



Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC)
Hybrid Meeting Zoom and In-Person at the
Essex Historical Society and Shipbuilding Museum
66, 28 Main St, Essex, MA 01929
September 23, 2022 1:30pm
Meeting Minutes

Attending:

- Bill Veno (MVC Representative),
- Dave Christopolis (At-Large Representative, Hilltown CDC),
- Helen Zincavage (SRPEDD Representative)
- Kim Robinson (PVPC Representative),
- Linda Dunlavy (FRCOG Representative and Chair),
- Shaun Suhoski (MRPC Representative, Athol Town Manager, STAM Liaison),
- Trish Settles (CMRPC Representative),
- Wendy Hudson (NPEDC representative),

Absent:

- Brian Bullock (At-Large)
- Corinne Fitzgerald (Senate President Designee),
- Helena Fruscio Altsman (Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Designee),
- Jay Coburn (Cape Cod Commission Representative, Vice Chair),
- Judy Terry (PVPC representative),
- Rep. Paul Mark (Speaker of the House Designee),
- Sara Smiarowski (At-Large),
- Thomas Matuszko (BRPC Representative)

Guests: Corinne Coryat (FRCOG and Aid to Rep. Natalie Blais)

- 1. Welcome and introductions:** Linda Dunlavy, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:35pm.
- 2. The Minutes.** A quorum of members was not in attendance and therefore a vote to accept the minutes was tabled until the next meeting.
- 3.** This meeting to prepare for the next legislative session. Some of the discussion is highlighted below.

The next legislative session Starts in January. We want to get the RPAC asks for leg filing by November and then look for sponsors. To do a better job of tracking priorities, we discussed assigning an RPAC member to follow select priorities. There was also discussion of acquiring a software program/application that would assist us in tracking the progress of legislation. One such program is called Insta Trac. Linda will look into 4costs and possible funding for such an

Those present discussed the legislative priorities in 2 tiers. Some of the current and previous priorities include the following:

- Establishment of an Office of Rural Policy
- PILOT payment formula
- Chap 90
- School funding formula
- Municipal building authority
- Water and Sewer Infrastructure
- Rural Equity and Competitiveness
- Dirt and Gravel Road
- Chapter 70
- Additional
- Mass works and a Rurality formula
- Bridges
- Culvert replacement
- Rural Transformative Development Initiative (TDI)

The Economic Development Bill may not go any further because of tax refunds

There was additional discussion regarding evening out the population demographics across the Commonwealth, encouraging migration to rural areas, the need housing, the need for supportive infrastructure. Top concerns around population decline in rural MA is the subsequent school enrollment decline, which negative affects school funding though the funding needs in rural schools remain high regardless of the enrollment. Our rural communities need to create a welcoming environment around diversity and population growth. The RPAC should support a statewide growth management strategy as a vision that supports RPAC goals.

The question of what happened to the Resilient Lands Initiative, a statewide land use strategy that began prior to the pandemic was raised. Trish will follow up.

8 bills were filed last session. Is tracking 11 or 12 bills manageable? Do we deemphasize the Office of Rural Policy and place more emphasis on other topics/items/bills/initiatives mentioned above. We should evaluate why some bills moved forward and adjust our strategies or minimize our effort. We should celebrate our successes. We will, through Shaun, share our list with STAM, and seek to engage rural communities at the MMA convention.

Dave reminded us that we should place more energy on food systems, an Office of Rural Health, ARPA 2, Rural Jobs Bill, Climate Change

We should meet with the Legislative Rural Caucus in November. Traveling to the Smithsonian exhibits may prove to be difficult to plan around. Maybe we should send an RPAC rep to each but not meet as the RPAC, since that will likely necessitate a hybrid meeting, which would be difficult.

Dave suggests that we make more use of social media.

4. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 3:32 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted,
Trish Settles, CMRPC, RPAC Clerk