

1 **BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING**  
2 **NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**  
3 *May 26, 2021 Draft Meeting Minutes*  
4

5 The meeting of the Board of Commissioners was held virtually via Zoom.us.  
6

7 **Attendance**

8 Commissioners: See attached. A quorum was present to conduct business.

9 Staff: C. Dimitruk, B. Remmers, G. Brunswick, E. Klofft  
10

11 Guests: A. Julow, D. Bennion, B. Harnish  
12

13 Chair K. Waite began meeting at 7:05 PM.  
14

15 **Adjustments to the Agenda**

16 None.  
17

18 **Welcome, introductions, opening remarks**

19 Chair K. Waite welcomed everyone and introductions were made. Commissioners B. Morris, R.

20 Noel, A. Alling and R. Brown gave extended introductions.  
21

22 **Opportunity for Public Comment**

23 None.  
24

25 **Municipal Declaration of Inclusion**

26 K. Waite referred to the materials in the board packet and welcomed guests Bob Harnish from  
27 Pittsford and David Bennion from Franklin. They are here to discuss a Declaration of Inclusion,  
28 which has been adopted by a number of towns across the state including Franklin.  
29

30 B. Harnish provided background on the Declaration of Inclusion which sets a community  
31 affirmation and aspiration to be welcoming and inclusive of all types of people regardless of  
32 race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, age, or disability and to  
33 recognize and address systemic racism. He explained that it came about for him during the  
34 protests of last summer culminating with the murder of George Floyd. He started educating  
35 himself on the experience of black people in our country and systemic racism. A friend from  
36 Franklin, D. Bennion, provided him with a copy of a Declaration of Inclusion, which the Town of  
37 Franklin had adopted. Franklin approached it from the perspective of affirming the community  
38 as a welcoming town to all people as they struggle with population decline and a stagnant  
39 economy. He presented the declaration to the Town of Pittsford Selectboard and after a few  
40 questions the motion unanimously passed. Nine other towns have adopted the declaration and  
41 they are working with several more. B. Harnish has worked with others to develop a packet  
42 which provides the template declaration and background information to help communities  
43 work through the process. This fits well with the national effort of Diversity, Equity and  
44 Inclusion.

45 D. Bennion provided background on how the Town of Franklin came about adopting the  
46 Declaration of Inclusion. A Selectboard member witnessed that a community in the state of  
47 Maine adopted a Declaration of Inclusion and suggested to the Franklin Selectboard that they  
48 adopt a similar declaration in Franklin. The Selectboard discussed it, tweaked some language  
49 and unanimously approved it. The main intent was to make it known that Franklin is a  
50 welcoming place for all. D. Bennion noted that they asked for input from community groups  
51 and committees and overall received a positive reaction all the way around. He noted that they  
52 also have it on Facebook and the municipal website.

53

54 K. Waite asked if the declaration led to any changes to regulations or town ordinances. D.  
55 Bennion replied that they have examined them but have so far made no changes. B. Irwin  
56 asked if there have been any adverse reactions? Or all positive? D. Bennion replied that all  
57 reactions have either been positive or neutral, nothing negative. B. Harnish noted that  
58 reactions have been positive as far as he knows, but he is not sure to the extent that it is well  
59 known in the community.

60

61 K. Waite asked if the packet can be sent to all commissioners? B. Harnish confirmed yes.

62

63 The Commissioners discussed the importance of the declaration as it relates to the experience  
64 of Hispanic residents in the region's communities. It was clarified that it is never acceptable to  
65 use the term illegal when referring to undocumented residents. D. Bennion shared that the  
66 declaration of inclusion will stimulate conversation in the community, such as how to refer to  
67 different groups of people. This can help a community explore how to be more welcoming.

68

69 K. Waite asserted that much of the value with taking up the declaration is about the  
70 conversation that occurs within the community rather than the document itself. The reality is  
71 that there are issues in every town, but having the conversation makes people more aware of  
72 where there may be systemic racism and injustice. He stated that as an RPC we should be  
73 thinking about these issues and how we want to address them.

74

75 C. Dimitruk agreed that having conversations around systemic racism, equity and inclusion is  
76 valuable. If Brad Docheff were here he would be able to share what happened in Fairfax. The  
77 first time the Declaration was brought to the Selectboard it was voted down because of  
78 concerns that it made the Town racist. There were members of the Selectboard that asserted  
79 no one in town is racist and therefore the Declaration was not needed. In response, many  
80 people of color came to meetings and shared their experience of racism in the community and  
81 the motion was reconsidered and it was adopted.

82

83 B. Buermann suggested that the RPC consider going further and find areas to take action. He  
84 suggested that the RPC go through all its plans and procedures to make sure we are using the  
85 right words and phrases that support justice, equity, diversity and inclusion and that promote  
86 policy to further this important work.

87

88

89 K. Waite thanked the guests B. Harnish and D. Bennion for sharing their work and experience  
90 with the RPC.

91

92 **Economic Development Project Lists**

93 K. Waite introduced Andy Julow, the new Executive Director of the Lake Champlain Islands  
94 Economic Development Corporation. K. Waite explained that ACCD tasked the Regional  
95 Development Corporations with preparing a Project Priority Lists for use in allocating state  
96 resources, including assigning priority boards for Northern Border Regional Commission grants.  
97 The RDC's were given a month to prepare the list that is being presented to the Board tonight.

98

99 K. Waite recognized Commissioner E. Nance who is here representing Franklin County Industrial  
100 Development Corporation. E. Nance explained that the list is circulating everywhere and there  
101 is a lack of clarity on exactly how the lists will be used. She explained that the list before the  
102 Board tonight was requested with quick turnaround, but that a second list has been requested  
103 by end of July. The FCIDC will be soliciting more input and applying a project priority ranking  
104 system for the July list. E. Nance reviewed the FCIDC project priority list (enclosed). The  
105 projects in priority order are as follows: Fonda site, St. Albans Town Industrial Park completion  
106 of infrastructure, Franklin County State Airport infrastructure, Montgomery Village Septic  
107 System, Healthy Roots Collaborative, MVRT and LVRT Rail Trail Improvements, Re-establishing a  
108 WIB Coordinator, Swanton Downtown Redevelopment, Brigham Academy and Colony Square  
109 Housing.

110

111 A. Voegele voiced concern about the priority ranking and that the St. Albans Industrial Park has  
112 attracted very little new business, only business expansions. E. Nance noted that she knows of  
113 3 prospective tenants for the Industrial Park. A. Voegele would rather prioritize Highgate  
114 Airport project which will do more to bring new employment and business enterprises. A.  
115 Voegele also voiced support for the WIB Coordinator as a second priority.

116

117 C. Dimitruk responded to a question on whether ACCD has provided guidance and how to  
118 develop this list and how it should be used. She explained that there is very little guidance on  
119 how the list will be used other than the top 5 will receive priority for NBRC grants.

120

121 B. Irwin suggested that the NRPC endorse the list with all projects being equal and not the  
122 ranking. He suggested that the list coming out in July will have better metrics to support the  
123 priority ranking.

124

125 C. Dimitruk clarified what is being asked of the Board, which is it review the project priority list  
126 and if the Board so chooses to endorse the list and priority ranking. She explained that  
127 endorsing the list but not the ranking is an option on the table.

128

129 *A. Voegele motioned that NRPC endorse the FCIDC Project Priority List without order of*  
130 *priority. B. Irwin seconded. Elisabeth Nance reused herself from the discussion and vote.*

131

132 *There was discussion on whether this action meets the needs of the task at hand. It was*  
133 *reiterated that it is unclear how this list is used other than NBRC. A. Julow reported that*  
134 *the LCIEDC prioritized their list earlier today based on metrics. He is concerned that if we*  
135 *don't play ball and everybody else does, then our projects could sink to the bottom.*  
136 *B. Buermann clarified that if the RPC does not support rank, the RDC can still submit a*  
137 *prioritized list with the RPC supporting the projects and the RDC supporting the priority.*  
138 *C. Dimitruk clarified that the ask from ACCD was for each RDC to create their own list*  
139 *and to seek concurrence with the RPC. She recommended that if the Board endorses the*  
140 *list without priority in Franklin County that they do the same for Grand Isle County.*

141  
142 *A. Voegele amended his motion by adding that C. Dimitruk review the language included*  
143 *on the Priority List related to NRPC endorsement on the Board's behalf. B. Irwin*  
144 *seconded.*

145  
146 *Motion carried, E. Nance abstained.*

147  
148 K. Waite recognized A. Julow to review Grand Isle County's project list. A. Julow shared his  
149 screen and reviewed the County's 9 priority projects, including the ranking system that was  
150 used to assign priority. The ranking criteria include the number of jobs created or retained, the  
151 quality of benefits and wages compared to rest of region, amongst other criteria. He noted that  
152 the projects went through Selectboard review to be fair and even. The list includes in order of  
153 priority Bay View Crossing (South Hero), Two Hero's Public House (South Hero), The Grand Isle  
154 Lake House, Shore Acres Restaurant and Event Venue Expansion (North Hero), Alburgh Child  
155 Care, South Hero 1816 Meeting House, Courthouse Parking Lot Expansion (North Hero), Keeler  
156 Bay Campground and Marina (South Hero) and the Alburgh Slaughterhouse.

157  
158 A. Julow clarified that job creation makes up about 1/3 of overall priority. There was a question  
159 on the Bay View Housing project's score, since it was highest priority. It turns out that  
160 construction jobs were enough to provide the points necessary for the high ranking. A. Julow  
161 reported that they did not receive guidance on how to count or tally jobs within the metrics.

162  
163 B. Irwin asked the Commissioners whether they should endorse priority in Grand Isle County if  
164 they are not doing the same in Franklin County?

165  
166 *B. Dubie motioned to endorse LCIEDI Project Priority list and ranking. A. Voegele*  
167 *seconds.*

168  
169 *Motion carried.*

170  
171 **Minutes of the April 2021 Meeting**

172 K. Waite asked for any errors and/or omissions.

173  
174 *A. Voegele moved to accept the April 2021 meeting minutes. R. Noel seconded.*

175

176 *Motion carried.*

177

178 **Commission Reports:**

179

180 **Finance/Operations**

181 H. Garrett reported that the budget will come before the Commission in June.

182

183 **Personnel**

184 L. Ruple reported that the Committee did not meet in May. There are three positions  
185 advertised, including the Water Resources Senior Planner. The Committee will be reviewing  
186 evaluations later in the summer.

187

188 **Executive Committee**

189 K. Waite reported that they met and completed a preliminary budget review, legislative update,  
190 and reopening plans. Like the State, NRPC has a goal to be back in new normal operations by  
191 September with some interim steps. C. Dimitruk is developing a re-opening plan.

192

193 **Project Review**

194 B. Irwin reported that there is a new Tractor Supply store being planning for development near  
195 the Hannafords in Enosburg. It is substantial regional impact. Additionally, the project review  
196 report includes the City of St. Albans Pool, which is a significant upgrade in pool facilities and  
197 the Committee has determined it as substantial regional impact. Finally, the report includes a  
198 battery energy supply storage project in Georgia on the Ballard Rd. This project is important for  
199 the types of solar and wind projects in our region because excess energy from windy or sunny  
200 days can be stored and used during peak demand. It is also substantial regional impact because  
201 it is tied to the broader energy demand and uses in the region.

202

203 *R. Noel moved to ratify the project review report. B. Morris seconded. Motion carried.*

204

205 **Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)**

206 R. Noel reported on project prioritization. There is a preliminary deadline at the end of May  
207 and the list will come before the board at the June meeting. TAC will finish process with  
208 VTRANS and RPC input by the end of June.

209

210 **Energy Committee**

211 B. Irwin reported that the Committee did not meet. There is an energy planning forum on June  
212 2<sup>nd</sup>.

213

214 **Brownfields Committee**

215 Did not meet.

216

217 **Regional Plan and Policy Committee**

218 L. Douglass reported that the Committee will review the current regional plan identifying needs  
219 for changes and additions. She noted that there has been trouble with the regional metrics

220 because of a lack of data updates during COVID, but staff is working on how to achieve the  
221 updates needed. It is important that the data we include is if a nature that we can keep it  
222 updated.

223

#### 224 **Municipal Plan Review**

225 Did not meet.

226

#### 227 **Vermont Economic Progress Council (VEPC)**

228 A. Voegele reported that the City of St. Albans will appear to adjust TIF contract tomorrow. He  
229 does not anticipate any problems.

230

#### 231 **Green Mountain Transit**

232 B. Beurmann reviewed latest strategic plan. He noted that union contract negotiations are  
233 underway, which are targeted for completion in June.

234

#### 235 **Clean Water Advisory Committee**

236 Did not meet.

237

#### 238 **Healthy Roots Advisory Committee**

239 Advisory committee meets tomorrow.

240

#### 241 **Northwest Vermont Regional Foundation**

242 No update.

243

#### 244 **Office**

245 B. Remmers reported that the office has hired 2 new summer interns to help with the field  
246 season, including finishing up road erosion inventories, traffic and pedestrian counts. E. Klofft  
247 reported that there is an upcoming energy planning forum on June 2. She also noted that she  
248 has been busy administering Vermont Community Development Program funded projects  
249 including Almond Blossoms Child Care, South Hero 1816 Meeting House and the Fairfield  
250 Community Center Pavilion. G. Brunswick reported that there is a workshop coming up on June  
251 3 that NRPC is collaborating with Franklin County Caring Communities and Franklin/Grand Isle  
252 Tobacco Prevention Coalition on Municipal Perspectives in Cannabis Regulation and Prevention.  
253 C. Dimitruk reported that the state is still determining how the county American Rescue Plan  
254 Act (ARPA) funds will be distributed, so stay tuned for more information. She reported that the  
255 nominating committee met this week to plan for the transition of officers. Finally, she informed  
256 that Board that Mark Serrano, the AmeriCorps service staff is leaving because he was offered  
257 his dream job doing economic development in the county planning office where he wanted to  
258 move back to.

259

#### 260 **Commissioner Announcements:**

261 R. Noel noted that the Town of Highgate has a new Zoning Administrator made possible by  
262 NRPC's intermunicipal service agreement with Highgate and Sheldon. It seems to be working  
263 out great!

264

265 *A. Alling motioned to adjourn. R. Noel seconded. Motion carried.*

266

267 Meeting Adjourned at 8:49 pm

268