

New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commissions

Summary Minutes

Meeting of March 18, 2021

I. Call to Order

Chairman Steve Buckley announced that today's meeting would be conducted using a Zoom format and Rich Clough from SWRPC would assist by monitoring the meeting. Rich Clough read a document entitled *Authority for Conducting a Meeting Electronically* (copy attached). He announced that all votes would be conducted by roll call.

Chairman Buckley called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and asked members to identify themselves, explain why they are attending today's meeting remotely, note where they are, and state if anyone is in the room with them. Members introduced themselves as follows.

Tim Moore, Barbara Kravitz (RPC); James Vayo, Peter Griffin, Sylvia von Aulock (SNHPC); Steve Buckley (CNHRPC); Tim Murphy (SWRPC); Jen Czys (SRPC); Patricia Higgins, Meghan Butts (UVLSRPC); Bob Snelling (LRPC); Becky Baldwin (staff).

Guests: Cordell Johnston (NHMA); Jared Chicoine and Mike Klass (NH OSI).

II. Minutes of January 21, 2021 Meetings

Motion: To approve the minutes of January 21, 2021 as submitted.

Motion by Tim Moore, seconded by Bob Snelling. Approved by unanimous roll call vote with Peter Griffin abstaining.

III. NHARPC - NHMA Partnership

Chairman Buckley referred to the schedule for articles being submitted to Town and City magazine that was included in the agenda packet. The article for the May/June edition entitled *Mobility During a Pandemic* will be co-authored by NRPC, RPC, SNHPC, and UVLSRPC and has a deadline of March 31st. It was noted that from time to time we also sponsor webinars based on these articles such as a webinar on housing issues which was conducted just prior to today's meeting.

IV. NH OSI Road Show Summary - Collaboration, Training Ideas and Needs

Chairman Buckley drew attention to the NH OSI road show summary that was included in the agenda packet stating that it provides an excellent account of ideas for collaboration regarding future training opportunities. Mike Klass explained that NH OSI met virtually with each of the RPCs to identify training needs that are important to their individual regions. Similar meetings were conducted with other partners who might be able to collaborate on providing training. Mike Klass indicated that identified topics include basics for planning and zoning board members, templates on how to conduct meetings and any information that can be provided related to housing issues. He explained the housing information request served as the impetus for providing today's webinar on that subject. Barbara Kravitz asked if a schedule has been developed for training sessions and if they will all be virtual. Mike Klass noted that currently virtual training sessions sponsored by NH OSI are conducted at noon on the third Thursday of each

month. Next month's planning and zoning session will be focused on providing information to new land use board members. Information on upcoming sessions is published through *Plan Link* and also appear on the NH OSI website. The NH OSI annual conference is currently scheduled to take place virtually on May 15th.

V. 2021 Legislative Session

Chairman Buckley announced that we would be taking up agenda item V (b) next on the agenda.

B. Proposal Related to NH OSI

Chairman Buckley introduced Jared Chicoine, Director of NH OSI who agreed to meet with us today to discuss proposed legislative changes that would affect his organization. Jared Chicoine reported that in his budget, the Governor is proposing the creation of a Department of Energy which currently is a division of NH OSI along with the planning division. On the energy side, NH OSI currently oversees fuel assistance and weatherization programs. Under the proposal the energy division of NH OSI would become the new Energy Department and the planning division would move to the Department of Business and Economic Affairs (BEA). There are currently six planners in the planning division at NH OSI that would become part of a new planning and development office at BEA. The current senior planner at NH OSI will become the Director of the new office which will maintain all of NH OSI's current planning programs without any changes and also retain the current staff. Jared Chicoine stated that he feels this is an important change and will be a good opportunity for the planning staff. Although NH OSI may go away, the services they provide to municipalities would be maintained by moving the planning function as an office within BEA.

It was expressed by several members that, given prior changes made to NH OSI over past years, there is a general concern about what will happen under the Governor's proposal. Members noted it is comforting to be reassured by Jared Chicoine that he considers this a good move that will be beneficial. It was also noted that where NH OSI is currently linked to the Governor's Office, BEA is a department of their own. Barbara Kravitz asked what the mechanics of the proposed legislation would be and Jared Chicoine noted that it is part of HB2 and if it is signed into law the transition would take place over the summer. HB2 is currently being reviewed by the House Finance Committee and will go from there to the full House and the Senate for consideration and approval. Jared Chicoine offered to share a summary of the proposal that can be shared with the membership. The question was asked as to what kind of coordination is taking place between NH OSI and BEA regarding the anticipated changes that will take place if the Governor's budget is approved. Jared Chicoine responded that the two agencies have been communicating to make sure any proposed changes happen in a smooth and orderly way. He encouraged the NHARPC membership to share any thoughts or concerns with him and he will forward them to the Governor's Office for consideration. When asked how the NH OSI planning staff felt about the proposed changes, Jared Chicoine noted that so far they seem to be positive about it. Mike Klass added that from his perspective matching the language in the proposed bill mirrors that of the current statute and if it happens as proposed, should amount to nothing more than a different name and office. Jared Chicoine noted that the Governor is committed to keeping the team together and his budget includes funding for two municipal and regional assistance positions. Without knowing what the legislative process will do to the bill it appears to be a good plan. When asked if any of this will impact the roll of the RPCs, Jared Chicoine responded that he isn't aware of any changes being made to the funding for RPCs and anticipates continuing to maintain a close working relationship.

A. Partner Updates

Chairman Buckley asked if there were any legislative updates that the membership should be made aware of. Cordell Johnston reported on the status of several bills of potential interest as follows:

HB 132: Relative to acreage required to build certain single family housing. This bill has been retained. Bob Snelling asked if the wording for this bill was “shall” or “may” and Cordell Johnston responded that it was a mandate. He added that by being retained it will be further studied by the Committee and a recommendation will be made in January.

HB 189: Relative to accessory dwelling units. This bill was found inexpedient to legislate.

Cordell Johnston noted that the following bills are all scheduled to be heard at a marathon House session scheduled for April 7th, 8th, and 9th when they will be processing approximately 400 bills, most of which will be on the consent calendar.

HB 341: Relative to permissible residential units in a residential zone. The Municipal and County Government Committee recommends this bill be found inexpedient to legislate on a 10-9 vote.

HB 588: Relative to building codes for tiny houses. The Municipal and County Government Committee recommends this bill be found inexpedient to legislate on a 10-9 vote.

HB 573 and HB 574: Relative to the uses of certain large retail properties. The Municipal and County Government Committee recommends both these bills be found inexpedient to legislate on a 19-0 vote.

HB 586: Relative to training and procedures for zoning and planning boards and relative to financial investments and incentives for affordable housing development. This bill has been tabled but has the potential to come back again in the Senate.

HB 154: Relative to community revitalization tax relief incentives. The Municipal and County Government Committee passed this bill on a 19-0 vote and it will be heard by the House on April 7th.

Cordell Johnston reported that there have been several bills in both the House and Senate that would allow for the permanent continuation of remote meetings such as:

SB 95: Adopting omnibus legislation relative to access to remote meetings, penalties for violation of privacy, and establishing a committee to study remote meetings.

Mike Klass drew attention to:

SB 86: Adopting omnibus legislation relative to planning and zoning. He noted that this bill addresses third party inspection and re-establishing the conservation and planning program.

SB 85: Establishing a broadband matching grant initiative and fund. This bill is scheduled to be voted on next week.

C. Discussion

Discussion ensued regarding the proposed reorganization of NH OSI. For example, should we schedule a meeting with the leadership of BEA regarding their perspective on the proposed change or is this something that NHARPC should not be involved in. Bob Snelling noted that he would like to receive more information on what is being planned. Chairman Buckley explained that the RPCs need to understand what changes will take place with regard to the current services provided to our municipalities when NH OSI moves to BEA. Having a meeting with BEA leadership could either reaffirm that things will not change or provide us the option to weigh-in. Tim Moore suggested that we invite BEA to attend the next NHARPC meeting. Mike Klass offered to leave the meeting if members felt he should and it was agreed that would not be necessary. He noted that NHPA has similar questions about the reorganization. Meghan Butts questioned if there will be additional barriers related to the funding that RPCs currently receive from NH OSI following the reorganization that we should be concerned about. Mike Klass noted

that it is his understanding that there would be no change but suggested specific questions could be sent to him and he would pass them on to get definitive responses. James Vayo asked if their physical offices would be moving and Mike Klass responded that they would be moving to the BEA office location. Tim Murphy offered as NHARPC staff to approach Taylor Caswell and invite him to attend a future meeting or the Executive Directors could be asked to take this on and report back to the membership at a future meeting. Chairman Buckley suggested exploring such a meeting with NH VEA Commissioner Caswell.

VI. Other Matters

Sylvia von Aulock noted that it has been some time since we last spoke about conducting a Commissioners Convening and now that we are conducting remote meetings might be a good time to plan for one. It would be a good opportunity to provide positive information on how the RPCs have navigated the COVID pandemic. She also noted that in the past NHARPC employed a legislative consultant that benefited all of the RPCs and we may similarly want to entertain hiring a grant writer that would benefit everyone. Chairman Buckley asked that these items be placed on a future agenda rather than being discussed at today's meeting.

Barbara Kravitz noted that last month the Hampton Beach Area Commission assembled a virtual symposium on promoting resilience. Over 100 people attended the all-day event that can be viewed on the Town of Hampton website.

VII. Next Meeting

Chairman Buckley noted that the next meeting will be determined based on need. Staff will inform the membership as this becomes clarified.

VIII. Public Comment

No public comments at this time.

IX. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca I. Baldwin
On Behalf of NHARPC