**Minutes of Meeting of Rural Advisory Commission’s (RAC) Subcommittee on Demographics and Workforce**

July 26, 2017

1:30-3:00

FRCOG Offices

Greenfield

**Subcommittee members present**

Linda Dunlavy, FRCOG

Nat Karns, BRPC

Trish Settles, CMRPC

**Discussion of three topic areas and potential policy changes**

Sewer/Water and Title 5:

1. Change DEP regulations so that businesses reliant on private wells can expand more easily before being designated a public water supply. *Need better understanding of this – LD to talk to FRCOG Public Health Agent.*
2. Increase number and variety of DEP-approved small package treatment plant technologies.
3. Ensure that zoning reform, especially in the area of minimum lot size, recognizes the constraints of Title 5 and private wells – areas without sewer and water are often physically constrained from multi-unit/acre development.
4. Get a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of DPU, Fire and Water Districts, and Private Water Companies to determine if there are constraints that prevent or opportunities that would enhance commercial and affordable housing development.

Small Business Support/Job Creation:

1. Include a provision in any legislation to increase minimum wage to exempt high school-aged workers and/or seasonal workers so small businesses can afford to hire young people. Assess impact of potential minimum wage increase on youth employment opportunities, small retailers, tourism sector.
2. Increase tourism funding. Compare NY tourism funding to MA. Research whether NY has data on impact of recent funding expansion. Assess whether tourism funding is more critical to rural areas.
3. Develop a CLT manufacturing facility in a forested area of rural MA. Do this quickly before other NE states beat us to it.\*
4. Pursue development and enhancement of Rural Service Center concept, perhaps identifying sub-regional, economic sector-specific workforce development expansion and small business support and development services.

Rural Service Delivery:

1. Give all RPAs the power of COGs and/or encourage/legislate an organizational restructuring of RPA Boards to be chief elected officials.
2. Support STAM’s Civic Education initiative.
3. Support the Municipal Workforce Skills Gap Working Group.
4. Develop municipal government Community College course curriculum and apprenticeship program.

FUND STAFF FOR RPAC – All of these ideas will require time and resources. Funding for dedicated RPAC staffing is needed. Pursue funding in FY19 and/or DLTA or Regionalization and Efficiency Program.

Next Meeting: August 30 at 2:30 in FRCOG offices.

\* **FROM FORESTS TO BUILDINGS: DEVELOPING CROSS-LAMINATED TIMBER IN NEW ENGLAND**

Nicole St. Clair Knobloch from the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) presented at the July 11, 2017 MTWP Advisory Committee meeting on the potential for developing cross-laminated timber (CLT) in New England. CLT is an engineered wood product that can replace concrete and steel in larger projects such as schools, apartments, offices, and college buildings.

Only five mills in North America produce CLT, the closest located in Quebec. NEFF’s study found that New England could participate in the CLT market, sustainably supporting one or two mills. UMass Amherst is currently testing different wood types such as Hemlock and other local softwood species.

Replacing energy-intensive steel and concrete with sustainably harvested wood avoids GHG emissions and stores carbon sequestered by the trees while growing. The new UMass Amherst Design Building (below) is estimated to store 2,000 tons of CO2. (see <https://bct.eco.umass.edu/about-us/the-design-building-at-umass-amherst/> for more information)



Photo credit: Alex Schreyer / UMass