

**PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)**  
**Minutes of the Full Commission Zoom Meeting Held on Thursday, February 9, 2023**

Commission Members Present:

Doug Albertson	Alternate Commissioner	Belchertown
Joanna Brown	Commissioner	South Hadley
Bruce Coldham	Commissioner	Amherst
T.J. Cousineau	Alternate Commissioner	Blandford
Bob Daley	Alternate Commissioner	Chester
Bill Dwyer	Commissioner	Hadley
Marilyn Gorman Fil	Alternate Commissioner	Monson
Chris Flory	Commissioner	Williamsburg
Walter Gunn	Commissioner	Longmeadow
Jack Jemsek	Alternate Commissioner	Amherst
George Kingston	Commissioner	East Longmeadow
Kate Kruckemeyer	Alternate Commissioner	Holyoke
Michael Marciniac	Commissioner	Palmer
James Moore	Commissioner	Wilbraham
Rosemary Morin	Commissioner	Springfield
Peggy O'Neal	Alternate Commissioner	Worthington
Marcus Phelps	Commissioner	Southwick
Elizabeth Pols	Commissioner	Belchertown
Mark Paleologopoulos	Commissioner	Agawam
Bill Roberts	Commissioner	Holland

PVPC Staff Present

Pat Beaudry	Manager of Public Affairs
Lisa Edinger	Director of Finance
W. Kyle Finnell	Land Use Planner
Patty Gambarini	Chief Environment Planner
Indrani Kowlessar	Director of Human Resources
Sue Ortiz	Executive Assistant
Catherine Ratté	Director, Land Use and Environment
Kimberly H. Robinson	Executive Director
Eric Weiss	Director, Municipal Services

Guests Present:

Toby Berkman	CBI
Don Humason	Town of Chester

1. Chairman's Call to Order, Welcome, and Approval of the Minutes of the Commission held October 13, 2022, and December 8, 2022

The February 9, 2023 Commission Zoom meeting was called to order at 5:31 p.m. by Commission Chair Walter Gunn. Mr. Gunn took roll call and he noted that there was a quorum.

Mr. Gunn called for a motion to accept the minutes of the October 13, 2022, Commission meeting.

MOVED BY ELIZABETH POLS SECONDED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, TO MOVE THE APPROVAL OF THE OCTOBER 13, 2022 MEETING MINUTES TO THE APRIL 13, 2023 COMMISSION MEETING. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Mr. Gunn called for a motion to accept the minutes of the December 8, 2022 Commission meeting.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY JAY MOORE, TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 8, 2022 MEETING MINUTES. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED WITH ONE ABSTENTION.

Mr. Gunn called for a motion to jump to agenda item 3.

MOVED BY T.J. COUSINEAU, SECONDED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, TO MOVE TO AGENDA ITEM 3. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

## 2. Workshop on Draft Strategic Plan Scoping Results

Executive Director Kimberly H. Robinson reported that in the past, it had been decided to make a scoping effort to examine the costs and effort required. Toby Berkman was with CBI, a non-profit organization that focused on collaboration. He reported the outcome could be a draft scope for strategic planning. There were eight small focus group conversations with 29 interviewees and 20 survey respondents, and final recommendations were expected in March 2023. The questions asked in the focus groups surrounded PVPC's strengths as a regional planning body, opportunities for improvement, goals, concerns, equity, process advice, and an appropriate timeline. The observations included enthusiasm for a cross-sector strategic plan for PVPC, caution that it needs to be done "right," consensus on PVPC's broad areas of strength and opportunities to improve, and a need for a broadly inclusive process. The PVPC's strengths were discussed and included advising and direct service and community and regional convening and connecting. The opportunities to improve were discussed and included broadening communication and engagement, aligning and tailoring services for diverse needs, coordinating and aligning across sector silos, managing funding limitations, and diversity of staff with broad perspectives.

Mr. Berkman presented the goals for a successful plan, including a broader/improved stakeholder buy-in, strategic focus and clarity, cross-sector coordination, budgetary alignment, flexibility, improvement of specific practices, and practical implementation. There were concerns about an unsuccessful plan, including a lack of stakeholder buy-ins, not addressing natural or practical barriers to change, and poor implementation. The elements of an effective process included broad and effective stakeholder consultations, ensuring outreach is targeted, addressing regional and governance issues, and building upon what was already done. Ensuring equity was reported to be very important, and it was discussed that it required effective and open-minded engagement and the need to address internal and external dimensions.

The timeframes were discussed. There had been minimal consensus on the desired timeframe. There were benefits of longer-term (5 to 10-year) timelines and shorter-term (3 to 5-year) goals. There were different planning horizons dependent on the investments.

There was a discussion surrounding how the PVPC could serve a broader dialogue across communities. It was discussed that strategic planning ensured the firm financial and personnel bases. The lack of consensus on the timeframe was discussed, and how a decision would need to be made prior to the presentation. Mr. Berkman stated that the mean response on timeframe was five years, but many individuals pushed for longer timeframes of 10 years.

Mr. Berkman presented the process recommendations. They included convening a core team to draft and advance the plan; reviewing existing plans and consolidating findings; broad consultations on regional vision and challenges, municipal needs and opportunities, and roles for PVPC and partners; core team and work groups to review feedback and develop a framework for the plan; continued vetting and outreach to communities and staff for additional input at crucial junctures as work toward the final draft is done.

The key strategic planning questions were presented for small groups to discuss in breakout rooms. The question to discuss was, "Have we identified the right questions to ask, and are they framed appropriately?" The discussions are reported below:

Mr. Berkman's breakout room discussed that silos were an issue with large cities and small towns. Rosemary Morin discussed that the diversity in larger cities was not being recognized. It was discussed that PVPC's initial mantra was supporting rural communities. It was asked what the question regarding the vision and challenges were. Mr. Berkman explained that he considered it as looking at the key regional issues in the next five to ten years. It was discussed that strategizing and coordinating with essential groups and agencies in Western Massachusetts would be helpful.

PVPC Principal Planner/Traffic Manager Gary Roux reported out for Ms. Robinson's breakout room. The group agreed that the first question was excellent, as a vision should be a primary element of a planning organization. It was discussed that the critical challenges needed to be identified as well. For question two, wording it differently so one community does not feel like they are getting less than others was discussed. It was suggested to remove "and within different communities" from question two. It was discussed that engaging in a conversation around education may be helpful. Ms. Robinson stated that she would check to see if Alternates received any onboarding. It was discussed that working on ideas for fostering partnerships may be the first step before looking at what partnership strategies PVPC should foster. It was stated that PVPC was making good progress in listening to individuals when doing outreach before providing a solution. The definition of silos was discussed, and it referred to municipalities, other types of communities, or demographic communities. The first part of the funding question was decided to be a good question.

PVPC Director of Land Use and Environment Catherine Ratté's breakout room discussed the vision statement and the possibility of using what PVPC's statement already was. It was suggested that the first question might be unnecessary. It was discussed that the second question was tailored to the community being worked in since there was so much diversity across the region, so the role was important. Critical challenges were discussed, including participation being down. How PVPC can improve its long-term funding strategy and internal operations was discussed. It was decided that it was an important question to move forward. Governance diversity was discussed, and leadership diversity and the commissioners' diversity were included as well.

Joanna Brown reported out for PVPC Director of Municipal Services Eric Weiss' breakout group. Ms. Brown stated her group discussed the need to revisit the existing vision and focus on critical challenges. One member said it would be beneficial to take the statements on the page and shorten them to make them very concise. Looking at the 43 towns and convening groups to hear the most critical challenges and urgent questions was discussed. There was also a discussion surrounding retaining staff.

After the breakout rooms, there was a general discussion about the main takeaways:

Ms. Ratté reported everyone affirmed the questions were the right questions. For the first question, there was a divergence of opinion on the vision in that the vision may not need to be revisited as much. Question 4, part 2, was discussed in that the diversity of the staff did need to be expanded, but there is a lack of clarity on how to do so.

Mr. Roux reported that the importance of defining critical challenges was discussed, along with whether communities know what PVPC's mandate is. It was discussed that question 3 was a bit confusing and if it was meant to be internal or external. It was also discussed that diversity was essential, but there was a lack of clarity on doing so, and retention was also necessary.

Mr. Berkman noted that the key takeaways were looking at outreach to towns, specifically to towns that were left out. It was suggested to add "in an equitable way" to the question regarding effective outreach and appropriately tailored services to meet diverse needs. There were comments on the value of getting PVPC and some major partner organizations together to think about a shared strategy. Generally, people felt like the questions were the right questions.

Mr. Berkman reported that the next step was to send the explicit findings and recommendations to colleagues. After that, the PVPC will need to decide what to do. Mr. Gunn stated that engaging more towns needs to be considered. Ms. Robinson and Mr. Berkman will connect to prepare prior to the April meeting.

### 3. Certification of Local Assessments at a Proposed Per Capita of \$.182567 for Fiscal Year 2024

Ms. Robinson reported that there was an increase of 2.5% for the FY 2024 proposed assessments, which was also capped at 2.5%, increasing the total annual assessment from \$111,695 to \$114,490.

Mr. Gunn called for a motion to approve and certify the annual assessment for the fiscal year 2024.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY T.J. COUSINEAU, TO APPROVE AND CERTIFY THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2024. THE MOTION CARRIED WITH ONE ABSTENTION FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

4. Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Estimates

Kim Robinson presented a proposed FY2024 budget draft that would be voted on at the April 13, 2023 meeting. A slight decrease, about 1%, in revenue was projected due to a lack of clarity on federal funding. There was also much work done breaking out different departments to track the funding better. The budget categories for staffing and office expenditures were presented. It was expected to have a 1% increase in staffing and a .67% decrease in office expenditures. There was an increase expected of approximately 3.27% in miscellaneous spending and a slight increase predicted for consultants and subcontractors. There was a reduction predicted in the Revolving Loan Funds. The rehab projects in Northampton and Westfield had been completed, so it was presented as \$0 in the budget. Therefore, there was no action needed on the draft.

It was reported that there were budget workshops planned.

5. Community Reports/Updates from PVPC Commission Members

There being no community updates, Mr. Gunn moved to the next agenda item.

6. Committee Member Comments, Suggestions, and Future Agenda Items

Mr. Gunn reported that a survey was sent out regarding the future of the meetings, and he asked everyone to respond to it. He then reminded Commission members that the next Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, April 13, 2023.

There being no further discussion, Mr. Gunn called for a motion to adjourn.

MOVED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, SECONDED BY T.J. COUSINEAU, TO ADJOURN THE FEBRUARY 9, 2023 COMMISSION MEETING. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 7:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Albertson, Secretary/Clerk

List of Documents and Other Items Distributed at the February 9, 2023, Meeting

- February 9, 2023, Agenda and Possible Motions
- October 13, 2022, Executive Committee Minutes
- December 8, 2022, Executive Committee Minutes