

SOUTHWEST REGION PLANNING COMMISSION

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MINUTES

January 12, 2021

Staff member Rich Clough announced that today's meeting will be conducted using a Zoom format and read a document entitled *Authority for Conducting a Meeting Electronically (copy attached)*. He indicated that all votes would be conducted by roll call.

Present: Tom Mullins, Chairman, *Peterborough*; Gus Lerandean, Vice-Chairman, *Swanzy*; Larry Robinson, Secretary, *Marlborough*; Sara Carbonneau, *Winchester*; Brian Barden, *Dublin*; Chris Coates, *Cheshire County*; Leandra MacDonald, *Peterborough*; Cheryl Mayberry, *Walpole*; Ed Merrell, *Jaffrey*; Butch Morin, *Richmond*; John Snowdon, *Westmoreland*.

Staff members present include Tim Murphy, Executive Director; Rebecca Baldwin, Office Manager; Rich Clough, Office Support Specialist; Todd Horner, Planner; Terry Johnson, Senior Project Manager; J. B. Mack, Principal Planner; Lisa Murphy, Senior Planner; Henry Underwood, GIS Technician/Planner; James Weatherly, Planning Technician.

Guest: Christine Robidoux, Temple resident.

Absent: Jill Collins, Treasurer, *Hinsdale*; Jay Jacobs, *Harrisville*; Camilla Lockwood, *Temple*; Gary Spykman, *Keene*.

I. Welcome

Chairman Mullins called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m. and welcomed those in attendance.

II. Advisory Committee Reports

a. Transportation Advisory Committee

J. B. Mack reported that the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) met on December 7, 2020 and discussed the schedule for making updates to *Southwest Connects: Southwest Region Transportation Plan*. The next meeting of TAC will likely take place during February pending the receipt of information from NHDOT on priority projects that were submitted for consideration in the Ten Year Plan update process.

b. Energy and Natural Resources Advisory Committee

Lisa Murphy reported that the Energy and Natural Resources Advisory Committee (ENRAC) met on December 15, 2020 and received updates on several ongoing watershed planning and implementation projects including Spofford Lake, Lake Warren in Alstead and the Ashuelot River Corridor through several communities. The next meeting of ENRAC is scheduled for March 23, 2021.

Economic Development Advisory Committee

Todd Horner reported that the Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) is scheduled to meet on January 13, 2021. The agenda includes updates on the merger of the Greater Keene and Peterborough Chambers of Commerce and the *Promoting the Region* campaign. Activities being conducted through SWRPC's Monadnock Vital Economies initiative will also be featured. Current efforts include working with the Town of Winchester to enhance social media capabilities, assisting the Chesterfield Economic Development Committee in conducting an inventory of business development permitting process and a project with the Hinsdale Economic Development Corporation to promote properties along NH Rt. 119 between downtown Hinsdale and the Connecticut River.

c. Brownfields Advisory Committee

J. B. Mack reported that the Brownfields Advisory Committee has not met since the Board was updated on their activities at the November 10, 2020 meeting.

III. Consent Agenda

- a. Minutes of December 8, 2020 Meeting**
- b. Highlights of Commission Activities - December 2020**
- c. SWRPC Advisory Committees - 2021 Rosters**
- d. Financial Report - December 2020**

Motion: To accept the consent agenda as presented.

Motion by Director Robinson, seconded by Director Lerandeau. Approved by unanimous roll call vote with Directors Carbonneau, MacDonald, Mayberry, Morin, and Snowdon abstaining.

IV. Executive Director's Report

No items were brought forward.

V. Discussion Topic - Hinsdale-Brattleboro Bridge Replacement Project: Overview and Status Update

Mr. Murphy acknowledged the work being done regarding planning for the Hinsdale-Brattleboro Bridge Replacement project. He noted that both the states of New Hampshire and Vermont have relied heavily on their respective RPCs to assist with facilitating the public process portion of this project. J. B. Mack has taken a lead role in facilitating meetings that have involved local officials, various state agencies and other stakeholders from both states. This is a high-profile \$60 million investment in transportation infrastructure that has been in the works for decades. A few years ago it was removed from the Ten Year Plan, and thanks to the efforts of our TAC, it was put back in the Plan and is scheduled for construction in the coming years.

J. B. Mack provided an areal view of the Charles Dana and Anna Hunt Marsh Bridges that were built in the 1920's that connect the towns of Hinsdale, NH and Brattleboro, VT. He pointed out key landmarks including various roads, the New England Central Railroad, Mt. Wantastiquet Recreational Area, Norm's Marina, and Hinsdale Island. The design of both bridges according to transportation professionals are now considered "functionally obsolete". The width, height, and weight load on both bridges are not in keeping with today's standards. The bridges have deteriorated over time and are currently "red listed". If something were to happen to close one or both of the bridges, the nearest detour is seventeen miles in distance. There

are safety issues related to the railroad crossing that currently services eight trains per day. An area known as “malfunction junction” which is the intersection of Routes. 119, 5, 9, 142, Canal and Main Streets, is a traffic congestion point that hopefully the reconstruction project will improve by decreasing traffic flow in that area. He showed and described the current condition of Hinsdale Island which is owned by the State of New Hampshire. Currently homelessness, substance mis-use and criminal activities in this area are concerns of police departments in both states.

J. B. Mack proceeded to describe elements of the project including property acquisition, and negotiations with the railroad. The advertising date for the project is scheduled for February 23, 2021 and it is anticipated that it will take three construction seasons to complete. A new single-span bridge will be owned by NHDOT and Brattleboro, VT and will be maintained by NHDOT. Due to current ownership, the State of New Hampshire will be responsible for approximately 74% of the overall \$60 million project cost. The majority of the funds will be coming from Federal Aid Programs, a Build Grant that was awarded to both NH and VT in the amount of \$12 million and NH gas tax revenues. He showed various slides that described the actual construction components of the new bridge. Proposed improvements include the rerouting of Rt. 119 that is currently used by 9,000 vehicles per day. There will be a pedestrian sidewalk on the north side of the new bridge and new stormwater systems will be built on both the NH and VT sides.

The plan calls for the existing bridges to be rehabilitated for pedestrian and bicycle traffic. It is currently anticipated that the project will be advertised in the summer of 2023 and will be completed by 2026. The estimated cost for this project is \$10 million.

J. B. Mack described the roles and contributions that SWRPC has provided for this project which include administrative, technical support and facilitation services to NHDOT. As part of the project, a project advisory committee has been meeting that is comprised of elected officials, economic and environmental professionals and various interest groups from both states to provide advice on final design and conduct public outreach. SWRPC has provided support for the Build grant proposal, facilitated advisory committee meetings regarding bridge design, conducted public outreach, served as a liaison between various stakeholders, and provided planning services regarding the project.

J. B. Mack explained SWRPC’s role in enlisting the services of the UMass Amherst Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning Department in creating a conceptual plan for the existing bridges and Hinsdale Island based on public input. Ideas for the existing bridges include plantings, seating areas and viewing platforms. It is anticipated that the majority of Hinsdale Island will be preserved as a wildlife habitat. Additional ideas being considered include a kayak launch, food trucks, restrooms, a child play area, trails, and an amphitheater for musical and theatrical performances.

J. B. Mack reviewed the timeline for the project including next steps and referred Board members to the SWRPC and NHDOT websites for more information.

Mr. Murphy acknowledged the extensive amount of work that has been put into this project by J. B. Mack and others. He noted this is a transportation infrastructure project with components of recreation and the amenities being considered will provide a boost not only to the local economy but the region a whole. J. B. Mack noted that he has had conversations about the project with the NH Division of Travel and Tourism and they are enthusiastic about the tourism opportunities it will provide. Mr. Murphy recalled that at the SWRPC Annual Meeting, information was provided about a potential transportation center for the greater Keene area and there could be a synergy between such a transportation center and the proposed Amtrak station in Brattleboro.

Chairman Mullins asked about the funding for the second phase of the project for the rehabilitation of the existing bridges. J. B. Mack responded that the anticipated \$10 million for that phase is separate from the funding for construction of the new bridge but is also included and incorporated in the Ten Year Plan.

Director Coates asked if there will be a problem if Hinsdale doesn't want to step forward and take responsibility for the existing bridges. J. B. Mack noted that the State has asked for more information prior to entering into negotiations with the Town who is under no obligation to accept responsibility for the bridges. Chairman Mullins noted it is his understanding that the States of NH and VT are committed to build the new bridge and NH has to rehabilitate the existing bridges at a minimum and J. B. Mack concurred. Director Coates pointed out that making the bridges safe and making them pretty are two different things. J. B. Mack explained that the NHDOT does have plans to paint the existing bridges as part of the rehabilitation process because painting them will help preserve them. Director Coates pointed out that there is an incredible history regarding events that used to take place on Hinsdale Island.

Director Carbonneau asked if any analysis has been conducted regarding parking needs. J. B. Mack noted that parking is being discussed but no decisions have been made yet. He noted that the greatest opportunity will be on the Hinsdale side of the project.

VI. Next Meeting

Chairman Mullins noted that according to the schedule, the next meeting of the SWRPC Board of Directors would be on February 9, 2021. Mr. Murphy noted that it is unclear at this point if a meeting of the Board would be necessary in February. If one is needed it will be held in conjunction with the SWRPC 2021 Winter Commission Meeting and would be conducted remotely. He added that staff would advise the Board once a determination has been made.

VII. Other Matters

No other matters were brought before the Board at this time.

VIII. Public Comments

No public comments were offered.

IX. Adjourn

Meeting Adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rebecca I. Baldwin
Office Manager