

**PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)**

**Minutes of the Full Commission Zoom Meeting Held on Thursday, December 14, 2023**

Commission Members Present:

Joanna Brown	Alternate Commissioner	South Hadley
Bruce Coldham	Commissioner	Amherst
Robert Daley	Alternate Commissioner	Chester
William Dwyer	Commissioner	Hadley
Judith Eiseman	Commissioner	Pelham
Christopher Flory	Commissioner	Williamsburg
Walter Gunn	Commissioner	Longmeadow
Brad Hutchison	Commissioner	South Hadley
Edmund Jaworski	Alternate Commissioner	Hatfield
Jack Jemsek	Alternate Commissioner	Amherst
Stephen Thor Johnson	Commissioner	Southampton
George Kingston	Alternate Commissioner	East Longmeadow
Kate Kruckemeyer	Commissioner	Holyoke
Rosanna Lopez	Alternate Commissioner	Holyoke
Nestor Matthews	Commissioner	Worthington
Elizabeth Pols	Commissioner	Belchertown
James Whalen	Alternate Commissioner	Holland

PVPC Staff Present:

Kimberly H. Robinson, Executive Director  
Rana Al-Jammal, Principal Transportation Planner  
Ken Comia, Deputy Director of the Land Use and Environment Department  
Megan Haberle, Director of the Community Development Department  
Aodhan Hemeon-McMahon, Land Use and Environment Planner  
Indrani Kowlessar, Director of Human Resources  
Catherine Ratté, Director of the Land Use and Environment Department  
Gary Roux, Principal Planner/Traffic Manager

Guests:

Tom Corbett, Zero-Point Development  
Tamarin Laurel-Paine, Town of Middlefield  
Kate Norton, Norton Communication Strategies  
Tony Rogers, Pelham Energy Committee

Communities Not Represented at the December 14, 2023 Commission Meeting

Agawam	Granville	Plainfield
Blandford	Hampden	Russell
Brimfield	Holland	Southwick
Chesterfield	Huntington	Springfield
Chicopee	Ludlow	Tolland
Cummington	Monson	Wales
Easthampton	Montgomery	Ware
Goshen	Northampton	West Springfield
Granby	Palmer	Wilbraham

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1. Chairman's Call to Order and Welcome

The December 14, 2023 Commission Zoom meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m. by Commission Chair Walter Gunn. Kimberly Robinson took roll call and noted there was a quorum present.

2. Introduction of New Staff Members

Aodhan Hemeon-McMahon, Land Use and Environment Planner, and Megan Haberle, Director of the Community Development Department, were introduced as new PVPC staff members.

3. Presentation on Battery Energy Storage Systems and Discussion

Ken Comia presented on battery energy storage systems, followed by an invitation for Tom Corbett from Zero-Point Development Inc. to speak further on permits and definitions related to battery energy storage in Massachusetts. Mr. Corbett has secured permits for 13 standalone energy storage system projects in Massachusetts. Zero-Point Development has a significant renewable energy portfolio, including rooftop and ground-mounted photovoltaic arrays and energy storage systems. Mr. Corbett discussed the policies and development of energy storage systems in the state, as well as the different types of batteries used for storage. The goal is to educate towns and communities on best practices for permitting and safety standards related to energy storage. He added that the battery expectancy was about 25 years. Therefore, the lease would be completed, or repowering could commence. The town would always be covered based on the solar company that is operating solar in the community and on the special permit that would be conditioned to require updates.

James Whalen explained the difference between Ethercat and Ethernet IP, which are more of an American protocol and faster in their communication speeds. Concerns were raised about the potential impact on communities in case of accidents involving battery storage systems. Peer review processes, maintenance plans, and operation guidelines were suggested to address safety considerations during permit approvals.

Tony Rogers of the Pelham Energy Committee pointed out that different types of batteries have varying levels of combustibility, with lithium iron phosphate being considered less prone to combustion. Mr. Corbett shared the different chemistries in lithium-ion batteries. Commission members requested more information about the different types of batteries used in energy storage systems, specifically, about the advantages and disadvantages of each type and their applicability in different scenarios. Recycling efforts were mentioned as an essential aspect of preventing environmental harm from discarded batteries.

Jack Jemsek shared that he wrote a white paper on solar and battery storage that can provide valuable insights and recommendations for communities regarding environmental concerns related to battery storage. Developing a fact sheet or checklist that provides essential information about battery storage systems for planning boards and communities was suggested. This should include an overview of the different types of batteries, their safety measures, maintenance requirements, and potential environmental impacts. Mr. Corbett recommended that planning boards collaborate with experts from the fire department to ensure compliance with safety standards specific to each system. Therefore, developers could offer training programs to volunteer fire departments that may lack experience in handling emergencies related to battery technology.

4. Schedules of the Commission and Executive Committee Meeting Dates for 2024

Mr. Gunn reminded Commission members to put the 2024 meeting dates in their calendars, as it is essential for a quorum to be met at these meetings.

5. Executive Director’s Highlights and Updates

Ms. Robinson mentioned the success of the PVPC 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary event on November 28, 2023, at Fame Cafe in Holyoke. Two Regional Impact Awards were handed out, one to Josh Shimmel, who is the Director of the Springfield Water and Sewer Department, doing work around wastewater and combined sewer overflow for the last 30 years. The other Regional Impact Award winner was former State Senator Anne Gobi, who is currently the Director of the Office of Rural Affairs for the Commonwealth. Ms. Robinson shared that on November 17, 2023, the PVPC celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Connecticut River Cleanup Committee in conjunction with a tour of the York Street Station in Springfield, which is a significant \$145 million project.

In 2024, there will be a new proposed environmental bond bill, and part of the conversation is going to be about ensuring that PVPC continues to have funding to work on cleaning up the Connecticut River. PVPC hosted a cybersecurity and internet technology event in late October 2023. The current administration is looking at a municipal modifications bill, and they were out on a listening tour to hear people talk about what they think might be needed in that modifications bill. PVPC was also part of the Western Massachusetts Housing Coalition that hosted the Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, Edward M. Augustus on October 25, 2023.

Ms. Robinson noted that the PVPC was looking to host the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) rail update for the February 8, 2024 Commission meeting. She praised the transportation section and highlighted that PVPC is one of the recipients of the Safer Streets for All grant of \$1.25 million for their region, which is focused on traffic safety. She encouraged Commission members to encourage their communities to submit their applications for District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) funding before the extended deadline of December 22, 2023.

6. Community Reports/Updates from the PVPC Commission Members

George Kingston reported that East Longmeadow is looking for a new Planning Director and Planning Clerk. He asked the Commission members to contact the Town of East Longmeadow if they knew of anyone interested in these positions.

7. Other Business

There being no further discussion, Mr. Gunn called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY JAMES WHALEN TO ADJOURNED TODAY'S COMMISSION MEETING. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 7:03 P.M.

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8. Action Items

- Ms. Robinson is looking to host the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) rail update for the next Commission meeting on February 8<sup>th</sup>.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Douglas Albertson, Secretary/Clerk

List of Documents and Other Items Distributed at the December 14, 2023, Meeting

1. December 14, 2023 Commission Meeting Agenda