair) – Windsor

Staff/Partners in attendance: *virtual:* Lisa Hayden, NEFF/Admin Agent; *in person:* Kate Conlin, NEFF/Coordinator

1. Call to order, welcome, and introductions, 2:04 p.m.

- The Committee expressed concern with having an even number of members (4) in terms of achieving quorum and voting. K. Ross motioned to officially add D. Crane to the Committee, B. O’Connor seconded, unanimously approved.

2. Agent update: overview of the current status of the Agent contract budget and active grants

- L. Hayden gave an overview of the Agent contract between New England Forestry Foundation and EOEEA. The 4-yr \$475,000 contract runs through June 2025 – as of June 30, 2023, \$187,183.33 has been expended, leaving \$287,816.67.
- B. O’Connor noted that once NEFF is ready to make amendments to the budget, EOEEA can extend it to Dec ’25. He expressed happiness with NEFF’s performance so far.
- L. Hayden summarized Partnership grants: a total of \$935,000 is administered by NEFF, which includes 3 USFS grants totaling \$700,000 (one is the Congressionally Directed Spending funding), and 2 active matching state grants of \$175,000.
- K. Ross noted concern there isn’t money for land conservation and proposed a circuit rider for towns and volunteer land trusts to put together the resources for land conservation projects.
- B. O’Connor suggested that a regional organization could apply for a circuit rider, a part-time person who supplies resources, in next year’s state Woodlands Partnership grant opportunity.
- D. Crane said the goals of the Partnership include land conservation, but most communities are struggling from a town finance point of view. There is conflict between taking land off tax rolls and conserving land. There’s a need to build opportunity for town boards to participate in conservation from the beginning and be part of the process, so they can recognize the impacts of different conservation tools.
- C. Cozzaglio stated that select boards should be very aware of potential conservation opportunities as they are happening because they see right of first refusals and sign off on conservation restrictions.

3. Keith Ross – overview of draft budget he and Whit Sanford prepared of forward-looking needs and priorities

- The draft budget was made to capture what annual funding would be needed to run the whole organization. L. Hayden stated that this template needs to be updated and cross-referenced with current statistics. This committee could work on the aspirational budget

needs and revise it after gathering input from other committees to see what they would need to implement their goals.

- D. Crane stressed the importance of federal recognition and funding outlined in the Plan goals, and the importance of interacting with other organizations that have done this to learn, like Friends of Conte, which is in the process of seeking federal recognition. They might be a good partner. He has had some contact with their staff and they seem interested in partnering.
- C. Cozzaglio reminded that with any federal asks he cannot help, since it would be a conflict of interest, but stressed that a well outlined budget and grants awarded will help this initiative. A capital expenditure budget would be helpful in planning long-term funding needs.
- J. Nowak suggested the Agent and EEA should see how Gov. Healey's climate initiatives could help with funding, though D. Crane noted the Partnership has not received these grants directly and should keep the idea of an Executive Director as a priority.
- L. Hayden said this committee could help prioritize funding that the Partnership goes after while efforts continue for the trust fund as mentioned in the enabling legislation. If received, the Partnership board would determine how to phase in the fund, which would be the ideal vehicle or need to start the trial run of a Partnership bank account.
- K. Ross thinks we have a benefit being affiliated with NEFF for now.
- Noting it's difficult to get funding for staff from a grant, B. O'Connor has come to the conclusion the Partnership should apply to be a National Heritage Corridor through the National Park Service, as the US Forest Service said they could be the administrator of such funds. This would likely provide 100-200k a year. It takes an act of Congress to designate an area to be a National Corridor. He proposes that we meet with Congressman Neal or our two senators and see if we can get a proposal to become a National Corridor.
- L. Hayden said we could invite some speakers from nearby Heritage Areas to learn more about the program at a future full board meeting.

4. Discussion of Committee goals and expectations

- C. Cozzaglio reiterated the importance of interacting with all the other committees. Chairs of each committee should meet, decide what can be financed and not financed.
- D. Crane suggested committees could connect by putting input into the yearly update of the Partnership Plan as part of that process.
- J. Nowak agreed better connection and synergy are needed between subcommittees. Agent will address.

5. Approval of (draft) minutes from November 29, 2021

- J. Nowak expressed concern over approving minutes for which the current committee wasn't in attendance.
- C. Cozzaglio moves to continue this agenda item to the next meeting, seconded by K. Ross. Vote unanimous. Agent will investigate proper process under Open Meeting Law for approving older minutes.

6. Scheduling next meeting(s)

- Jan 12th, hybrid at Windsor Town Offices, 4:00-5:30 p.m.

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

- Dicken agreed with pursuing Heritage Corridor funding and would like to be able to show initiatives that have been supported so far both in pursuing this federal funding and in showcasing our achievements to a general audience. K. Conlin mentions a draft of a “one-pager” she had started – will share for next committee meeting.
- C. Cozzaglio moves we recommend that the Executive Committee considers the pursuit of the Natural Heritage Program, seconded by B. O’Connor. The motion was approved unanimously.

8. Public comment

- none

9. Adjourn

- C. Cozzaglio motions, D. Crane seconds, unanimous, 3:35 p.m. adjourn.