**Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC)**

**Via Zoom**

**April 11, 2025, 10:00 am**

**Minutes**

**Present:** Linda Dunlavy (FRCOG), Trish Settles (CMRPC), Thomas Matuszko (BRPC), Wendy Hudson (NPEDC), Dan Doyle (MVC), Anne Gobi (EOED), Jay Coburn (Cape Cod Commission/CDP), Karen Pettinelli (SRPEDD), Rep. Natalie Blais, Shaun Suhoski (MRPC designee), Sen. Paul Mark – **Quorum = YES**

**Members Absent:**, Dave Christopolis (At-Large), Kimberly Robinson (PVPC), Sara Smiarowski (At-Large),

**Guests:** Mallory Sullivan (EOED),Amelia Morton (Rural Affairs intern), Ethan Melad (CMRPC), James Fuccione (MHAC), Mark Maloni (FRCOG), Jared Freeman (Sen. Comerford), Susannah Hatch (DOER), Kelly O’Reilly (Rep. Blais)

1. **Welcome and introductions:** Linda Dunlavy, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:08 am
2. **Approve minutes of February 15, 2025:** Tabled until next meeting
3. **Office of Rural Affairs update:**

Anne mentioned that a Chapter 90 hearing was just held and also reminded the group of the Western Rural Conference, with guest Becky McCray.

Mallory gave some updates about Community One Stop; they have received 170 Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for rural projects and have a potential for 14 new communities to join the program. There will be 1:1 meetings with EOI submitters, and there will be office hours for Rural Development Fund and STRAP programs on 4/15 at 12pm. Applications can be submitted May 5- June 4. Some RPAC members may be asked to be One Stop reviewers.

Rural Equity Research was outlined; the project includes an inventory of all State grant programs and whether there is consideration of rural in those programs. This could be whether they have a rural factor, whether rural communities have received funds, and funding amounts and distribution among rural towns.

Amelia spoke of her best practices and recommendations draft along with Rural Policy Plan update work; she will be finishing her internship at the end of the month and documents will be distributed.

1. **Discuss Legislation, Policies and Priorities:** Chapter 90 advocacy

A hearing on Chapter 90 was held on April 10. The bill adds $100M for road miles. It appears a majority support the increase, with a 5-year bond. Linda mentioned she has put testimony in writing, others should as well. Shaun noted there was also a MassDOT panel and hearing, with support coming from the Governor. Additional discussion included mention of a $10M House addition for dirt and gravel roads in their supplemental budget. There was a question of how to get Senate support. Anne advised it would be good to submit support sooner than later; Linda will draft a letter and distribute.

PILOT study

Some members met to review the Auditor’s PILOT study. It was agreed that it is difficult to craft an equitable formula. Some discussion of the study mentioned working to quantify carbon sequestration as it relates to outdoor recreation and that we should consider where the baseline numbers for the formula are coming from.

Jared spoke of Sen. Comerford’s bill, ‘An Act to reform payments in lieu of taxes for state-owned land’ (S.1939/H.3032), and noted it implements recommendations from the 2020 report. Dan offered to share a Martha’s Vineyard study report regarding wetlands/salt marshes and other ecologies.

Review priority topics and bills

Mark shared FRCOG’s web page which lists all 12 RPAC priority topic areas and tracks individual bills. Linda said FRCOG does not have the capacity to monitor all the areas and needs to hand off at least 5 to others for development of letters of support, testimony or advocacy as needed. This will be reported back to RPAC. The distribution is:

* Climate: SRPEDD
* Economic Development: Shaun S.
* Farms/Ag: CMRPC
* Housing: CCC
* Water/Sewer/Stormwater: PVPC

MassTrack will show and notify Mark when hearings are scheduled, he will try to notify the relevant designee. Linda will send a reminder of who has been charged with what topic area, RPAs could try to set up reminders to check for legislative updates.

Senator Mark spoke about budget development. The Senate is crafting the budget based on 2% growth, looking at future investments in transportation and education. The House Speaker appears to be opposed to Ch. 70 revision and new MA-based taxes, so will rely on millionaire’s tax. Sen. Mark reiterated that there is a lot of uncertainty at the moment.

Rep. Blais said the surplus supplemental budget was passed by the house. It includes $10M for unpaved roads, and can fund vehicles such as grinders. Rep. Blais also requested continued submission of photos and stories of failing municipal buildings to support the Muni Building Authority bill.

**Susannah Hatch: Clean Energy Siting and Permitting**

Ms. Hatch presented on DOER’s Clean Energy Siting and permitting and SMART 3.0. She described the state’s climate goals, solar incentive updates, reforms to clean energy siting and permitting, and the timeline for these changes. Among other points, Ms. Hatch noted that clean energy needs will have a 50% higher peak by 2035, that SMART 3.0 will take developed land into consideration and siting and permitting changes will work to streamline and simplify processes. Following the creation of a new DOER division and stakeholder engagement, draft regulations will be completed by 3/1/2026. Regional Coordinators will be hired to work across the state.

**Adjourn: 12:05 pm ---Respectfully submitted by Trish Settles, RPAC Clerk**