

## **SOUTHWEST REGION PLANNING COMMISSION**

### ***BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING***

#### **MINUTES**

**July 28, 2020**

Chairman Mullins 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 announced that all votes would be conducted by roll call.

**Present:** Tom Mullins, Chairman, *Peterborough*; Gus Lerandean, Vice-Chairman, *Swanzey*; Brian Barden, *Dublin*; Camilla Lockwood, *Temple*; Leandra MacDonald, *Peterborough*; Cheryl Mayberry, *Walpole*; Ed Merrell, *Jaffrey*; John Snowdon, *Westmoreland*; Sara Carbonneau, *Winchester*.

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 Robideaux, Temple resident.

**Absent:** Larry Robinson, Secretary, *Marlborough*; Jill Collins, Treasurer, *Hinsdale*; Chris Coates, *Cheshire County*; Jay Jacobs, *Harrisville*; Butch Morin, *Richmond*; Gary Spykman, *Keene*.

#### **I. Welcome**

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

#### **II. Committee Reports**

##### **a. Transportation Advisory Committee**

Staff member J. B. Mack reported that the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) met on June 29, 2020 to review new criteria that will be used to rank projects being considered for inclusion in the 2023-2032 Ten Year Transportation Improvement Plan (TYP) update. The criteria was developed by the nine regional planning commissions in conjunction with the NHDOT and the NH Division of the Federal Highway Administration.

The next meeting of TAC is scheduled for August 3, 2020 when in addition to continuing work on the TYP update, staff will provide a presentation on the recently completed *Greater Keene Intermodal Transportation Center Feasibility Study*.

### **b. Energy and Natural Resources Advisory Committee**

Mr. Murphy reported that the Energy and Natural Resources Advisory Committee (ENRAC) has not met since the Board was updated on their activities at the SWRPC Annual Commission meeting. It is anticipated that ENRAC will meet again in the Fall.

### **c. Economic Development Advisory Committee**

Staff member Todd Horner reported that the Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) has not met since the Board was updated on their activities at the SWRPC Annual Commission meeting. The next meeting of EDAC is scheduled for October 14, 2020.

### **d. Brownfields Advisory Committee**

Staff member J. B. Mack reported that the Brownfields Advisory Committee (BrAC) has not met since the Board was updated on their activities at the SWRPC Annual Commission meeting. It is anticipated that BrAC will meet again towards the end of August to discuss activities at the W. W. Cross site in Jaffrey following a recent fire, consider a nomination for a property located in Keene and potential environmental assessment activities at properties located in Greenfield and Keene.

## **III. Consent Agenda**

- a. Minutes of May 12, 2020 Meeting**
- b. Highlights of Commission Activities - May and June 2020**
- c. Agreement with NHDES - Lake Warren Watershed Planning**
- d. Agreement with Cheshire County - Grant Administration Services**
- e. Agreement with City of Keene - Grant Administration Services**
- f. Agreement with University of Massachusetts - Technical Assistance Services**
- g. Agreement with Oster & Wheeler, P.C. - Financial Audit**
- h. Financial Reports - May and June 2020**

Chairman Mullins noted that there are a lot of agreements on the consent agenda. Mr. Murphy concurred noting they are all pretty straightforward and that he is willing to discuss them individually at the request of members of the Board. Chairman Mullins asked when was the last time we solicited bids for our financial audit and Mr. Murphy responded that he believed it was about three years ago. Chairman Mullins made the suggestion that we should make it a practice to solicit bids every five years.

**Motion: To accept the consent agenda as presented.**

Motion by Director Lerandeanu, seconded by Director MacDonald. Approved by unanimous roll call vote with Chairman Mullins abstaining.

## **IV. Executive Director's Report**

Mr. Murphy recognized Sara Carbonneau as the newest member of the Board of Directors having been elected at the SWRPC Annual Commission meeting representing the Town of Winchester.

#### **a. Agreement with Cheshire Medical Center - Age Focused Planning**

Mr. Murphy explained that the proposed agreement with Cheshire Medical Center represents Phase II of an age focused planning project that was conducted between July 2018 and June 2020. In anticipation of project completion, staff submitted a letter of intent to the Tufts Health Plan Foundation to work on implementation of aspects identified in the Phase I study and were invited to submit a proposal to continue our work. We put forward a proposal that would help our communities address an increase in the senior population along with declines in both school age and working age populations. We recently learned that our proposal has been selected for award and will result in a three-year project that will be administered by Cheshire Medical Center with total compensation to SWRPC set at \$185,000.

Terry Johnson briefly described the project that will be based on the findings identified in the Phase I study which include the themes of transportation, housing, economic opportunity, and social engagement. Since 21% of our population does not drive, transportation needs are one example of what the Phase II effort will address. We have also seen a decrease in the amount of time spent socializing for both our senior and younger populations and need to find ways to increase social engagement.

Mr. Murphy noted that our letter of intent was submitted to the Tufts Health Plan Foundation prior to the current pandemic and we have since been encouraged to modify our proposed work plan accordingly.

Director MacDonald asked if the statistic that younger and older populations are becoming less socially engaged includes the use of social media. Terry Johnson noted that it pertains mostly to in-person communications but does involve other aspects such as social media as well.

**Motion: To authorize the Executive Director to enter into an agreement with Cheshire Medical Center to continue our age-focused planning program.**

Motion by Director MacDonald, seconded by Director Lerandean. Approved by unanimous roll call vote.

#### **b. Proposal to U.S. EDA - Economic Development and Recovery Planning**

Mr. Murphy explained that this item is informational and does not require action from the Board at this time. Staff responded to an opportunity sponsored by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) that would allow us to expand parts of our work program focused on economic development. Through the federal CARES Act, funding is being made available to assist with economic recovery related to the on-going public health pandemic. We have been working closely with the EDA field representative and have developed a proposal that would allow us to undertake a complete update of the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Southwest New Hampshire* (CEDS) that was developed in 2005 and has not had a complete update since the Great Recession. He asked Todd Horner to provide additional information regarding the proposal.

Todd Horner noted that the development of an updated CEDS is a great opportunity for us to measure and assess where we are today as well as identify the medium- and longer-term impacts of the pandemic on the regional economy. He noted that SWRPC's EDAC will assist staff with various aspects of the proposal if it is accepted and this provides a great way to communicate across municipal boundaries.

In addition to the CEDS update, other components of the proposal include:

- Broadband coordination such as supporting the on-going work of the Monadnock Broadband Group.
- An update of the regional housing needs assessment and providing staff support to the Monadnock Housing Roundtable.
- Work with stakeholders to address workforce needs.
- Conducting an assessment of the region's food systems and ways to promote the local agricultural economy.
- Addressing energy issues in the region such as potential coordination regarding the recent community power law that enables local governments to pool together for the purpose of purchasing electricity at lower cost.

Mr. Murphy reported that the proposal represents a 3-year effort in the amount of \$350,000. It is a very competitive program and we hope to hear back from EDA sometime in the near future.

Director Snowdon commented that this sounds like a great opportunity to work with the Cheshire County Conservation District regarding food security, agricultural activity and energy. Mr. Murphy agreed and noted that we succeed in the Region through partnership approaches.

#### **V. FY 20/21 Meeting Schedule**

Chairman Mullins referred to the proposed FY 20/21 Board of Directors and Commission Meeting schedule that is included in the agenda packet and asked members to add the dates to their calendars.

#### **VI. Discussion Topic - Connecting NH Emergency Broadband Expansion Program**

Mr. Murphy called on Henry Underwood to provide an update on the services SWRPC has been providing regarding broadband connectivity in the region. Henry Underwood displayed the SWRPC broadband dedicated webpage that was created to respond to requests and support the Monadnock Broadband Group. He added that this is one of our most popular webpages and features regional, state and national news relative to the issue which is a hot topic. The Monadnock Broadband Group meets every couple of months to review legislative updates, engage in information sharing and discuss timely topics. The webpage also includes a link to the Southwest Region Broadband Plan that was adopted by the Board in 2014, case studies, a resource page that has links to various community pages, sample surveys, and funding opportunities. Staff is currently working on a guide to help communities apply for broadband bonding based on a model developed by and successfully implemented in the Town of Chesterfield. Henry Underwood commented that the State of NH has an ongoing effort to collect information through a survey about broadband issues and encouraged members to respond. He added that results of the survey will be available by town when it is released.

Mr. Murphy noted that HB 1111 which was signed by the Governor last week is mentioned under legislative updates on the webpage and asked if more information could be provided to Board members. Henry Underwood explained that this bill clarifies how a community can define what parts of their town are unserved by broadband. It further establishes communication districts which, modeled after water and sewer districts, allow towns to collaborate and issue bonds to address broadband needs. Chairman Mullins noted it would be interesting to know if the burden of the bond repayment would be placed upon the homes served by the district.

Mr. Murphy provided a brief overview of what SWRPC has been doing with regard to broadband noting that it is part of a void that we are trying to fill. He noted that connectivity is a very different issue in rural NH as compared to urban NH because rural areas don't have the development density needed to serve as sufficient incentive for internet service providers to make service available.

Mr. Murphy provided an explanation of the Connecting NH Emergency Broadband Expansion program funded through the State of NH by \$50 million in federal CARES Act funds. The Governor announced the program in June as a way to help meet last mile connectivity in NH and look at the needs related to issues caused by the pandemic. It was hoped that this would help make a difference in our region. Several days after the Governor's announcement, a RFP was issued by the NH Office of Strategic Initiatives in conjunction with the NH Public Utilities Commission and the NH Department of Education. Several issues and problems with the RFP requirements were identified and discussed at the July 7, 2020 meeting of the Monadnock Broadband Group. These issues included a very short (2-week) turnaround time in submitting proposals, significant risks placed on municipalities and broadband providers as applicants, and a requirement for completing build-out and expenditure of federal funds prior to the end of the calendar year. The Monadnock Broadband Group felt it was necessary to highlight these issues through a letter to NH Office of Strategic Initiatives, NH Public Utilities Commission and NH Department of Education with a copy sent to the Governor's Office (copy attached). Part of the reason for sending the letter was to raise these issues as challenges in the event of future funding made available for broadband connectivity.

Discussion among Board members followed in which it was noted that not enough time was allowed for in the RFP for most municipalities to apply for funding.

## **VII. Next Meeting**

It was acknowledged that the next meeting of the SWRPC Board of Directors is scheduled for September 15, 2020.

## **VIII. Other Matters**

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

## **IX. Public Comments**

No public comments were offered.

## **X. Adjourn**

Meeting Adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rebecca I. Baldwin  
Office Manager