

PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)
Minutes of the Virtual Zoom Meeting Held on Thursday, October 14, 2021
Springfield, Massachusetts 01104

Commission Members Present Were:

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|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Doug Albertson | Alternate Commissioner | Belchertown |
| Isaac Bauer | Commissioner | Worthington |
| Joanna Brown | Commissioner | South Hadley |
| William Dwyer | Commissioner | Hadley |
| Christopher Flory | Alternate Commissioner | Williamsburg |
| Jon Goddard | Alternate Commissioner | Southwick |
| Marilyn Gorman Fil | Alternate Commissioner | Monson |
| Walter Gunn | Commissioner | Longmeadow |
| Holly Hendricks | Alternate Commissioner | Williamsburg |
| Richard Holzman | Commissioner | Chester |
| Edmund Jaworski | Alternate Commissioner | Hatfield |
| Jack Jemsek | Commissioner | Amherst |
| George Kingston | Commissioner | East Longmeadow |
| Kate Kruckemeyer | Alternate Commissioner | Holyoke |
| Cynthia Labrie | Commissioner | Chicopee |
| CJ Lammers | Alternate Commissioner | Chesterfield |
| Linda LeDuc | Alternate Commissioner | Palmer |
| Michael Marciniak | Commissioner | Palmer |
| Mark Paleologopoulos | Commissioner | Agawam |
| Lyn Simmons | Alternate Commissioner | Longmeadow |
| David Whitehill | Alternate Commissioner | Northampton |

Guest Speakers

Suzanne Bump, State Auditor, Office of the State Auditor, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Ashley Stolba, Undersecretary of Community Development, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Ben Tafoya, Director of the Division of Local Mandates, Office of the State Auditor, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Guests Present

Stuart Beckley, Town of Ware

Paul Bockelman, Town of Amherst

Carolyn Brennan, Town of Hadley

Christine Fowles, Town of Southampton

Steve Lonergan, City of Springfield

Doug Moglin, City of Southwick

Joy Piper, Town of Southampton

Charley Rose, Town of Worthington

Dawn Scaparotti, Town of Goshen

Tim Sheehan, City of Springfield

PVPC Staff Present:

Becky Basch, Senior Planner

Patrick Beaudry, Manager of Public Affairs

Indrani Kowlessar, Director of Human Resources

Catherine Ratté, Principal Planner and Section Manager, Environment and Land Use Section

Kimberly H. Robinson, MUP, Executive Director

Dana Roscoe, Principal Planner/Transportation Manager

Lori Tanner, Economic Development Manager

Eric Weiss, Manager of Regional and Municipal Programs

Communities Not Represented at the October 14, 2021 Commission Meeting

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| Blandford | Huntington | Springfield |
| Brimfield | Ludlow | Tolland |
| Cummington | Middlefield | Wales |
| Easthampton | Montgomery | Ware |
| Goshen | Pelham | West Springfield |
| Granby | Plainfield | Westfield |
| Granville | Russell | Westhampton |
| Hampden | Southampton | Wilbraham |
| Holland | | |

1. Chairman’s Call to Order, Welcome and Minutes of the Commission’s Annual Meeting Held on June 10, 2021

The October 14th virtual meeting of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Planning Commission Chair Walter Gunn who welcomed all those present. Following introductions, Mr. Gunn called for a motion to address the June 10, 2021 PVPC Annual Meeting minutes.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY DOUG ALBERTSON, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2021.

Mr. Gunn asked if there were any questions, comments or abstentions from Commission members. Joanna Brown, Commission member representing the Town of South Hadley, commented on a typographical error on page 4 of the word, “Hartford” as it was spelled “Harford.” There being no other comments, Mr. Gunn performed a roll call vote to show approval of the motion.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER QUESTIONS, COMMENTS OR CORRECTIONS, THE MINUTES OF THE JUNE 10, 2021 COMMISSION MEETING AS CORRECTED WERE UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED

PVPC Executive Director Kimberly H. Robinson announced that today’s first presentation will be an informational introduction to a recent report entitled *Public Infrastructure in Western Massachusetts: A Critical Need for Regional Investment and Revitalization* which will be presented by State Auditor Suzanne Bump. Ms. Robinson remarked on the good fortune of having present from the Massachusetts State Auditor’s Office, Auditor Suzanne Bump and Ben Tafoya, Director of the Division of Local Mandates (DLM).

2. Informational Presentation of *Public Infrastructure in Western Massachusetts: A Critical Need for Regional Investment and Revitalization*

Mr. Gunn then welcomed Ms. Bump who began by saying that there really is an east-west divide in Massachusetts that is manifested in state policies and in the allocation of resources. Ms. Bump explained that when she, along with the Office of the State Auditor’s Division of Local Mandates (DLM), embarked upon this study of public infrastructure in western Massachusetts, they didn’t know the amount of money that would be available from the Commonwealth to fund it. They didn’t foresee a \$5 billion surplus in fiscal 2021, and the coming of a federal infrastructure bill. Ms. Bump remarked that the timing of this funding and an opportunity to call attention to the inadequate way funding is provided in the Commonwealth is fortuitous. Ms. Bump asked Ben Tafoya, Director of the Division of Local Mandates, to speak about a survey done by DLM which was sent to 101 communities in Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties.

Mr. Tafoya reported that 45 survey replies were received from the four counties which included responses from the City of Springfield as well as midsize cities and small towns. Mr. Tafoya explained that the survey asked for information about infrastructure needs and the responses overwhelmingly indicated significant infrastructure needs. He indicated that the most of responses referred to roads, bridges, culverts, public buildings, and a need for Chapter 90 funding to increase. Mr. Tafoya noted that concern was expressed about the ability of smaller towns to address competitive grants used to fund roadway infrastructure. There was also concern regarding population limitations in the state’s Small Town Road Assistance Program (STRAP), which is part of the MassWorks Infrastructure Program. Mr. Tafoya further reported that of the 45 communities that responded to the survey, all but eight of them indicated a significant

need for the repair of safety or municipal buildings. He underscored the need for higher state assistance for roadways, bridges and municipal buildings.

Ms. Bump remarked that she was interested in hearing what the Commission members would like to do with the Public Infrastructure in Western Massachusetts report. She emphasized that there's an opportunity now for them to help create an agenda and then present their priorities to their legislators. Ms. Robinson responded that those next steps were identified earlier today in a meeting between the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the state auditor's office. Ms. Robinson stated that this group will be meeting again next Wednesday to talk further, but some specific categories have already been mentioned for further discussion including broadband, Chapter 90, culverts, sewer and water infrastructure, municipal buildings, and transportation. Ms. Bump urged everyone to prioritize increasing the annual dollar amount of Chapter 90 and changing its formula for further discussion. She remarked that the Massachusetts Municipal Association has been advocating for a change in the Chapter 90 formula for some time in order to give greater weight to road miles. Ms. Bump noted that if that occurs and the Chapter 90 funding is increased from 200 million to 300 million, everybody wins.

Mr. Gunn asked Ms. Robinson, if there is something that the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), as a Regional Planning Agency, can do to follow up on advocating for an increase in Chapter 90 funding. Ms. Robinson replied that there's a variety of options that the PVPC could provide such as drafting letters that can be sent to legislators. Ms. Robinson underscored that the PVPC is happy to convene and bring together communities on a regional level and to coordinate tasks with which communities need help.

Ms. Brown asked if there's a need for state legislation that would require that every funding formula within agencies be analyzed and tested for inequities, and that changes be made to rectify any errors before funding decisions are made. Ms. Bump replied that she believes that Ms. Robinson and Patrick Beaudry are formulating a plan which they will be presenting to their legislators.

Ms. Robinson then emphasized that she is committed to contacting every single community that is participating in this zoom meeting by next Friday. Ms. Robinson stated that she has everyone's name and contact information and she wants to obtain everyone's feedback on this evening's conversation. Mr. Gunn then thanked Ms. Bump and Mr. Tafoya for their presentation, and he asked Ms. Robinson to introduce the next guest speaker.

3. Informational Presentation on Massachusetts American Rescue Plan Act funds proposal

Mr. Robinson introduced Ashley Stolba, Undersecretary of Community Development in the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development saying that Ms. Stolba would speak about the Massachusetts American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and the proposal that the governor's office has put forward for a portion of that ARPA funding. Ms. Stolba displayed an overview of the proposed bill: H.3922, *An Act Relative to Immediate COVID Recovery Needs*, reflecting the allocation of \$2.9 billion in federal funding through the American Rescue Plan Act. Ms. Stolba reported that of that \$2.9 billion, approximately \$1.8 billion is dedicated to targeted, recovery-oriented initiatives which support key priorities including housing, economic development, job training, workforce development, health care, infrastructure and housing equity and opportunity. Ms. Stolba stated that the bill would allocate \$1 billion for homeownership and housing production, \$900 million for infrastructure investments, \$350 million for downtown development and job training programs, \$240 million for workforce development and job training programs, \$225 million for health care, \$100 million for tourism and cultural facilities, and \$100 million for increased broadband access.

Ms. Stolba underscored that home ownership has always been a priority for Governor Charlie Baker. She remarked that Governor Baker signed a housing bond bill of \$1.8 billion dollars then committed \$1.4 billion of its funding to the annual Massachusetts Capital Investment Plan (CIP) to create and preserve affordable housing. Ms. Stolba explained that the bill's Homeownership Strategy to Confront Inequities allocates \$300 million dollars in first-time homebuyers' assistance and \$200 million to the Commonwealth Builder (CWB) Program to help communities of color build wealth through homeownership. She noted that the hope is that ARPA funds would be used for Massachusetts programs that support downtown development in municipalities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and for investments aimed

at downtown recovery and revitalization projects. Ms. Stolba indicated that she manages the Community One Stop for Growth which is an application portal and collaborative review process of grant programs. She reported that there was over \$300 million in requests for the nine programs in the One Stop portal and unfortunately, ARPA funding was not available to add to the \$100 million that was available at the time. Ms. Stolba remarked that hopefully, once ARPA funds are available, there will be more money to add to programs.

Ms. Stolba underscored the importance of funding for workforce training because of the state-wide workforce shortage, funding for strategies to promote tourism, and funding for broadband. She reported that broadband has been a priority for Governor Baker during his entire administration and in 2016, 53 communities were identified that were either unserved or underserved. Of the 53 towns that were identified, Ms. Stolba reported that either all of them now have service or are on a path to have service with 100% completion predicted by the end of next year. She noted that \$100 million has been proposed to close the digital divide and the hope is that the Massachusetts Legislature will act on ARPA by the end of the year. Dawn Scaparotti asked if support is being targeted more to larger cities than to rural areas. Ms. Stolba replied a Rural and Small Town Grant program to provide funding for community capital projects was established in January of this year which is funded at \$3 million and she pledged continual support of rural communities.

Ms. Robinson and Mr. Gunn thanked Undersecretary Ashley Stolba for her presentation and for the good work she's been doing for the Commonwealth.

4. Community Reports/Updates From PVPC Commission Members

Ms. Gunn asked if there were any community reports. There being none, he moved on to the next agenda item.

5. Executive Director's Highlights

Ms. Robinson announced that the PVPC is currently reviewing available ARPA funding along with funding from the Economic Development Administration (EDA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other potential federal funding opportunities. Ms. Robinson encouraged communities that would like assistance in identifying grant opportunities, to please contact her, and she will set up a meeting with the community members and PVPC staff members representing all of the PVPC sections to discuss what assistance the PVPC can offer. Ms. Robinson also announced that the East-West Passenger Rail Study originally identified low ridership numbers that didn't include potential economic returns from investments over time. She reported that after a recalibration of the model, rail ridership numbers are up 54% and the PVPC is in contact with state senators and congressional members and is continuing to do advocacy work for the East-West Rail with the state of Connecticut.

6. Other Business

There being no further business to conduct, Mr. Gunn called for a motion to adjourn this Thursday, October 14, 2021, Commission meeting.

MOVED BY JOANNA BROWN, SECONDED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, TO ADJOURN THIS THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14TH COMMISSION MEETING. THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO CONDUCT, THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 7:03 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Albertson, Secretary/Clerk
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

List of Documents Distributed for this October 14th Meeting:

- Agenda for the Thursday, October 14, 2021 Commission Meeting
- Minutes of the June 10, 2021 Annual Meeting Commission minutes