



**Executive Board Minutes
April 11, 2023**

Location: Remote meeting via Zoom.

Members Present: Gabby Ciuffreda, Chair; Ann Golob, Steve Lembke, Bonnie North, Tim Arsenault, Stephan Chait

Absent: Jim Pinkerton, Jack Cunningham, Carolyn Partridge

Staff present: Chris Company, Executive Director; Matt Bachler, Senior Planner

Public/Guests: none

Presenter: none

Call to Order: Commissioner Gabby Ciuffreda, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Additions/Changes to Agenda: Executive Director Company asked that committee appointments be added to the agenda before the Executive Director's report.

Secretary's Report: On a motion by Commissioner Lembke, seconded by Commissioner Golob, the January 10, 2023 minutes were approved by a unanimous vote. Because the draft minutes to the February 20, 2023 minutes were not made available ahead of the meeting due to a website posting error, their approval was deferred until the next meeting.

Health Equity Grant Public Participation Stipend Procedures Proposal: Senior Planner Matt Bachler explained that 11 regional planning commissions have received grant funding through the Department of Health to help towns increase capacity for including health equity language in their plans with the goal of improving physical activity opportunities and healthy food access. Staff from the Regional Planning Commissions have completed a *Health Equity and Planning Toolkit* that includes best practices examples for towns to consider when making updates to plans and policies. WRC staff will provide a training session later this spring for municipal officials on how to use the Toolkit in their communities. A portion of the grant funds are for supporting towns to implement strategies found in the Toolkit. This work will begin after we complete the training and run through May 2024. The grant includes \$3,000 to provide stipends to residents from targeted populations to participate in this planning work. The targeted populations, as defined by the grant agreement, include: people of color, indigenous peoples, refugees and English language learners, LGBTQ+, people experiencing homelessness, people living with disabilities, and people living in rural communities (defined as towns with less than 5,000 residents). Matt asked the Board to adopt a stipend policy associated with this grant that has been used

successfully by Bennington County Regional Commission. He recommended the provision of a stipend of \$50 per meeting attended, to be distributed in the form of gift cards by stakeholder organizations that we are engaging in this effort. Commissioners asked about research that identifies health equity gaps and needs, and whether this policy would apply to WRC engagement as a whole or only to this specific project. Research on the issue was described, and it was explained that this policy would apply only to this specific grant and its specific requirements. The Commission may want to consider an overarching stipend policy in the future. It was also suggested that law would preclude a requirement that participants explicitly identify themselves as being a part of a specific group. It was explained that self-identification would not be requested or a requirement to receive the stipend, and that one of the reasons for engaging with stakeholder organizations is for them to recruit engagement by underrepresented and marginalized people and populations. On a motion by Commissioner Arsenault, seconded by Commissioner Golob, the Board agreed by a unanimous vote the use of \$50 Visa gift cards as a stipend for those participating in meetings related to the health equity grant.

Review and Approval of Updated Title VI Policy: Chris explained that it is the responsibility of each regional commission to update its federal Title VI federal civil rights equality of access policy. He explained that it is the practice of Vermont's regional commissions to share with one another updated policies so we can build upon one another's work. The proposed updated Title VI policy builds upon that recently adopted by Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, which was reviewed by the Federal Highway Administration. On a motion by Commissioner Arsenault, seconded by Commissioner Golob, the Executive Board adopted the proposed updated policy as presented by a unanimous vote.

Review and Approval of Updated Purchasing Procedures: Chris explained that it was necessary to periodically review and update our purchasing policies to be consistent with federal and state laws. As with the aforementioned Title VI policy, regional commissions typically share their updated policies with one another. Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission most recently updated its purchasing policies, and the proposed changes to the WRC procedures builds off of these. Chris was asked if this policy was reviewed by more than one staff person. He explained that both the proposed Purchasing Procedures and Title VI policy were reviewed by him, Susan Westa, Colin Bratton, and Inessa Muse. On a motion by Commissioner Lembke, seconded by Commissioner Arsenault, the Executive Board adopted the proposed updated procedures as presented by a unanimous vote.

Intermunicipal Cooperation Discussion: Commissioner Golob shared the outreach she had begun to evaluate the needs and opportunities for intermunicipal cooperation. She shared her notes from meetings she had had and the challenges towns are facing given a shortage of expertise in an increasingly complex environment. She learned that some towns have proceeded with a wide array of shared service and/or mutual aid agreements, while others had not. She proposed a 6 month strategy through which she would lead outreach to towns on behalf of the WRC to learn what needs and challenges exist, and to then bring that information back to the Executive Board to develop an approach and strategy. Appreciation of her efforts was noted, as was the benefit of this being a commissioner-led initiative that would enable local issues to rise up. Commissioner North volunteered to assist Commissioner Golob in this effort.

Brownfields Committee Recommendation of a Grant and Loan for the Bellows Falls Train Station

Cleanup Project: The Brownfields Steering Committee preliminarily approved the project as eligible to receive cleanup funds on August 10, 2022. In December 2022, the Committee preliminarily approved the project for \$300,000 of cleanup funds, \$240,000 as a grant and \$60,000 as a loan. Brattleboro Savings and Loan (BS&L) gave a positive review of the town's application and financial information on March 1,

2023. The Committee has not determined the terms of the loan but most recently approved loans with a 2% interest rate and a 10-year term. On a motion by Commissioner Lembke, seconded by Commissioner Arsenault, the grant and loan proposal was approved with a 2% interest rate for the loan by a unanimous vote.

WRC Staff Holiday Addition Proposal - Juneteenth and Indigenous Peoples Day: Chris proposed that the Juneteenth and Indigenous Peoples Day be adopted as WRC staff holidays to be consistent with other peer organizations. He confirmed that there was room in the budget for the addition of the two paid holidays. The proposal was approved by a unanimous vote on a motion by Commissioner Arsenault, seconded by Commissioner Golob.

Appointments: Commissioner Mike Tuller (Jamaica) was appointed to the Energy Committee.

Executive Director's Report: Chris reported on the House Appropriations Bill that would add an additional \$1.5 million to the base funding of the regional planning commissions per statutory formula. While this amount falls significantly short of what statutory formula would allow, it is a meaningful increase that would enable expansion of staff capacity to meet town and regional needs. He noted that the regional commission sign on letter in support of full statutory funding was beneficial. It is hoped that the Senate Appropriations Bill will fund the RPCs at at least the same level as the House bill. He also explained that there is funding in the Budget Adjustment Act to assist rural towns with project planning, development, and applications, but the details of exactly how this would work were still a work in progress. The Windham Region has 6 state-identified priority towns.

Committee Chair Updates: The Finance Committee will meet in April. Chris noted the draft audit was complete and looked good. The Transportation Committee is discussing how the evolution to a Transportation Advisory Committee will work, and that a letter is being drafted for outreach to towns and stakeholder organizations.

Review of Action Items: Chris and Gabby will follow up with Commissioner Partridge about her ability to remain as a Commissioner given her new role as a Windham County Side Judge. Going forward meeting Zoom links will be provided on agenda transmittal emails, and that staff will draft those transmittal emails for the Chair. Discussion of intermunicipal agreements will continue in May, as will a TAC transition update.

Public Comments: None.

Adjournment: On a motion by Commissioner Arsenault, seconded by Commissioner Golob, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:15