



**APPROVED – MINUTES
NASHUA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
Held via Zoom
March 17, 2021**

Members Present:

Susan Ruch, Amherst	Tim Berry, Mont Vernon
Tamara Sorell, Brookline	Janet Langdell, Milford
Robert Larmouth, Hollis	Sarah Marchant, Nashua
James Battis, Hudson	Dave Hennessey, Pelham
Kim Queenan, Litchfield	Hal Lynde, Pelham
Burton Reynolds, Lyndeborough	Peter Howd, Wilton
Karin Elmer, Merrimack	Kermit Williams, Wilton
Tim Tenhave, Merrimack	

Others Present:

William Rose, NHDOT
Robin LeBlanc, Plan NH
Jack Madden, Nashua Rail Transit
Comm

Staff Present:

Jay Minkarah, Executive Director
Sara Siskavich, Assistant Director
Gregg Lantos, Principal Transportation Planner/MPO Coor.

Matt Waitkins, Senior Transportation Planner
Kate Lafond, Business Manager

Welcome and Introductions

Ruch opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m. A roll call attendance was conducted.

Privilege of the Floor

No members of the public wished to speak.

Approval of Minutes – December 16th, 2020

Battis noted that Venu’s presentation needs to be linked as stated in the draft minutes. Larmouth commented in the last paragraph, “electronic” should be changed to electric. Tenhave noted that “Hench” should be spelled Hinch.

Battis motioned to approve as amended with a second from Tenhave

THAT the minutes of December 16th, 2020, be approved as amended and placed on file. A roll call vote was conducted. Peter Howd and Kermit Williams abstained.

The motion **carried**.

Robin H. LeBlanc, Executive Director, Plan NH: Municipal Technical Assistance Grant (MTAG) Program

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Minkarah introduced LeBlanc, Executive Director of Plan NH who was present to discuss a grant opportunity available. Minkarah added that Plan NH is a great organization that contributes to planning in New Hampshire. LeBlanc explained that Plan NH is an independent organization of and for NH communities as well as the planners, designers, and builders who shape them. LeBlanc went on to describe the Municipal Technical Assistance Grant Program (MTAG). The MTAG addresses the expanding need for places to live. The program is funded by NH Housing and is administered by Plan NH in partnership with UNH Coop Extension. The program has a Board of Advisors who help shape the program, review applications, interview applicants, and champion the program throughout the state.

LeBlanc informed the commission that the MTAG is for any incorporated NH municipality. Awards range from \$5,000 to \$25,000 and are to be used for hiring planning consultants to assist with identifying the community needs with regards to places to live, review zoning and propose new zoning to address the community's needs. There is a 15% cash or in-kind match. Grant disbursements are reimbursements, simple monthly reporting, and community participation is required.

12 NH communities have already participated in the MTAG to date. LeBlanc continued to describe the process for submitting the applications which can take approximately 18 months. There is no deadline, but the community must demonstrate readiness for the process. LeBlanc directed people to visit plannh.org for more information and to reach out if they have a possible project in mind.

Tenhaven asked if Plan NH helps drive a project after the zoning changes are implemented. LeBlanc stated unfortunately not. The program helps facilitate the zoning changes to expanded housing options. Williams thanked LeBlanc for all that Plan NH does. Williams added that the community involvement and engagement are great and asked if there is a way for a larger demographic in the community to be engaged. LeBlanc noted that is a part of UNH Coop's role in this grant program process, adding that the goal is to maximize engagement. Madden noticed that 4 of the communities that have been awarded MTAG funds have passenger rail and asked if there is a correlation between intercity passenger rail and MTAG grant applications. LeBlanc believed it to be coincidental.

MPO Policy Committee

Approval of Minutes – Special MPO Policy Committee, February 24, 2021

Tenhaven motioned to approve as written with a second from Battis

THAT the minutes of the February 24, 2021, Special MPO Policy Committee meeting, be approved as written and placed on file. A roll call vote was conducted. Tim Berry, Hal Lynde, and Kermit Williams abstained.

The motion **carried**.

State of New Hampshire FY 2023 to 2032 Ten Year Transportation Plan project proposals

Lantos presented a table of projects and conveyed that the list of projects was previously presented at the December MPO meeting, then the list was transmitted to NHDOT for their engineering review that resulted in 2 issues. The first was the Brookline project at the intersection of NH 13 and Mason Road the DOT cost estimate came back substantially larger than the municipal estimate so it had to be

removed. Lantos explained that low-cost alternatives were discussed with the town and NHDOT and through the TYP it will be asked that this project be taken up as an alternative funding program. The second issue was with the Merrimack pedestrian bridge over the Souhegan River, the initial comment has concerns with the launch location. Lantos explained that discussion with the town and NHDOT resulted in a revised comment that the design process should include an alternative analysis that considers all options. With the changes, adjustments were made to fully utilize the regional funding allocation. Lantos noted that Wilton has submitted their TYP project as a transportation alternative program. If selected under that program would free up TYP funds for other projects.

Williams motioned with a second from Sorell

THAT the presented list of projects be transmittal to NHDOT. A roll call vote was conducted. William Rose abstained

The motion **carried**.

CSX Acquisition of Pan Am Railways: status update and discussion of NRPC comment as an interested party

Minkarah noted that CSX has proposed to purchase Pam Am Railroad and we do have some interest in the future of the rail lines such as the capital corridor project, addressing safety concerns, and the restoration/expansion of freight. CSX has filed for approval with the surface transportation board. There will be an opportunity for public input. Minkarah asked whether it makes sense for NRPC to provide a comment. Ruch thinks it is great that this is on the agenda and would like NRPC to register as an interested party so that we receive notification of all filings. Ruch touched on some benefits of rail that are important to the region. Williams noted that there is an active line in Wilton and the operator has had difficulties dealing with Pam Am, so he is thrilled about the possibility of an active and engaged operator. Williams echoed several of the benefits of rail and added that keeping rail is a high priority in Wilton. Langdell asked if Minkarah reached out to Bennington railroad. Minkarah stated that he had not but noted that it was a good idea. Berry agreed that NRPC should file as an interested party. Marchant & Hennessey echoed everyone's comments particularly the safety concerns of the current rail. Madden talked about the most recent derailment and the support for this merger, there is much support, but MassDOT is opposed as it stands now. Ruch described the merger process for those present. Tenhave asked if other properties were included in this merger. Minkarah stated that he was unsure but believes there to be easements involved. Langdell clarified the NRPC is just an interested party with no opinion at this point. Minkarah confirmed this.

TAP Grant Applications

Waitkins presented the proposed transportation alternatives program, 7 communities in the region submitted letters of intent. Waitkins reviewed the projects proposed, totaling approximately \$4.7 million in federal funds. There are approximately \$5.4 federal funds available. Statewide 43 letters of intent were submitted to NHDOT totaling approximately \$29.6 million so this is a very competitive program. Waitkins previewed the review and approval schedule provided by NHDOT.

Transportation Project Updates

Lantos noted that NRPC is in the home stretch for completing the Interregional Transit Study, Congestion Management Process, and the Regional Bicycle Pedestrian Plan. Upcoming RSMS

projects in Lyndeborough and Merrimack will commence in the spring. In the next UPWP cycle, we will be working on the FEE Turnpike Exit 12 study, delayed from 2020 due to COVID-19.

Project Updates

Regional COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan

Minkarah reviewed the project scope of the grant awarded by the EDA for a Regional COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan. Key areas include leveraging regional opportunity zones, fostering entrepreneurship, and relaunching/redefining retail, service, and hospitality. Minkarah added that they will be forming a steering committee to guide this process. The study also includes GIS and community outreach work.

General Updates

Minkarah updated that the non-profit has been registered with the State of NH and filed for 501(c)3 with the IRS. Minkarah added that there is one more filing with the Attorney Generals' office as well and went on to discuss the board composition. There are two open members at large seats to be filled.

Commissioners Roundtable

Milford – Langdell informed that voters in Milford voted down the match to two sidewalk projects.

Hudson – Battis noted that the town just had town meeting, everything was approved except the general fund and the rehabilitation of the high school.

Merrimack – Tenhave indicated that they just wrapped up their deliberative session and town voting will be held in April. Merrimack is trying to shut down Saint-Gobain. Tenhave also commented that Merrimack is experiencing an increased use in recreation and conservation areas but a reduction in volunteers to maintain those areas and wondered if other towns were experiencing the same. A few towns raised their hands indicating similar experiences.

Litchfield – Queenan thanked NRPC for helping update the master plan and capital improvements plan. Queenan added that on Rt 3A there is a proposal for a 64-unit multifamily housing. Queenan also informed that she and her husband will be opening a vineyard on Rt 3A as well.

Amherst – Ruch noted that because of COVID the deliberative and town election have been delayed to May and June.

Wilton – Williams commented that affordable and available housing is a real issue in NH he would like to see NRPC more involved in housing in our region. Wilton's largest employer is closing this will create a vacant mill building, looking to have someone turn it into housing. Williams thinks this would be great for Wilton and the region.

Mont Vernon - Berry stated that town meeting dates will be the 2nd Tuesday and 2nd Saturday in June. NRPC will be helping the town with revising its wetland ordinance.

Brookline - Sorell echoed Williams comments regarding affordable and available housing, noting that there is local vitriol regarding workforce housing and petition warrant articles which is contrary to what we are all trying to do here and perhaps a violation of the workforce housing statute.

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Pelham – Hennessey noted that there is a 90+ workforce housing project proposed in Pelham. He is a proponent of workforce housing and feels the town ZBA's are a bit abandoned by the state in part by the distraction of COVID but there is no guidance from the state.

Pelham – Lynde informed that the town has an active forestry committee and has acquired about 2000 acres of conservation land with great trail systems. A subcommittee has been appointed to help maintain the trails. Lynde continued that the town meeting results were favorable including school renovations. There is also one bridge project left and it is in process. Also, two major intersections have major backups during rush hour, the state is contributing nothing financially to these but is holding up the approval. Lynde added that the town is also in the process of updating the master plan.

Lyndeborough – Reynolds noted that things are quiet, but the budget was down so everything passed at the town meeting.

Nashua – Marchant commented that the city's budget is in a difficult place this year, but things are rock n rolling which is helping to offset the tax base. There are or will be two new faces, one is Matt Sullivan the new Planning Director for the city and there will be a new Transit Administrator to replace Camille Pattison. Marchant noted that the master plan update community outreach component has been going very well despite COVID.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn was made by Tenhave with a second from Lynde. The meeting ended at 9:00 p.m. The next Commission meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 17th, 2021, at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jay Minkarah, Executive Director