

**MINUTES**  
**Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts\***  
**Natural Resource Based Economic Development Committee Meeting**  
**November 13, 2023**

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Amy Shapiro — *Franklin County Community Development Corporation (chair)*; Chris Skelly — *Buckland (notetaker)*; Jay Healy — *Charlemont*; Russ Richardson — *Massachusetts Forest Alliance*

**Staff/Others in Attendance:** Marybeth Chichester, Board member – FRCOG; Lisa Hayden – *Administrative Agent*; Kate Conlin – *Woodlands Partnership Coordinator*

**1. Committee members began introductions and Chair Shapiro called the meeting to order at 5:09 p.m.**

**2. Review & approval of last minutes**

Approved. – J. Healy moved and A. Shapiro seconded approval of March 21, 2023 minutes. C. Skelly abstained and the minutes were approved 2-0.

**3. Review of draft Committee charter, past metrics discussion, and goals in Partnership 10-year Plan; brief discussion & focus for next time**

- R. Richardson – suggests adding “dark sky” tourism to the charter. Agent will add.
- J. Healy – stresses the importance of parsing goals down to specific action items to take to legislators and others. We should determine 6 or 7 specific goals we would like to accomplish. He noted the MDAR Buy Local marketing campaign should be replicated for local wood. NRBED should invite the Agricultural Commissioner to a meeting to learn about available grants as well as Sen. Paul Mark, Rep. Natalie Blais, and Director of Rural Affairs Anne Gobi. Forestry is defined as agriculture in state law.
- Agent: per Committee request, the next Committee meeting will focus on further ideas for action items.
- A. Shapiro asks if tourism development connects to the Buy Local campaign
- J. Healy – MDAR extends to local breweries, how can we use the opportunity to broaden the vision of the Buy Local campaign? Trees are not considered a crop. Wood banks could be part of subsidized heating. Wood inserted into existing programs.
- C. Skelly – action plan needs a list of organizations that would be part of implementation and a lead organization responsible. A discussion of metrics should include what’s realistic 5, 10 years from now.
- A. Shapiro said metrics are needed to show progress, and also are useful for grants. Focus on data that already exists, we know how to collect it. For local wood, we could survey loggers. We could devote each committee meeting to one action item and how to implement.
- J. Healy suggested that the Committee should decide on goals first, so then progress to the goal could be measured as metrics. Gathering data could be a full-time job.
- Decision that 4-5 ideas should be on the table before setting priorities, and discovery work should be done to see which ones could move forward. There was discussion of metrics that are possible to track including the following, and committee members were invited to suggest more:
  - Local wood & processing
  - How much land is enrolled in Chapter 61?
  - Number of acres of carbon-focused forestry

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- Tourists
- Education
- Number of people engaged by marketing
- There seemed to be general consensus on considering 1) Buy local and 2) tourism as priority areas for the Committee to pursue. Discussion of the Forest Center and setting priorities followed.
- R. Richardson suggested Vermont Welcome Center in Dummerston as a good model in terms of displaying local wood products, and that juried furniture making competitions could be another idea. Perhaps the lobby of Berkshire East could display locally made wood products or crafts.
- Agent will share the Williams College Survey about Forest Center space needs with the committee.

**4. Partial funding of Franklin County CDC-led 'Equity in Conservation' grant with WP partners – Amy**

- A. Shapiro reported that multiple partners led by Franklin County CDC in coordination with B. O'Connor requested \$1 million and was awarded \$608,000 with FCCDC as sponsor. Youth education and Indigenous partnerships are included.

**5. Discussion of proposed regional wood bank based at Hall Tavern Farm – Jay Healy**

- J. Healy – Four or five towns including Colrain, Buckland and Charlemont have gotten various grants for wood banks. He asked if the Partnership be used to coordinate a regional initiative to share resources, such as processors or dump trucks, and knowledge and foster a thoughtful, long-term project that can be sustained? How can we upgrade inefficient woodstoves and ensure people in need are getting benefit of help to heat their homes?
- R. Richardson – W. Virginia has a voucher program where eligible residents can buy wood from approved local dealers.

**6. Update on Woodcraft Collaborative project**

- J. Healy gave a brief update on the Hall Tavern Farm effort to use the dairy barn space, reporting that the architectural analysis revealed extensive repairs were needed and the cost to install sprinklers surpasses funding availability. They have not given up on the idea, but it would be a big challenge to renovate the barn for public use. The building's use must be profitable enough to justify a \$1 million restoration. Some cabinet makers expressed they may prefer to be home in their own space rather than driving to a separate shared location, and a lukewarm reception to the idea of sharing equipment.
- C. Skelly – noted some grants for barn renovation are given to towns & suggests investigating Mass Historical Commission grants.

**7. Agent update on relevant grant projects – WP website & Virtual Forest Center, Congressionally Directed Spending project on climate resilience, state Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative**

- The WP website will be ready to share soon. Virtual Forest Center focus groups will occur this winter. Rowe's Pelham Lake project had two successful public engagement forums and work will be beginning soon. Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative has not announced any particulars yet.

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**8. Items not anticipated within 48 hours**

- None

**9. Schedule next meeting**

- January 19, 2024, 3:00-4:30 p.m.

**10. Public Comment**

- None

**11. Adjourn**

- J. Healy motions, C. Skelly seconds, all in favor at 6:40 p.m.