**SOUTHWEST REGION PLANNING COMMISSION**

***BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING***

**MINUTES**

**July 27, 2021**

**Present:** Gus Lerandeau, Vice-Chairman, *Swanzey;* Brian Barden, *Dublin;* Sara Carbonneau, *Winchester;* Jay Jacobs, *Harrisville;* Camilla Lockwood, *Temple;* Leandra MacDonald, *Peterborough;* Ed Merrell, *Jaffrey;* Cheryl Mayberry, *Walpole;* Butch Morin*, Richmond.*

Staff members present include Tim Murphy, Executive Director; Rebecca Baldwin, Office Manager; J. B. Mack, Principal Planner*;* Lisa Murphy, Senior Planner; Todd Horner, Senior Planner.

**Absent:** Tom Mullins, Chairman, *Peterborough;* Larry Robinson, Secretary, *Marlborough;* Jill Collins, Treasurer, *Hinsdale;* Chris Coates*, Cheshire County;* John Snowdon, *Westmoreland;* Gary Spykman, *Keene.*

**I. Welcome**

Vice-Chairman Lerandeau called the meeting to order at 3:00 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) has not met since the Board was updated on activities at the SWRPC Annual Meeting held in June. The next meeting of TAC is scheduled for August 2, 2021. The agenda will focus on Transportation Program updates including the FY 2023-2032 Ten Year Plan update and a presentation on the Cheshire Rail Trail South Plan.

 **b. Energy & Natural Resources Advisory Committee**

Lisa Murphy reported that the Energy and Natural Resources Advisory Committee (ENRAC) conducted a forum on June 22, 2021 that provided information on local efforts regarding implementation of the Community Power program. The program is designed to provide communities the ability to purchase electricity at a cost savings that can also help reduce carbon consumption. The next meeting of ENRAC is scheduled for September 28, 2021.

**c. Economic Development Advisory Committee**

Todd Horner reported that the Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) conducted a forum on July 14, 2021 to discuss creating a new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Southwest New Hampshire (CEDS). The original CEDS was adopted in 2005 and provides a strategic plan for economic development in the Region. Since its adoption, the CEDS has undergone limited periodic updates of a targeted nature, while the current effort will involve a more comprehensive update. EDAC will serve as the CEDS Strategy Committee during the 12-15 month effort which is supported by a grant from the U. S. Economic Development Administration. The next meeting of EDAC is scheduled for October 13, 2021.

 **d. Brownfields Advisory Committee**

J. B. Mack reported that the Brownfields Advisory Committee (BrAC) has not met since the Board was updated on activities at the SWRPC Annual Meeting. The next meeting of BrAC has not been scheduled at this time and is pending on results of a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment for the former Tom’s Auto property located in Keene.

**III. Consent Agenda**

 **a. Minutes of June 15, 2021 Meeting**

 **b. Highlights of Commission Activities - June 2021**

 **c. Agreement with the Town of Nelson - Emergency Operations Planning**

 **d. Agreement for Services - 2021 Financial Audit**

 **e.** **Financial Report - June 2021**

Mr. Murphy noted that since distributing the meeting agenda packet, a quote has been received from Oster & Wheeler, P.C. to conduct the 2021 financial audit for $9,900 which reflects an increase of $200 over last year.

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

Motion by Director Jacobs, seconded by Director Carbonneau. Approved by unanimous vote.

**IV. Executive Director’s Report**

**a. American Rescue Plan Act - Potential Implications for SWRPC**

Mr. Murphy referred to agenda item IV. a. and provided background information on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and how SWRPC might become involved. Recent discussions with state agency officials and the nine regional planning commissions (RPCs) have suggested possible involvement in updating regional housing needs assessments, updating regional plans, regional economic development planning, and broadband connectivity.

In addition, all 234 municipalities in NH will have funds made available to them for various projects. Some have expressed concern that they do not have the capacity to file the mandatory application to receive ARPA funds by the August 18th deadline. The State’s RPCs in partnership with the NH Municipal Association (NHMA) and the NH Community Development Finance Authority are exploring ways to provide technical assistance to municipalities so that none of them miss this funding opportunity.

Mr. Murphy noted that staff have provided outreach materials to our member municipalities offering assistance in helping them file their initial ARPA applications. He noted that the initial application does not require specifying projects. Director Jacobs asked what would happen if municipalities don’t sign up by the August 18th deadline and was told that they would likely lose the opportunity to access these funds. He asked if there are any fact sheets available explaining the funding and Mr. Murphy responded that NHMA has a dedicated website providing information.

Mr. Murphy drew attention to the fact that as things unfold in the coming months relative to funding opportunities and a potential role for providing additional technical assistance to our municipalities, we need to be cautious that we do not overextend our capacity.

**b. SWRPC Operations - Transitioning from a Pandemic**

Mr. Murphy reminded Board members that at the SWRPC Annual Meeting it was suggested that the Board participate in a discussion on how to conduct in-person meetings now that the Governor’s Executive Order allowing fully remote meetings has expired. In conversations with the Board Chair, Mr. Murphy characterized that Chairman Mullins made the distinction that the day-to-day operations on how to transition from the pandemic fall within the jurisdiction of the Executive Director but with regards to public meetings the Board should be part of the discussion. Mr. Murphy further characterized Chairman Mullin’s clarification that remote meetings are allowed in the provisions of 91:A. However, he cautioned that certain criteria must be met including conducting the meeting in-person at a physical location with a quorum of the body present. Those physically present will need to agree to allow others to participate remotely and remote attendees will need to state their name, location, identify anyone in the room with them, and why they are participating remotely (concern about the pandemic is a valid reason for requesting remote participation). When members are participating remotely, all votes must be taken by roll call. Chairman Mullins has advised that as a public agency, we should be moving forward with conducting in-person meetings until we hear otherwise.

Vice-Chairman Lerandeau suggested that this item be carried over to the next Board meeting to allow Chairman Mullins to attend and share his thoughts. He added that more information might be available by then regarding the pandemic and any proposed changes to conducting public meetings. He asked members if they had any thoughts they would like to share today and suggested they contact staff with any comments or concerns prior to the next Board meeting.

Director MacDonald noted that a problem with a regular Zoom meeting is that unless we have the proper equipment, participants may not be able to see everyone attending the meeting in-person. She also expressed concern that our current conference room does not allow for social distancing should everyone wish to attend in-person and we might want to explore options for a larger meeting space.

Director Jacobs noted that his municipality has conducted in-person meetings throughout the pandemic and made provisions for members of the public to participate using Zoom.

Director Carbonneau expressed concern that earlier today the CDC released new recommendations for conducting indoor meetings. She was optimistic that delaying this discussion until the next meeting will allow time for more information to base any decisions on. She noted that she would be more comfortable meeting in a larger room.

Director MacDonald explained that she doesn’t mind meeting with a group of people she is familiar with but we need to decide how to involve the public in meetings. It was noted that we are not able to ask people attending our meetings if they have been fully vaccinated.

Mr. Murphy reported that we are in the process of outfitting the SWRPC conference room to accommodate both in-person and remote meetings as well as a combination of both. In addition to addressing pandemic concerns, modernizing the conference room will allow us to accommodate presenters such as those representing state and federal agencies from out of the area to remotely attend meetings. He added that if social distancing is a concern we could look into possibilities for using larger spaces off-site for our meetings to accommodate those attending in-person.

Director MacDonald suggested we get a legal opinion if we could limit public attendance to participating remotely only. Mr. Murphy noted that he believes the public cannot be excluded from attending in-person if they choose to. He further explained that if we are allowing any type of remote participation, we would need to announce in advance that should there be technical difficulties during a remote meeting, the meeting would continue among those attending in-person.

Director Mayberry asked what technology we are using to equip the conference room. Mr. Murphy responded that we have purchased an Owl Pro and a television screen that can be mounted on the wall. Director Mayberry observed that the set-up we had for the SWRPC Annual Meeting made it difficult for anyone using the remote option to determine who was speaking of those that were in-person. She expressed concern that using a room much larger than this conference room might present the same problem.

It was unanimously agreed by those in attendance to place this item on the agenda of a future meeting of the Board to conduct further discussion.

**V. Next Meeting**

Vice-Chairman Lerandeau announced that the next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled for September 14, 2021.

**VI. Other Matters**

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

**VII. Public Comments**

No public comments were offered.

**VIII. Adjourn**

Meeting Adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

 Rebecca I. Baldwin

 Office Manager