

New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commissions

Summary Minutes

Meeting of February 4, 2016

I. Call to Order

Chairman Glenn Coppelman called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. He welcomed Barbara Robinson as the newly appointed Executive Director of North Country Council. Members introduced themselves as follows.

Tim Murphy, Larry Robinson, Elaine Levlocke (Southwest RPC); Nate Miller (Upper Valley Lake Sunapee RPC); Cynthia Copeland, Kenn Ortmann (Strafford RPC); Glenn Coppelman, Tim Moore (Rockingham RPC); Jeff Hayes, Bob Snelling (Lakes RPC); Tim Roache, Mike Fimbel (Nashua RPC); Barbara Robinson, Glenn English (North Country Council); Becky Baldwin (staff).

II. Minutes of January 14, 2016 Meeting

The minutes of January 14, 2016 were approved as submitted by unanimous vote.

III. 2016 Legislative Session

A. Legislative Review Process

Chairman Coppelman reviewed the events of the last NHARPC meeting where the group conducted discussion regarding the importance of developing an agreed upon legislative review process to assist in the review of proposed bills put forward for the 2016 Legislative Session. He noted that Kenn Ortmann and Tim Murphy agreed to draft a legislative review process that would be brought to this meeting for further discussion and consideration. He added that the draft had been distributed for review by the NHARPC membership prior to today's meeting and he had received written comments concerning the draft from both Jeff Hayes and Cliff Sinnott. Jeff Hayes stressed the importance of having a legislative review process that will serve as a strategic thinking document that will assist the Association in speaking with a unified voice.

Kenn Ortmann explained that it has always been a struggle for the Association to represent the various philosophies of the individual RPCs noting that if we take too long to respond, we lose the opportunity to be effective. He went on to outline the process of commenting on legislation explaining that if there is a strong consensus among the membership to take a stand on a piece of legislation, either a member is identified to write a letter expressing the desire of the group, or our legislative consultant is instructed to attend the hearing and sign-in on our behalf. Jeff Hayes questioned if correspondence should come back before the membership prior to being submitted. Kenn Ortmann noted that when he was Chairman, correspondence would go to staff to be formatted and then sent to him for final review and signature. They would then either go back to the writer of the letter if they planned to testify at a hearing, or be forwarded to our legislative consultant to bring to the hearing on our behalf. He added that due to the timing on most legislative actions there would not be time to bring correspondence back to the entire group and still be able to meet the deadline to weigh in. Tim Murphy agreed noting that the number of people involved in the review of correspondence prior to it being submitted provides a level of safeguarding and due to the time it would take to bring letters back to the entire Association, in many cases we would miss our opportunity to comment. Kenn Ortmann thanked Tim Murphy for doing the

heavy lifting in creating the draft document and noted that the concept behind the document is to emphasize the educational aspect based upon priorities identified in the Granite State Future document created by all nine of the RPCs. He added that over the years legislators have come to respect our opinions and we want to continue that reputation.

Tim Murphy noted that creating a specific legislative review process has been something that we have postponed for several years. He added that this is a document that will be read by others including those that want to know what the Association is all about. He noted the importance of reviewing all of the bills but emphasized that we need to be strategic on the number we choose to take a stand on. He agreed that given our purview as regional planners is broad, there are numerous bills that pertain to us in one way or another and we need to be disciplined in determining when a bill lies at the core of our purpose and functions. Tim Murphy explained that the Granite State Future document was used as the substantive basis in developing the draft Legislative Policies attached to the draft Legislative Review Process. He noted that if there were a need to refine them further, a set of legislative priorities could be created on a periodic basis such as annually. He explained that we not only have a responsibility to become familiar with various bill text but we also need to consider where our partners fall in regard to bills that pertain specifically to them prior to commenting. Kenn Ortmann agreed noting this is easier to accomplish if we limit the number of bills we comment on. Tim Murphy noted that unlike NHMA we do not have a full time legal staff but we do have a level of expertise that could benefit legislators in making their decisions. He added that we have been criticized in the past for taking positions particularly since we are not elected officials. He pointed out that there are certain circumstances when we may need to take on a stronger role than one of education, especially when a potential bill makes direct reference to RPCs or effects the core functions and purposes of regional planning commissions.

Motion: To endorse the NHARPC Legislative Review Process and Legislative Policies.

Motion by Kenn Ortmann, seconded by Larry Robinson. Chairman Coppelman opened up the floor for discussion.

Tim Roache noted that NRPC only takes positions on bills that effect regional planning and added that he likes the idea of taking on a more educational role as well as basing the Legislative Policies on the Granite State Future document that was created by all of the RPCs.

Cynthia Copeland noted that she appreciates the effort that was put into creating both of the draft documents. She suggested that to avoid possible negative feedback the title of the attachment should be Legislative Guidelines rather than Legislative Policies. In addition she suggested a couple of grammatical edits.

Nate Miller noted that it is easy to say we need to cut back on bills but questioned that may not always be possible. He suggested that the legislative policy sub-committee should have more members noting that with only four people to review all the proposed legislation they chose to err on the side of identifying any bills that looked like they might pertain to us. Glenn English noted that the bills can always be narrowed in number when the entire group begins reviewing the legislative policy sub-committee report. Nate Miller expressed concern that although he understands the concept of providing an education, execution is also important regarding the use of our time. He noted that if we only provide broad and vague statements regarding legislation, our testimony may have no real value. Nate Miller questioned what is meant by “core functions” since to him it sounds like unless legislation specifically refers to RSA 36 or the regional planning commissions we won’t take a position. Tim Murphy explained that he felt that the particular wording “core functions and purpose” made it less restrictive rather than more restrictive. He went on to note that we can take a stance on legislation rather than a position and focus on educating why a particular bill has merit or may create a problem or unintended outcome. It was agreed that our friendly amendment to HB 1439 would be considered a stance rather than a position.

Glenn English noted that if we don't like using the language saying that we support or oppose a bill, we can always change the terminology to comment. He added that at the public hearings most legislators only want to hear if you support or oppose a bill. Larry Robinson asked if you could sign-in to speak about a bill rather than support or oppose it. Kenn Ortmann explained that the only options when signing in are "support" or "oppose" and "educate" is not an option. Glenn English asked how state agencies sign-in and was told that they are usually asked to come testify rather than having to sign-in. As an aside, Kenn Ortmann noted that any correspondence being submitted on a bill should include the wording "as currently written".

Bob Snelling noted that our towns are going through the same trauma we are in having to review 700 bills that may or may not affect them. He noted that as an Association it would be helpful to make them aware of our activities and suggested sending them copies of any letters that we may develop through our legislative review process.

The titles of the documents were discussed and it was agreed to change them to NHARPC Legislation Review Process and Legislation Review Guidelines respectively.

Nate Miller suggested that the fourth bullet on the NHARPC Legislation Review Process under the heading "Review of legislative initiatives" be changed to replace the wording "otherwise at the very core of the" with "determined by NHARPC to affect the". Those in attendance agreed with the suggestion.

Larry Robinson noted that this will become a living document that can be amended in the future. Jeff Hayes agreed observing that this helps us to move away from the perception of bordering on lobbying.

Kenn Ortmann agreed to change his motion to include the suggestions for the grammatical edits, document name changes and the changing of the fourth bullet. Larry Robinson agreed to accept these changes in his second of the motion.

Chairman Coppelman explained that we are voting to adopt the draft versions of the documents as presented, incorporating the suggestions that were agreed to by Kenn Ortmann who made the original motion and Larry Robinson who seconded the original motion.

Motion approved by unanimous vote.

Chairman Coppelman asked staff to provide a final version of the documents to the membership once the approved modifications have been made.

B. Legislative Sub-Committee Report

Nate Miller pointed out that many of the bills identified on the legislative sub-committee's report have already been ITL'd or defeated and it would be helpful to work from an updated listing. As an example he noted that HB 1119, relative to the maximum optional fee for transportation improvements charged by municipalities when collecting motor vehicle registration fees, received positive testimony at the hearing and a favorable vote of 8-7 at the executive session, but was defeated 176-135 on the House floor. Tim Murphy pointed out that we rely heavily on our legislative consultant, who is unable to be with us today, to provide reports on the status of various pieces of legislation. He added that the primary purpose of today's meeting was to finalize the Legislative Review Process document. Chairman Coppelman asked if we would be in a position to meet again next week to further discuss proposed legislation. Those in attendance agreed to meet next Thursday (2/11/16) following the executive director's meeting. Tim Murphy noted that staff would contact Nancy Johnson to confirm whether she can attend the meeting and provide us with an updated bill tracking sheet based on the legislative sub-committee's report. Cynthia Copeland asked that HB 1551 be added to the list for consideration. Chairman Coppelman noted that he

had signed the Association letter regarding HB1439 and that Cliff Sinnott presented it on behalf of the Association at the hearing which was held yesterday.

C. Legislative Breakfast - February 17, 2016

Tim Murphy reported that the legislative breakfast has been scheduled for February 17th from 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. in the State House cafeteria. He noted that each RPC will have a table that they can use to showcase projects in their region. He added that the NHPA will be joining us for the event as they have in the past. It was suggested that the executive directors discuss this event at their next meeting so they can coordinate on what topics each of them will feature. Cynthia Copeland suggested that each RPC send an invitation to the event to their individual legislators. Tim Murphy agreed that personal invitations to the legislators helps to improve attendance.

D. Legislative Coordination

Tim Murphy noted that in the past NHARPC has coordinated with NHPA, NHMA, and OEP regarding sharing of information on legislative matters and, although nothing has ever been formalized, suggested we might want to encourage the continuation of this activity. He added that he has spoken with representatives from both NHPA and NHMA and they have expressed an interest in meeting on a periodic basis for the purpose of coordination. Those in attendance felt that this would be a good idea and Tim Murphy volunteered to coordinate with Chairman Coppelman and Vice-Chairman Ortmann to identify dates that would work.

IV. NHARPC 2016 Annual Commissioner's Meeting

It was noted that the Annual Commissioner's Meeting has been scheduled for May 12, 2016. Kenn Ortmann expressed concern that a venue has not been identified for the meeting as yet and volunteered to contact Bob Jaffin regarding this event. Cynthia Copeland advised that due to his schedule Bob Jaffin has reduced his involvement with Association activities. Tim Murphy suggested that we might want to consider holding the event at the same venue we did last year. Those in attendance agreed with the suggestion and Jeff Hayes volunteered to contact the facility and have them get in touch with Becky Baldwin to work on the logistics.

V. Next Meeting

Chairman Coppelman noted that as discussed earlier in the meeting, the next NHARPC meeting will take place at 1:00 p.m. on February 11th. The agenda for that meeting will focus on the 2016 Legislative Session and the 2016 Annual Commissioner's Meeting.

VI. Other Matters

Mike Fimbel asked what the status was regarding our request that an amendment be made to HB 377 that would allow for RPC representation on a Commission to study the creation of a state geographic information system office and geographic information officer. Tim Murphy noted that Nancy Johnson informed us previously that she had spoken with the bill's sponsor who was amenable to the suggestion. He noted that staff will contact Nancy Johnson and ask her to provide an update at the next meeting.

Cynthia Copeland brought to the attention of the Association, HB 1551 that is sponsored by a legislator in her area.

VII. Public Comment

No public comments were made at this time.

IX. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca I. Baldwin
On behalf of NHARPC