**Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC)**

**In-person at FRCOG Offices & Via Zoom**

**April 14, 2023, 11:00 am**

**Minutes**

**Present:** Linda Dunlavy (FRCOG), Trish Settles (CMRPC), Jay Coburn (Cape Cod Commission/CDP), Wendy Hudson (NPEDC), Brian Bullock (At-Large), Helen Zincavage (SRPEDD/At-Large), Robert Malinn (DHCD), Thomas Matuszko (BRPC), Shaun Suhoski (MRPC), Kimberly Robinson (PVPC),

**Members Absent:** Sara Smiarowski (At-Large), Helena Fruscio Altsman (Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Designee), Bill Veno (MVC), Dave Christopolis (At-Large), Corinne Fitzgerald (Senate President Designee)

**Guests:** EOEHD Secretary Yvonne Hao; Undersecretary of Economic Foundations, Ashley Stolba; Andy Hogeland (MMA), Ethan Melad (CMRPC), James Fuccione (MA Healthy Aging); Katy Lacy (MHP), Corinne Cotyat (FRCOG Planner), Eric Weiss (PVPC), Pat Beaudry (PVPC)

1. **Welcome and introductions:** Linda Dunlavy, Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM.
2. **Approve minutes of 2/10/2023:** Motion to approve minutes by Jay Coburn, seconded by Tom Matuszko. **Motion passed unanimously.**
3. The meeting began prior to the arrival of Secretary Hao and Undersecretary Stolba. Members discussed the job description for the position of Director of Rural Affairs. Many agreed that the job will be difficult without additional support, and discussed what aspects of the job description are more or less important. As an example, grant-writing should not be a primary duty. Some discussion of job office location as it relates to attracting applicants as well as ability to adequately interface with rural communities. Shaun mentioned discussing support infrastructure and reporting chain at the next STAM meeting.

**Secretary Hao and Undersecretary Stolba joined** the meeting at approximately 11:15am. Both expressed their thanks for the invitation and excitement to be working on these issues. Initial discussion revolved around the position of Director of Rural Affairs. Sec. Hao commented that the position will be one person working within the cabinet but will actively collaborate with other offices. Linda mentioned it would be beneficial for the position to have offices in both Eastern and Western parts of the State for better access to resources. Sec. Hao hopes that position could be filled by someone from a rural area, and that they will be spending time on the ground in rural communities. Andy mentioned that job location (Boston) is an issue for candidate recruitment. Undersec. Stolba will look at editing the description. Trish asked about the involvement of the position with grants and opportunities like One Stop. They responded that the position will be involved, but acknowledged there will be limitations. It is understood that Rural Fund & One Stop are a result of input from communities and RPAs.

There was further discussion of the hiring timeline, interviewing, review, as well as position’s involvement with the Housing secretariat.

Sec. Hao described the ‘3 Pillars of Economic Development’ which include Economic Foundations, Economic Strategies, and Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation.

There was some discussion of how the ‘Pillars’ work with each other, as well as future opportunities for rural communities (Transformative Development Initiative (TDI)-type program) as well as the House budget. Additionally, discussion included mention of the need to focus on inequities, ensuring economic development plans to take population loss into account, as well as work to stem population losses.

Everyone was grateful for their engagement with the RPAC. Jay noted this was the first time an EOHED Secretary has met with the RPAC.

Secretary Hao and Undersecretary Stolba posed for a picture with the group and then left.

1. **Follow up discussion** included a commitment to continue to push for an **OFFICE** of Rural Policy, desire that the new hire will attend RPAC meetings, and desire that then new office will be expanded. Related to the involvement of RPAC in the hiring process, Linda will request that RPAC be represented in the decision-making process.
2. **Discuss Legislation, Policies, Priorities and Other Items**Some discussion of document and formatting of priorities list, which is being distributed to legislators and municipalities. Trish described the RCAP/Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts’ private well water testing legislation. Possible topics for the next meeting: private wells, Title V.

All agreed that the Fair Share letter is acceptable as written. RPAC now has access to Instatrac legislation tracking software.

FY24 budget priorities discussed: OFFICE of Rural Policy, Small Town Development Fund, Transit, SAPHE 2.0, and UGGA.

Corinne mentioned that the House is at $10M for rural, would fully fund regional transportation.

1. **Rural Policy Plan Addendum**

Tom submitted an Expression of Interest to Community One Stop Program to support the Rural Policy Plan Update. This is a competitive grant program that will require broad outreach and engagement. We expect to request $75k. $50k would cover consultants, and $25k would be split across the RPAs. Tom will send out templates for letters of support to all the RPAs in the RPAC as well as MARPA.

1. **Term renewals:** These are in progress and have been sent to the Governor’s office. There was some discussion of future members and commission makeup. Attendees thought it was worth considering tribal and agricultural community representation, and to consider racial, ethnic, and age diversity. Linda will send a letter to Senate President for Senate President Designee.
2. **Last stop for Smithsonian exhibit:** Athol, June 12
3. **Future meeting topics and guest presentations:**

* Title V
* Private wells
* Secretariats
* Climate Chief
* DEP & Wells concurrently?

**Next meeting: June 9, 11-1**

**Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 12:45 pm.**

Minutes respectfully submitted,

Ethan Melad, CMRPC, on behalf of Trish Settles, CMRPC, RPAC Clerk