

PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)
Minutes of the Virtual Zoom Meeting Held on Thursday, December 10, 2020
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Springfield, Massachusetts 01104

Commission Members Present Were:

Doug Albertson	Alternate Commissioner	Belchertown
Jesse Belcher-Timme	Commissioner	Easthampton
Joanna Brown	Commissioner	South Hadley
Lillian Camus	Commissioner	Granby
Mark Dunn	Alternate Commissioner	Hadley
William Dwyer	Commissioner	Hadley
Dori-Ann Ference	Alternate Commissioner	Holland
Christopher Flory	Commissioner	Williamsburg
Marilyn Gorman Fil	Alternate Commissioner	Monson
Walter Gunn	Commissioner	Longmeadow
Scott Hanson	Alternate Commissioner	Springfield
Richard Holzman	Commissioner	Chester
Michael Hutchins	Commissioner	Blandford
Edmund Jaworski	Alternate Commissioner	Hatfield
Jack Jemsek	Commissioner	Amherst
Jay Joyce	Alternate Commissioner	Granby
George Kingston	Commissioner	East Longmeadow
Daniel Lavalley	Commissioner	Southampton
Linda LeDuc	Alternate Commissioner	Palmer
Michael Marciniec	Commissioner	Palmer
Jay Moore	Commissioner	Wilbraham
Mark Paleologopoulos	Commissioner	Agawam
Mimi Panitch	Commissioner	Holyoke
Marcus Phelps	Commissioner	Southwick
Tracey Plantier	Alternate Commissioner	Wilbraham
Bernard Puza	Commissioner	Westfield
Judy Terry	Commissioner	Chesterfield
Jeffrey Wyand	Commissioner	Huntington

Staff Presenters:

Patrick Beaudry, Manager of Public Affairs
Kenneth Comia, AICP, Senior Planner, Environment and Land Use Section
Catherine Rattè, Principal Planner and Section Manager, Environment and Land Use Section
Eric Weiss, Manager of Regional and Municipal Programs

PVPC Staff Present:

Douglas Hall, Data/Manager Analyst
Bridgit Johnson, Community Development Planner
Indrani Kowlessar, Office Manager and Executive Assistant
Amelia Morrissey, Transit Data Analyst
Nicholas Peavy, Community Development Planner I
Kimberly H. Robinson, MUP, Executive Director
Keith Robitaille, Housing Rehabilitation Specialist
Dana Roscoe, Principal Planner/Transportation Manager
Gary Roux, Principal Planner/Transit Manager
Louise Sullivan, Administrative Assistant I Specialist

Other Attendees

Michael Fisher, P.E., Senior Project Manager-Principal, BL Companies

Communities Not Represented at the December 10, 2020 Commission Meeting

Brimfield	Montgomery	West Springfield
Chicopee	Northampton	Westhampton
Cummington	Pelham	Worthington
Goshen	Plainfield	
Granville	Russell	
Hampden	Tolland	
Ludlow	Wales	
Middlefield	Ware	

1. Chairman's Call to Order, Welcome and Minutes of the Commission Meeting Held on October 8, 2020

The December 10th virtual meeting of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) was called to order at 5:31 p.m. by Planning Commission Chair Walter Gunn who welcomed all those present. Mr. Gunn called for a roll call saying that there was a quorum. After the roll call, Mr. Gunn introduced three new Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) members who had been hired since the October Commission meeting: Transit Data Analyst Amelia Morrissey who will be collecting and using transit ridership data to analyze how to ensure a transit system that better serves the Pioneer Valley; Community Development Planner Bridgit Johnson who will be working on intake and outreach for the PVPC Home Modification Loan Program; and Community Development Planner I Nicholas Peavy who will focus on Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and provide institutional support to the Hampden County Health Coalition. Mr. Gunn then called for a motion to approve the minutes of the Thursday, October 8, 2020 Commission meeting.

MOVED BY JUDY TERRY, SECONDED BY RICHARD HOLZMAN, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2020.

Mr. Gunn asked if there were any questions, comments or corrections regarding the subject meeting minutes. Tracey Plantier, Alternate Commissioner representing the Town of Wilbraham asked that comments she made during Monica Moran's domestic violence presentation be included in the minutes. Mr. Gunn assured Ms. Plantier that the minutes would be so amended.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER QUESTIONS, COMMENTS OR CORRECTIONS, THE AMENDED MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 8, 2020 COMMISSION MEETING WERE APPROVED WITH SIX ABSTENTIONS BY JEFFREY WYAND REPRESENTING THE TOWN OF HUNTINGTON, DOUG ALBERTSON REPRESENTING THE TOWN OF BELCHERTOWN, JAY MOORE REPRESENTING THE TOWN OF WILBRAHAM, SCOTT HANSON REPRESENTING THE CITY OF SPRINGFIELD, JESSE BELCHER-TIMME REPRESENTING THE TOWN OF EASTHAMPTON, AND DORI-ANN FERENGE REPRESENTING THE TOWN OF HOLLAND

2. Presentation and Discussion on the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program, which provides state funding for eligible projects submitted by PVPC member communities

Mr. Gunn announced that three PVPC staff members would be discussing the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program and the first presenter would be Eric Weiss, Manager of Regional and Municipal Programs, followed by Catherine Rattè and Ken Comia of the Environment and Land Use Section.

Mr. Weiss stated that an essential part of his role as Manager of Regional and Municipal Programs is assisting PVPC's 43 municipalities. Mr. Weiss remarked that he has been speaking with people who are involved with their municipalities now more than ever and given the pandemic, their funding challenges will be increasing. Mr. Weiss suggested that regionalization of shared services may help and his goal is working with the municipalities to promote shared or regional services and developing inter-municipal agreements. He explained that areas of common need have to be identified by listening to the needs and goals that the municipalities delineate. Then those municipal needs and goals need to be integrated with the goals of the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program and other potential project opportunities.

Mr. Weiss explained that the Massachusetts budget includes \$3 million annually for DLTA funding and the PVPC receives \$274,000 each year to work with municipalities. The DLTA grant cycle is from January 1st to December 31st and DLTA funding is divided between regional services and land use planning. Mr. Weiss indicated that the PVPC provides a 5% match and the municipalities provide a 5% in-kind match. He further explained that the PVPC sends letters to the municipalities asking if there are community projects which need to be funded. Upon receipt of responses for financial assistance from the municipalities, internal PVPC meetings are held to evaluate request letters and applications for DLTA funding. DLTA grants are awarded in January and project work begins in February. Mr. Weiss emphasized that if any of the Commission members know of a project in their community that needs funding, they should send a letter to the PVPC or send him an email at eWeiss@pvpc.org.

Mr. Weiss described two successful projects funded by DLTA: the Evaluation of Hilltown Ambulance Services (resulting in a plan involving 6 towns) and Shared Police Services (involving the Towns of Chester and Blandford). Unfortunately, a Shared Health Services Project with Longmeadow and East Longmeadow has not come to fruition due to the pandemic; however, Mr. Weiss said that both Towns are still interested in the project. Mr. Weiss reported that he assisted ValleyBike in developing a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) to replace their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at a later date. He further reported that he's been meeting with the Towns of Palmer and Monson to plan the design and construction of a regional animal control facility.

Mr. Weiss remarked that yesterday the DLTA funded Solar Working Group, comprised of 11 towns, met to continue discussion of solar arrays and the development of a solar best practices guide. On a different note, Mr. Weiss reported that an external consultant has been hired to begin an evaluation of regional fire services for five towns, and a request for proposal (RFP) has been issued to hire a consultant to investigate if remnants of an old canal stretching from Northampton to the Connecticut line would qualify for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Mr. Weiss then spoke about projects that have been initiated. The Towns of Pelham, Northampton and Amherst have begun developing a green energy aggregation whereby they will purchase green electricity in bulk with the possibility of more communities joining them. Also, five towns are planning to regionalize their school resource officer and there are plans to use COVID-19 funding to support round tables and communication between communities. In addition, the Towns of Russell and Montgomery have signed a MOU to share police services, and Mr. Weiss is working on a PVPC regional procurement model for the regional disposal of road sweepings and catch basin debris which will serve up to 20 communities.

Citing DLTA regional services projects for 2021, Mr. Weiss listed a potential shared water system operator for the Towns of Blandford and Russell; a shared health agent for towns in eastern Hampden County; a regional procurement model for the PVPC's service region; procuring a shared conservation agent; and continuing support for project requests from municipalities.

Mr. Gunn thanked Mr. Weiss for his presentation saying that that all the communities with which Mr. Weiss has worked have expressed compliments. Then PVPC Principal Planner and Environment and Land Use Section Manager, Catherine Rattè, began her presentation saying that there has always been funding for local land use planning to support Municipal Planning Boards in achieving their communities' goals. Ms. Rattè reported that when she joined the PVPC, there was the Municipal Incentive Grant then in early 2000, the Massachusetts Priority Development Fund was created followed by the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program created in 2008 to focus on local land use planning and regional services. Ms. Rattè further reported that since 2008, 42 out of out of our 43 communities with the exception of the Town of Tolland have participated in PVPC's DLTA Program and using the Program to solve local land use, housing or zoning issues.

Ms. Rattè stated that DLTA funding has focused on housing for the last number of years because there is a housing affordability crisis in the Commonwealth. She explained that the Town of South Hadley has been particularly aggressive and creative in using DLTA funding to enable different kinds of housing needs. Ms. Rattè continued saying that PVPC Environment and Land Use staff assist with comprehensive zoning overhauls, specific bylaw ordinance updates, permit streamlining, low impact development, and open space and recreation plans. In terms of economic development, Ms. Rattè indicated that PVPC staff have produced redevelopment studies such as the Green Development Handbook and the

fiscal impact study implemented last year in Chesterfield .In addition, Ms. Rattè reported that greenhouse gas emissions inventories have been developed and bicycle-pedestrian network plans have accomplished in collaboration with PVPC Senior Planner Jeff McCollough. Ms. Rattè stated that Kenneth Comia, AICP, Senior Planner of the Environment and Land Use Section is the PVPC staff member most responsible for DLTA projects.

Mr. Comia reported that this year, municipality master plans, comprehensive zoning reviews and a Complete Streets Plan update in the City of Springfield have been completed. He further reported that the Town of Cummington's zoning bylaws were rewritten, and a comprehensive zoning bylaw and site plan review was completed for the Town of Worthington. Mr. Comia noted that the PVPC's Solar Best Practices Guide will be helpful to smaller communities who often rely on volunteer boards to make decisions for them. He added that the Guide will be posted to the PVPC's website.

Mr. Comia reported that a community survey was distributed in the Town of Belchertown to determine economic development issues and to update their community plan. He also reported that a public service announcement (PSA) and a comprehensive survey was completed for the Town of Southampton this summer to assist its master plan implementation committee.

Mr. Gunn thanked Ms. Rattè and Mr. Comia for their excellent DLTA presentations and he moved on to the next agenda item.

3. Update and Discussion on the Work of the Massachusetts Legislature

Mr. Gunn welcomed Patrick Beaudry, PVPC Manager of Public Affairs. Mr. Beaudry explained that the Massachusetts Legislature is the oldest Democratic Party in North America and it serves as a model for the United States Congress. There are a total of 200 members with 160 state representatives that represent approximately 40,000 people and 40 senators who represent 160,000 people. Mr. Beaudry stated that the legislative process relies heavily on a committee structure that examines and analyzes bills. When the Senators and the Representatives disagree on a bill, a conference committee is convened to reconcile their differences. He added that each legislative session is two years long with this current session ending January 5, 2021.

Mr. Beaudry announced that there are now new faces representing the Pioneer Valley: Adam Gomez defeated incumbent James Welch in the Democratic primary for the Massachusetts State Senate Hampden District; Kelly Pease, a Republican, is now the State Representative in the 4th Hampden District in Westfield; Patricia Duffy secured the 5th Hampden District House seat representing the City of Holyoke for the seat formerly held by State Representative Aaron Vega; and Jake Oliveira, Ludlow School Committee member, defeated Thomas Petrolati to represent the 7th Hampden House District comprised of Ludlow, Chicopee, Belchertown and parts of Springfield.

Mr. Beaudry explained that the most important legislative bill currently is the Student Opportunity Act as it's the first education reform act since 1993. He indicated that it will particularly benefit low income students, students with disabilities, and students who speak English as a second language. Mr. Beaudry stated that another important bill is the Police Reform bill which creates a Commonwealth-wide certification/decertification process for law enforcement officers and which he believes will be passed next week.

Mr. Beaudry remarked that the Massachusetts Fiscal Year 2021 Budget just came out of the Conference Committee last week and was late as usual missing its July 1st deadline. Mr. Beaudry reported that this \$46 billion budget is holding steady on Local Aid and Chapter 70 and is relying on one-time federal dollars and \$1.7 billion from the Commonwealth's Reserve Account. Regarding DLTA, Mr. Beaudry commented that this 2021 budget includes \$3 million for District Local Technical Assistance and \$95.5 million for the Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs). He added that Governor Charlie Baker has 10 days to sign in favor of this budget or do a line-item veto.

Mr. Beaudry stated that the Conference Committee, which reconciles the differences between the Massachusetts House and Senate proposals, has not yet ruled on transportation, climate change, economic development, public health or housing choice. He reported that the House of Representatives passed a robust transportation bill in March before the COVID-19 crisis occurred and then the Senate passed a more modest version in July and a gas tax increase is not likely to

happen. Mr. Beaudry further reported that the Senate passed their version of a climate change bill in January and the House passed their version in late July. Mr. Beaudry remarked that in the best case scenario, the Conference Committee would include net zero on carbon emissions by 2050. Mr. Beaudry indicated that economic development is an unknown currently and telehealth and other provisions in health care and public health have been accelerated during the pandemic. He explained that the Statewide Accelerated Public Health for Every Community (SAPHE 2.0) bill, sponsored by Senator Jo Comerford, seeks to implement improvements to local public health systems' structure, staffing and financing in the wake of COVID-19. Mr. Beaudry noted that progress on housing choice is difficult to ascertain right now and he asked if there were any questions or comments. After a brief question and answer period, Mr. Gunn thanked Mr. Beaudry for his presentation and he moved on to the next agenda item.

4. Discussion of 2020 Top 10 Resolves and Potential Priority Subjects for 2021

PVPC Executive Director Kimberly Robinson stated that when the Top 10 Resolves were discussed at last year's December Commission meeting, it was apparent that the Commissioners and Alternate Commissioners wanted to engage in discussions not only about PVPC accomplishments, but more specifically about the top ten results. Ms. Robinson explained that because of the impact COVID-19 has had on funding arriving late in 2020, she's planning on more fully discussing the PVPC 2020 Top 10 Resolves and major accomplishments at the February 2021 Commission meeting.

Ms. Robinson pointed to the *2020 Top 10 Resolves* document displayed on the screen saying that it was emailed to everyone and that some of the resolves are less timely for 2021 especially the 2020 census. Ms. Robinson indicated that the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and 2050; housing issues including affordability and availability; multiple modes of transportation; regional collaboration; best practices; and shared services are emphasized in the document.

Ms. Robinson suggested additional potential topics for 2021 beginning with public health needs and structure. Ms. Robinson remarked that the PVPC supports the Medical Reserve Corps in Hampden County and COVID-19 has highlighted issues that indicate that the public health structure will continue to be under pressure in 2021. Ms. Robinson underscored the importance of a regional economic recovery. She reminded the Commissioners of Doug Hall's presentation delineating the many effects COVID-19 has had on our economy.

Nationally and regionally, Ms. Robinson emphasized the importance of racial equity, diversity and inclusion. She noted that there's been discussion of a racial equity plan for our communities and our region. Ms. Robinson suggested prioritizing a PVPC racial equity plan and exploring a partnership with the Community Foundation on such a plan. Another potential topic for 2021, she said, is the digital divide and access to broadband — being able to engage digitally. Ms. Robinson underscored the importance of current access to internet because of school children, college students and employees working remotely and attending classes. She noted that there will be discussion around how workers' jobs will change due to COVID-19 in the future after the pandemic.

Ms. Robinson then spoke about the context within which she and the PVPC leadership team are developing these top ten results. She noted that there are still unknown impacts from COVID-19. Ms. Robinson indicated that vaccines are being approved but it's not yet known when we will be able to fully engage with one another and with our communities. This year should be better but there's predictions that next year municipalities will be adversely affected by lower funding and by taxes. Ms. Robinson remarked that the numbers of businesses that are closing in our various communities will lessen the amount of taxes the communities will receive.

Ms. Robinson noted that uncertain funding from the federal and state governments could result in additional COVID-19 recovery dollars but that funding will not cover all the economic development and funding needs caused by the pandemic so what should be prioritized for 2021. Ms. Robinson reported that while the top ten results have often been presented in December, they're not actually scheduled to be approved until February. She also suggested developing a strategic plan process next year. Given this, she suggested opening a discussion to entertain ideas, comments and questions about these issues, results, goals and developing a PVPC strategic plan

Daniel Lavalley, Commissioner representing the Town of Southampton, commented that the PVPC could best help with the protection of clean drinking water and the protection of aquifers located in some of the towns.

Jay Joyce, Alternate Commissioner representing the Town of Granby, asked that the PVPC give a community advance notice of a roadway, bridge, or any other project that will affect the community to ensure better communication between the community and the state.

Marcus Phelps, Commissioner representing the Town of Southwick, suggested condensing the Top Ten Resolves into very specific points. Mr. Phelps, adding to Mr. LaValley's comment about clean drinking water, stated that many rural communities have private wells and some communities have public water systems so there are two different interests involved.

Tracey Plantier, Alternate Commissioner representing the Town of Wilbraham, stated that it's difficult to relate the Ten Top Resolves to community projects. For example, one of the Resolves is to continue integrating climate resilience considerations including the identification of lands for conservation, but she's not really sure what the PVPC is specifically doing to accomplish that resolve. Ms. Robinson responded that this concern also came up as part of the conversation at the leadership team level. Ms. Plantier suggested announcing the Top Ten Resolves in February and matching them with actual specific projects. Ms. Plantier also suggested listing and explaining the most important projects on which the PVPC should focus.

PVPC Principal Planner Catherine Rattè pointed out that the Resolve to which Ms. Plantier refers is:

Continue integrating climate resilience considerations into various planning efforts, including identification of appropriate land for conservation, and maintain engagement with the Statewide Resilient Lands Initiative to assure the use of state of the art information and tools.

Ms. Rattè explained that the resolve relates to a Resilient Lands Initiative that consisted of a series of meetings that were attended by PVPC Principal Planner Patty Gambarini; and she added that historically, there's usually a project tied to a resolve Ms. Plantier commented that this is an excellent example of the point she had made about identifying projects that illustrate the Top Ten Resolves.

Mr. Gunn noted that the resolves were vague in order to allow for wiggle room for success or failure. Ms. Plantier replied that it wouldn't surprise her if all the Top Ten Resolves change over the course of a year; however, if you understand what a project is at the beginning of the year, you will understand why it went off track if it does.

Ms. Robinson commented that the Top Ten Resolves are a mix of both specific and broad information. She indicated that she prefers looking at the Resolves from the PVPC from an organization's perspective. Ms. Robinson suggested that the conversation should be about specific goals that the PVPC is attempting to achieve over the course of this year. She added that there's a need for both broad and specific resolves.

Richard Holzman, Commissioner representing the Town of Chester, stated that there should be an overarching continual statement of PVPC's mission almost like a mantra about planning, education, transportation, economic development, wind, water and sustainability. Mr. Holzman underscored that we need to be aggressive in pushing for results in those areas and in the Resolves especially regarding state projects. He advocated for economic development opportunities that result from connecting regions, both the Pioneer Valley and the Berkshires and for specifics around the overall comprehensive plan for moving the entire region forward.

Jack Jemsek, Commissioner representing the Town of Amherst, referred to the Resolve regarding the PVPC's assistance in the area of historic preservation and cultural resources planning through facilitation of regional educational programs. Mr. Jemsek suggested caution with that Resolve since our region has housing and economic development needs.

Joanna Brown, Commissioner representing the Town of South Hadley, praised strategic planning and said that it feels like we need a day-long virtual meeting. Ms. Brown noted that there is a need for affordable housing and public transportation in almost all of our communities. She commented that the Pioneer Valley differs from the Boston area and she asked what affordable housing and public transport should look like here in the future.

Mr. Gunn remarked that Ms. Brown makes an excellent point because our Commission meetings have usually been perfunctory required business meetings with nice presentations and usually difficult to get Commissioners to participate. Mr. Gunn suggested that now since he's seeing much more collaboration and an interest in involvement in our region, perhaps there should be zoom meetings on specific topics. Ms. Robinson replied that Mr. Gunn's suggestion was fantastic.

Scott Hanson, Alternate Commissioner representing the City of Springfield, stated that he would like to see more energy put into creating more diversity in the Commissioners and Alternate Commissioners membership.

Mimi Panitch, Commissioner representing the City of Holyoke, endorsed the idea of more meetings but emphasized prioritizing the discussion component of the meetings as opposed to the presentations which could be emailed then downloaded. Ms. Panitch remarked that everything in the Top Ten Resolves, both general and specific, would make more sense if there was an organizing format as if it were a mission or overall vision that we had all put together.

Ms. Robinson and Mr. Gunn thanked everyone for their comments. Mr. Gunn stated that it's very important for everyone to share ideas and collaborate but it's difficult for people to just chat with each other at zoom meetings.

Mr. Gunn thanked Ms. Robinson for her insights and suggestions and he moved on to the next agenda item.

5. Schedule of the Commission and Executive Committee Meeting Dates for 2021

Mr. Gunn announced that the Commission and Executive Committee meeting dates for 2021 have been distributed and he advised anyone having a conflict with a particular date to email Ms. Robinson.

6. Community Reports/Updates From PVPC Commission Members

Jack Jemsek, Commissioner representing the Town of Amherst, asked if there were any towns that have had experience with Chapter 40R. Joanna Brown, Commissioner representing the Town of South Hadley, replied that she will be willing to talk about 40R and she will put her phone number in the chat.

7. Executive Director's Highlights

PVPC Executive Director Kimberly Robinson announced that the pilot *Payments in Lieu of Taxes Report* will be emailed to everyone at the end of this meeting. Ms. Robinson also announced that a scholarship has been established by the family of Judge Edward Cullen Peck, Jr. for an ongoing, summer internship at the PVPC.

8. Other Business

There being no further business to conduct, Mr. Gunn called for a motion to adjourn the Thursday, December 10, 2020 Commission meeting.

MOVED BY RICHARD HOLZMAN, SECONDED BY MARILYN FIL, TO ADJOURN THE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10TH COMMISSION MEETING. THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO CONDUCT, THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 7:44 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Albertson, Secretary/Clerk
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

List of Documents Distributed for this Meeting:

- Agenda for the Thursday, December 10, 2020 Commission Meeting
- *The Top Ten 2020 Resolves: The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission*
- Minutes of the October 8, 2020 Commission meeting minutes