

PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)
Minutes of the Full Commission Zoom Meeting Held on Thursday, February 8, 2024

Commissioners Present:

Doug Albertson	Alternate Commissioner	Belchertown
Joanna Brown	Alternate Commissioner	South Hadley
Bruce Coldham	Commissioner	Amherst
Stacey Dakai	Commissioner	Northampton
Bob Daley	Alternate Commissioner	Chester
William Dwyer	Commissioner	Hadley
Walter Gunn	Commissioner	Longmeadow
Peri Hall	Alternate Commissioner	Goshen
Sarah Hamilton	Alternate Commissioner	Chesterfield
Richard Holzman	Commissioner	Chester
Brad Hutchison	Commissioner	South Hadley
Edmund Jaworski	Alternate Commissioner	Hatfield
Jack Jemsek	Alternate Commissioner	Amherst
Stephen Thor Johnson	Commissioner	Southampton
George Kingston	Alternate Commissioner	East Longmeadow
Rosanna Lopez	Alternate Commissioner	Holyoke
Mike Marciniak	Commissioner	Palmer
Eileen McGowan	Commissioner	Chesterfield
Rosemary Morin	Commissioner	Springfield
Elizabeth Pols	Commissioner	Belchertown
Jessica Thornton	Commissioner	Southwick

PVPC Staff Present:

Lisa Edinger, Director of Finance
Indrani Kowlessar, Director of Human Resources
Catherine Ratté, Director of the Land Use and Environment Department
Gary Roux, Principal Planner/Traffic Manager
Monique Shaw Senior Administrative Assistant

Guests Present:

Benjamin Bryant, Office of Housing and Livable Communities
Kate Norton, Norton Communication Strategies

Communities Not Represented at the February 8, 2024, Commission Meeting

Agawam	Holland	Tolland
Blandford	Huntington	Wales
Brimfield	Ludlow	Ware
Chicopee	Middlefield	West Springfield
Cummington	Monson	Westfield
Easthampton	Montgomery	Westhampton
Granby	Pelham	Wilbraham
Granville	Plainfield	Williamsburg
Hampden	Russell	Worthington

1. Chairman's Call to Order and Welcome

The February 8, 2024 Commission meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Commission Chair Walter Gunn. Catherine Ratté took roll call and Mr. Gunn noted there was a quorum present.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY RICHARD HOLZMAN, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 12, 2023 COMMISSION MEETING AS PRESENTED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITH THREE ABSTENTIONS FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

MOVED BY ELIZABETH POLS, SECONDED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 14, 2023 COMMISSION MEETING AS PRESENTED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITH FOUR ABSTENTIONS FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

2. Presentation of the Affordable Homes Act by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities

Benjamin Bryant provided an overview of housing challenges in Massachusetts and explained the proposed investments and policy initiatives included in the bond bill. These include funding for public housing repairs, sustainable and green housing initiatives, homeownership opportunities, tax credit programs, and various policy reforms. He also mentioned specific measures that aim to address housing issues in western Massachusetts. Additionally, commissions are being formed to focus on age-friendly policies and low-income housing recommendations. The presentation concluded with information about executive orders related to creating a housing advisory council.

The Housing Advisory Council has been sworn in to work on a statewide housing plan. Also, a Commission called the Unlock Housing Commission will identify barriers to housing production and make recommendations. The governor has called for a review of surplus land for housing development. This Commission has already held meetings and will tackle zoning and regulatory reform issues. They are open to working with all parts of the state.

Joanna Brown asked about accountability and public transparency regarding identifying surplus land. Mr. Bryant noted that accountability and public transparency are being worked on by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities with DCAM. The state is working on providing incentives for municipalities and quasi-agencies to develop affordable housing. They also plan to dispose of surplus land owned by state agencies.

Richard Holzman commended the appointment of the new director of West-East Rail as it will benefit rural communities. He emphasized the importance of mixed-use housing and transportation in these areas.

Mr. Gunn asked whether the housing bond bill that the governor had presented was an up or down vote as a package or whether the legislature would take it apart. Mr. Bryant replied that there was optimism that the bond bill would pass without being completely watered down but with possible amendments. Mr. Bryant discussed seasonal housing, parking as a barrier to housing, and potential changes to zoning regulations. The administration views the ADU policy as a calculated move, while parking is a significant barrier to housing production in downtown areas.

There were concerns from Commission members about standalone septic systems limiting high-density development in some towns. Stephen Thor Johnson expressed the need to explore potential solutions, including extending sewer lines and considering alternative wastewater management systems, to address these challenges in rural areas. The Housing Advisory Council and State Housing Plan may prioritize infrastructure grants that align with housing development goals. Mr. Bryant noted that some western Massachusetts communities might have concerns about the transfer fee threshold.

3. Certification of Local Assessments at a Proposed Per Capita Rate of \$.18713 for Fiscal Year 2025

MOVED BY RICHARD HOLZMAN, SECONDED BY ROSEMARY MORIN, TO APPROVE AND CERTIFY THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENTS OF THE PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION'S (PVPC) 43 MEMBER COMMUNITIES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025 AT A PER CAPITA RATE OF \$.18713 WHICH HAVE BEEN CALCULATED BASED ON U.S. CENSUS 2020 POPULATION FIGURES AND ALL RELEVANT PROVISIONS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION'S STATE ENABLING LAW (I.E. CHAPTER 40B M.G.L.). THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

4. Presentation of Fiscal Year 2025 Draft Budget in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 40B M.G.L., the PVPC's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2025 will be introduced at the February 8, 2024 Commission meeting, with final approval scheduled for the April Planning Commission meeting

Lisa Edinger gave an overview of the budget, highlighting increases in staff and office expenditures, as well as a projected decrease in pass-through funds. Assessments and budgets for the Fiscal Year 2025, including revenue sources and expenses breakdown, were discussed. Additionally, there was mention of website design plans and the use of consultants and contractors. The consultant subcontractors will only be used for projects separate from professional services or pass-through items. The budget projection for this year is a little below \$7 million. The Commission reviewed past years and considered inflation when making projections. Mr. Gunn noted he was proud of the audit results, which included no Management Letter, indicating good financial health. The budget has been adjusted to fit the changing landscape of the Planning Commission. Ms. Edinger noted that they went line by line to adjust and cut unnecessary items. She also provided historical budget data, highlighting consistency despite uncertainty.

MOVED BY RICHARD HOLZMAN, SECONDED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, TO ACCEPT THE PVPC STAFF REPORT APPLICABLE TO THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2025 PVPC CONSOLIDATED BUDGET WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT FINAL BUDGET APPROVAL WILL BE SCHEDULED FOR ACTION BY THE FULL COMMISSION AT ITS APRIL 2024 MEETING FOLLOWING AN EXTENDED PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT PERIOD. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

5. Community Reports/Updates from the PVPC Commission Members

Mr. Gunn mentioned that the Board will continue to meet virtually until March of next year. It was suggested that the Commission should meet face-to-face at least once a year to come up with new initiatives for the organization. Commission members discussed remote meetings, public participation, and the benefits of Zoom for planning board meetings.

Peri Hall shared her appreciation for Goshen, who was awarded a District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) grant that will help in doing a diagnostic review of the zoning bylaw. Mr. Johnson gave thanks to the DLTA support for reviewing their Groundwater Protection bylaw.

6. Other Business

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

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY JESSICA THORNTON TO ADJOURNED TODAY'S COMMISSION MEETING. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 6:54 P.M.

7. Action Items

- Mr. Gunn reminded Commission members the next Commission meeting is April 11, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.
- Benjamin Bryant will send his presentation deck slides to Indrani Kowlessar to be distributed to the Commissioners and Alternates.
- Ms. Edinger informed the Commission members that the assessment letters would be going out soon for each community.
- Mr. Gunn mentioned the Fiscal Year budget 2025 is scheduled for action April 2024.

Respectfully Submitted,
Douglas Albertson, Secretary/Clerk

List of Documents and Other Items Distributed at the February 8, 2024, Meeting

1. February 8, 2024 Commission Meeting Agenda
2. February 8, 2024 Possible Motions
3. Proposed Local Assessment Figures FY2025
4. Memorandum re: Proposed FY 25 Annual Assessments
5. October 12, 2023 Commission Meeting Minutes
6. December 14, 2023 Commission Meeting Minutes