

**Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership
Executive Committee Minutes
September 23, 2021**

Present: Hank Art (chair); Mark Buccowich, USFS (Ex Officio); Bob O'Connor, MA EOEEA; Joe Nowak, Whit Sanford, Lisa Hayden, Administrative Agent

Guest: Larry Parnass

1. Approve Minutes of Aug. 24, 2021, Ex. Committee

Joe moved and Bob seconded the approval of the Aug. 24 Executive Committee Minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Discuss proposal from Municipal Financial Sustainability Committee for MTWP Board to review “inadequate and inequitable” Payment in Lieu of Taxes formula to municipalities for state-owned and other tax-exempt land

The Municipal Sustainability Committee met on September 13, 2021. Members discussed a recent state auditor’s report finding issues with the PILOT formula. The Committee voted to recommend to the MTWP Ex. Committee that the Partnership become involved and be an advocate for improving PILOT. Specifically, the MFS Committee voted unanimously to:

Recommend to the MTWP Ex. Com that members of the Board meet with elected officials to raise concern about the inequities and inadequacies of the current PILOT formula for towns and authorize the committee to investigate suggestions for revising the formula that would address these issues.

During Ex. Com. discussion, it was noted that wealthier, suburban towns tend to receive a higher value per acre than, for example, some of the rural Hill towns in the Partnership region, such as Florida or Savoy, and it is an opportune time for change.

PILOT payments help the towns deal with health and safety issues that can occur because of increased tourism, ensure that tourists’ experience is not degraded, and rural lands provide environmental services for the rest of the state, so should be compensated for this benefit to the Commonwealth, while they also experience increased pressure on roads, municipal services and budgets.

One proposal, SB1875 sponsored by Sen. Hinds, would set a rate for PILOT for state-owned land equal to the average of the annual rates for three preceding years, and would not be less than what was paid in the prior year (unless there are significant changes to the tax-exempt land). Other legislative proposals are seeking to establish payments to towns for landowners who adopt sustainable practices because open and forested land is helping to address climate change.

Whit moved that the Committee should meet/work with elected officials to revise the formula to address these issues – and bring up the PILOT formula recommendations in upcoming meetings with the region’s legislators, Joe Nowak seconded the motion; it passed unanimously.

3. Invitation to local legislators for upcoming meeting

The Executive Committee is hoping to meet with the region’s Legislators on October 13th. The agenda and discussion will include PILOT payments, a summary of the progress the Partnership is making in establishing its program, and the Enabling Legislation for a \$30

million Trust Fund. Legislators to be invited could include Carol Hikama & Rebecca Rauch Co-Chairs of the Environmental Committee, Representatives Mark and Blais, and Senators Commerford and Hinds.

Other topics could include developing a Regional **Trail System** (Water Trail and Bike Trails between Charlemont and Shelburne Falls and connecting with other trails in other counties. The possibility of Federal grants to the Commonwealth for Tourism Development (MOTT) which could include a vision for the whole region (Western MA). Funding could help MTWP to plan and develop the Interpretive Center. The USFS is interested in Forest Health, Watershed Protection, Invasive Species eradication, and Habitat Protection. The MTWP is a unique and strong Partnership that could provide the person power locally to help the Forest Service and the State with these four goals. We need to work with the USFS Chief Moore so we can help them to help us.

4. Review plans for upcoming events

A MTWP “Grants for Good” webinar to showcase past grants given to towns and regional groups will be held on Sept. 28th – both towns and area nonprofits are being invited to speak about their grant projects – and to learn about potential projects.

The December EOR Committee Oak resilience program is still in the planning process.

5. Williams College student project for Forest Center needs assessment underway

Williams College students have met with Whit and Hank and will be working this fall to help plan the Forest Center. Hank and Whit are developing a Scope of Work to identify deliverables that we want. Joe and Hank reported the Greylock Glen Center, which has been in the planning process for years will complement the new MTWP Center. There was some discussion of where the Forest Center might be located, one idea is the Mohawk Trail State Forest.

6. Partnership Plan revision process

Whit and Lisa are working together prepare a new Partnership Plan. Whit Sanford is drafting the plan, while Lisa is asking the Committees to identify projects or initiatives, they would like to implement over the next 2-3 years. Our goal is to draft the plan, release it for public comment, revise it per those comments, and publish and adopt the plan in late winter. The first draft is targeted to be done in December. The Drafting Work Group will be made up of the Chairs of the Executive and Standing Committees.

7. Schedule next Executive Committee meeting(s)

The next Executive Committee Meetings will be held on October 13 with area Legislators, and potentially on October 19 to set the Agenda for the Board Meeting, and December 14.

8. Adjournment

Joe moved and Whit seconded his motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:21 pm. It was unanimous.