



Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC)

Virtual Zoom Meeting

December 9, 2022

Minutes

Present: Linda Dunlavy (FRCOG), Trish Settles (CMRPC), Jay Coburn (Cape Cod Commission/CDP), Shaun Suhoski (MRPC), Wendy Hudson (NPEDC), Brian Bullock (At-Large), Helen Zincavage (SRPEDD/At-Large), Kimberly Robinson (PVPC), Bill Veno (MVPC),

Members Absent: Thomas Matuszko (BRPC), Corinne Fitzgerald (Senate President Designee), Sara Smiarowski (At-Large), Dave Christopolis (At-Large), Helena Fruscio Altsman (Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Designee), Rep. Paul Mark (Speaker of the House Designee).

Guests: Winton Pitcoff (MA Food System Collaborative), James Fuccione (MA Healthy Aging Collaborative), Tom Hutcheson (STAM, Dalton), Andy Hogeland (MMA), Pat Beaudry (PVPC), Miguel Martinez, Ethan Melad (CMRPC)

1. **Welcome and introductions:** Linda Dunlavy, Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:03 PM.
2. **Approve minutes of 9/23/22 & 11/17/22:** Deferred until next meeting
3. **Discuss & prioritize legislative and new administration agenda**
 - a. RPAC Partner Priorities - discussion with Winston Pitcoff of MA Food System Collaborative, James Fuccione of MA Healthy Aging, Andy Hogeland of MMA, and Jay Coburn Board member of MA CDC

Winton discussed the MA Food System Collab's priorities, which include: Farmland preservation through constitutional change of Ch. 61A to remove acreage limitation (Rep. Schmid, Sen. Comerford), land protection by allowing MDAR to hold land (part of omnibus - Rep. Blais), PFAS testing considerations for thresholds/regulations as related to land rather than water (Sen. Comerford), food waste donation tax credit (Rep. Kane, Sen. Comerford), agricultural equity bill refile (Blais/Comerford), Food Systems Literacy bill. 'Act to enhance agricultural operations' and Act relative to Ag. disaster relief' did not make it to omnibus and will be refiled. The Omnibus bill is a top priority, as it will take care of many issues, and Winton will keep RPAC informed.

James discussed a number of health and health equity work and priorities: Mass Broadband Institute is working on the State Broadband Equity Plan; ways to enhance services for elderly in

rural/remote areas through change in licensing requirements and creating incentives for companies to service those populations; tax credit for care givers and credits for spouses who act as caregivers (Rep. Peake).

Andy gave an overview of MMA rural priorities and those which overlap: Rural ARPA spending; municipal building authority with dedicated funding; addressing rural school funding; addressing regional school transportation costs; Ch. 90 - changes to formula to account for rural issues, possibly by requiring any funding over 200M to be allocated only by road miles rather than full range of metrics (would Rep. Pignatelli be a champion for this?); increased funding for bridges and culverts; increased PILOT funding; new program, possibly similar to DLTA, to fund town planning/engineering/design.

Thanks all around to the guests.

b. Review list of Rural Caucus refilings

- Act relative to a Rural Policy Commission
- PILOT
- SAPHE 2.0
- Act relative to Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) (Rep Mark - unsure of refile status) - rural model like TDI for Gateway Cities. FRCOG received E&R grant to pilot a program (18-month grant). They are curious if the bill would be viable while initial pilot is still running, or better to try when success can be reported?
- Rural jobs bill being re-written
- Act modernizing student transportation
- Rural schools' omnibus bill - incorporate transportation?
- Gravel & unpaved roads
- HERO act (housing/climate/resiliency)
- Transfer tax bill
 - o possible merger w/ HERO?

Linda spoke about creating a white paper outlining the need for an Office of Rural Policy to bring to the new administration. Linda mentioned Rep. Peake recommended limiting number of priorities. It was discussed and agreed that Linda will send out list of bills for members to rank top 5.

4. Review and discuss possible Rural Policy Plan Addendum

The Plan did not list towns. The Addendum or Update should include discussion on the following: impacts of COVID, 2020 census data, recently released reports on rural communities.

In future meetings we will discuss the process, public engagement, division of work, costs, etc.

There was some discussion of when/how to do the update. The RPAs may use DLTA like last time. Tom has gotten pushback - the state should fund this. Linda will bring up at MARPA.

Additional Discussion:

Discussion of RPAC member appointments: All but one member needs reappointment. Reach out to Baker admin before end of term, or wait until Healy is seated in the Governor's Office? Brian commented that asking Baker may look like trying to jam reappointment through. It was agreed that in order to move quickly, RPA designees will be requested for reappointment now, and then the reach out to new administration for at-large members. Linda will ask for reappointment of RPAs and Helen (SRPEDD).

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 3:37pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted,

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