

# **New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commissions**

## **Summary Minutes**

Meeting of January 14, 2016

### **I. Call to Order**

Chairman Glenn Coppelman called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. Members introduced themselves as follows.

Mike Tardiff (Central RPC); Tim Murphy, Larry Robinson, Elaine Levlocke (Southwest RPC); David Preece, Jack Munn, Peter Griffin (Southern NH PC); Nate Miller (Upper Valley Lake Sunapee RPC); Cynthia Copeland, Kenn Ortmann (Strafford RPC); Cliff Sinnott, Glenn Coppelman, Tim Moore (Rockingham RPC); Jeff Hayes, Bob Snelling (Lakes RPC); Tim Roache, Mike Fimbel (Nashua RPC); Becky Baldwin (staff).

Guests: Nancy Johnson (Legislative Consultant), Kate Epsen (NH Sustainable Energy Association).

### **II. Minutes of December 10, 2015 Meeting**

Mike Fimbel asked that the minutes be changed under the discussion topic for January meeting to say the "Little Blue Bus". The minutes of December 10, 2015 were approved as amended by unanimous vote with David Preece, Tim Roache and Tim Moore abstaining.

### **III. Featured Topic - Energy Cap and Group Net Metering**

David Preece explained that early last year Southern RPC partnered with Kate Epsen from the NH Sustainable Energy Association to promote and encourage the installation of solar power at residential and business facilities. He noted that it was a very successful project and asked Jack Munn to provide additional information. Jack Munn explained that although the Solar Up NH initiative focused on the Southern RPC region they are considering applying for another round of funding so they can expand outside of the region to include Rockingham, Southwest, and Nashua RPC communities. Jack Munn noted that Kate Epsen was instrumental in developing the project web site and assisted with outreach materials. Over 1,000 visits were made to the website and generated 655 site visits by solar installers in seven communities. Of this number 155 resulted in signed contracts. Southern RPC has already received feedback from 12 communities that would like to participate in the next round. He spoke about a program conducted in the Upper Valley region that involved 26 communities. Kenn Ortmann asked what the reasons were for those that didn't sign solar contracts and Jack Munn responded that either trees were an obstacle, roof structures were not sufficient, or there were financing problems. Kate Epsen gave an in depth presentation on net metering noting that it applies to any renewable technology and not just solar. The use of net metering began in NH in 1988 and by definition is when one or more customers of the same distribution utility agree to share utility payments for any excess electrical generation. She noted that municipalities are allowed to combine their efforts to become part of the same group. Mike Fimbel asked if Historic Districts are allowed to participate and Kate Epsen responded that it depends upon the setup of the district. Nate Miller noted that there are a lot of proposed bills in this legislative session concerning net metering. Kate Epsen explained that SB 333 and HB 1116 are identical bills and are the important ones to watch as well as HB 1483 regarding community energy. She noted that she has additional information in the form of a powerpoint that she will share with Chairman Coppelman so it can

be distributed to the group. Chairman Coppelman noted that the Nashua RPC has agreed to do our next featured topic on the Souhegan Valley Transportation Collaborative known as the “Little Blue Bus”.

#### **IV. NHARPC 2016 Annual Commissioner’s Meeting Update**

Nate Miller reported that the NHARPC 2016 Annual Commissioner’s Meeting sub-committee has been discussing plans for the event and suggest that this year’s meeting be focused on strategic planning for the future. It is envisioned that the event will take place from 3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and a proposed agenda would include opening remarks, small breakout sessions that would focus on a SWOT analysis of the RPCs, a full group discussion that explores where we want to be five years from now, a social hour, and dinner followed by a guest speaker. It has been suggested that the guest speaker be newly appointed NH DOT Commissioner Victoria Sheehan.

Jeff Hayes reported that he has shared a letter he drafted with Bob Jaffin for his use in soliciting sponsors for the meeting. He pointed out that if we are successful in obtaining sponsors for the event, funds that had been budgeted could be utilized for something else such as creating an annual report. He added that Bob Jaffin plans to speak with Eversource who might be interested in being a major sponsor for the event. Jeff Hayes noted that typically if you have a major sponsor they are allowed to have a booth and speak to the audience at the event but he has been advised that this might be controversial due to Eversource’s connection with Northern Pass. Mike Tardiff noted that there are a lot of concerns with various energy proposals at present and we might want to avoid this being an issue at the annual meeting. Chairman Coppelman agreed noting that he knows North Country Council is acutely aware of the situation associated with Northern Pass. Tim Roache pointed out that some people might choose not to attend the event if it were being sponsored by Eversource due to these proposals. Tim Moore suggested that given the energy issues at hand it might be best to wait for another year to solicit sponsorship from Eversource. Cliff Sinnott noted that it might be less of an issue if they were one of many sponsors rather than the sole sponsor. Tim Murphy noted that the budget for the event this year did not factor in having sponsors. Jeff Hayes observed that \$4,000 is a lot to spend for a one day event and suggested that we should still try to solicit sponsors to offset the cost. Peter Griffin noted that having Eversource as one of many sponsors might be acceptable if they were not allowed to speak to the audience. Kenn Ortmann suggested that they could be asked not to mention Northern Pass at the event. Tim Murphy noted that this may simply be a bad year to solicit sponsorships from energy related organizations if it might affect attendance at our Annual Meeting. David Preece noted that if we plan to solicit sponsors it needs to be done soon since most need a 45 day turnaround to process a request. Jeff Hayes noted that his letter refers to different levels of sponsorship but it was agreed to keep it at one level and offer sponsors booth space and mention in the agenda packet materials. Mike Fimbel suggested contacting Auto Fair as a sponsor and have them feature electric or hybrid vehicles. Cliff Sinnott suggested contacting public organizations as potential sponsors such as NH Housing. It was agreed to focus on semi-public organizations to sponsor this year’s event.

#### **V. 2016 Legislative Session**

##### **A. Legislative Consultant Update**

Nancy Johnson reported that she participated in the legislative sub-committee meeting in which 70 proposed bills were identified to be brought to the attention of the Association. She added that hearings on proposed legislation have already begun and action has been taken on many of the bills that were identified by the sub-committee.

##### **B. Legislative Policies and Priorities**

It was agreed that, due to limited time availability, we would pass on this agenda item and take it up at a future meeting.

### C. Legislative Sub-Committee

Nate Miller reported that the legislative sub-committee reviewed 757 bills to determine those that the Association should consider supporting, opposing or watching. The sub-committee recommends that we support 29 bills, oppose 9 of them and watch the remaining 30 on their list. He suggested going through the list of recommendations and marking any that we want to go back to and discuss further. Nancy Johnson noted that HB 288, HB 294 were ITL'd, HB 606 has passed both the House and Senate, HB 613 was re-referred back to committee, SB 61 and SB 256 have an ITL pending status, SB 175 has been ITL'd, and SB 146 should pass so there is no need to keep them on the list.

Jeff Hayes questioned taking a position on any of the bills since the process should be to educate the legislators rather than lobby for a position. David Preece asked if the intent would be to flag all of the potential bills as "watch" and go back to our communities to see what stand they would like to see the Association take on particular bills. Nate Miller noted that if we were only going to watch bills what was the purpose of the sub-committee reviewing them. Cliff Sinnott pointed out that the RPCs have become a target in the past by either supporting or opposing certain pieces of legislation. Tim Murphy, speaking in the capacity of NHARPC staff, noted that the Association has been dancing around this issue for years and we need to address it head on. He stated that a re-occurring question has been whether it is appropriate for NHARPC to make black and white decisions to support or oppose legislation or should we focus on sharing our perspective on various legislation without going so far as taking a position. Bob Snelling pointed out that there are two kinds of legislation, those that specifically address us such as HB 1439 that need us to take action and others that we should make our communities aware of and get their feedback through our Commissioners as to what position they would like us to take. Cliff Sinnott suggested that rather than sending letters that support or oppose legislation we simply draw attention to the good and bad parts. Tim Murphy, again as NHARPC staff, acknowledged that approach as a possible option but also noted that we have been told in the past that letters like that have less value since legislators are often looking for a "yes" or "no" opinion. Nancy Johnson observed that several times legislators have asked her where the RPCs stand on different issues. Nate Miller questioned if there is any purpose in writing vague letters that don't take a stand on an issue. Jeff Hayes explained to the group that a couple of years ago the RPC Directors met with their counterparts in MA who choose not to take positions on legislation. He added that it is unfortunate if legislators won't pay attention to anything except a "yes" or "no" answer and pointed out that he is not authorized by his RPC to make those kinds of decisions on his own without their input. He noted that if we were to vote right now to support or oppose various pieces of proposed legislation, he would have to abstain. He pointed out that the various state agencies choose not to take a position on pieces of legislation. David Preece commented that his Commission sets goals and objectives within adopted planning documents that he uses to make his decisions regarding specific legislation. He added that if we need to take everything back to our individual commissions to get their feedback, we could very well end up with nine different opinions. Kenn Ortmann pointed out that his Commission entrusts him to represent them and not go back to them with every issue. He suggested moving ahead with the review of the listing and understand that some may need to abstain from taking a position on certain pieces of legislation. Mike Fimbel noted that we should take a firm position to oppose bills that directly attack us. Kenn Ortmann suggested that we be very selective regarding any bills we take a position on. Larry Robinson noted that there are some pieces of legislation we need to take a stand on and that legislators have come to value our opinion. Jeff Hayes noted that we need to decide if we want to lean more towards lobbying or providing information like other state agencies do. Tim Moore noted that last year we tended to watch different pieces of legislation and waited until cross-over to voice our opinions.

**Motion: To proceed as we have in the past choosing to support, oppose or watch proposed legislation but focus on trying to educate where we can. In addition, should the Association choose not to write a letter regarding a certain piece of proposed legislation, have our Legislative Consultant sign in on our behalf noting our position.**

Motion by Kenn Ortmann, seconded by Larry Robinson

Jeff Hayes stated that we should develop legislative priorities based on the Granite State Future guidelines before proceeding.

**Motion: To table this agenda item at this time.**

Motion by Jeff Hayes, seconded by Tim Murphy. Chairman Coppelman called for a show of hands vote on the motion to table and the results were: 8 – Yes and 6 – No. Motion passed by majority vote.

Nancy Johnson encouraged members to read and review the bills prior to the next meeting and be prepared to discuss the top 5 or 6 issues.

#### **D. HB 377**

Nancy Johnson reported that she has spoken with the sponsor of HB 377 regarding amending the bill to include RPC representation on a Commission to study the creation of a state geographic information system office and geographic information officer. She noted that the sponsor is amenable to the suggestion.

#### **E. HB 1439**

Cynthia Copeland stated that regardless of how we ultimately decide to treat other pieces of proposed legislation that we need to take action on HB 1439 since it directly affects all of us. Cliff Sinnott distributed a copy of a proposed draft letter that he wrote based on discussions at the last Association meeting. He noted that this bill obligates us to something that we don't currently do and therefore imposes an unfunded mandate on the planning commissions. Cynthia Copeland noted that she would object to making any changes to RSA 36:48 that would refer to 91:A. Cliff Sinnott agreed to make additional modifications to the letter to include removing any reference to 91:A.

**Motion: To make modifications to the draft letter regarding a proposed amendment to HB 1439 and forward it to staff to be reviewed, formatted and sent to the Chairman for his signature and distribution.**

Motion by Jeff Hayes, seconded by Kenn Ortmann. Approved by unanimous vote.

#### **F. Legislative Breakfast**

It was noted that the Legislative Breakfast has been scheduled to take place on February 17, 2016 and as in the past the NH Planners Association will be joining us. Becky Baldwin reported that she has made arrangements with Elizabeth's Kitchen to cater the event.

#### **G. Legislative Coordination**

Due to timing, this item was not brought up at the meeting.

#### **VI. Next Meeting**

It was agreed to hold the next meeting of the Association on February 4, 2016 at 1:00 p.m. to further discuss the action to be taken on legislative initiatives that was tabled earlier in the meeting. It was suggested that a proposal regarding NHARPC's legislative review process, including the manner in which feedback is presented in written correspondence and testimony, be developed for consideration. Kenn Ortmann stated that since this issue had been raised several times during his tenure as NHARPC Chair,

that he would agree to work on such a proposal. Tim Murphy agreed to assist in this effort in his capacity as NHARPC staff. It was agreed that this proposal be discussed at the February 4<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**VII. Other Matters**

No other matters were brought before the Association at this time.

**VIII. Public Coment**

No Public comments were made at this time.

**IX. Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca I. Baldwin  
On behalf of NHARPC