

PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)
Minutes of Executive Committee Zoom Meeting
November 20, 2025, 5:00 P.M.

Executive Committee Members Present:

William Dwyer, Chair – Hadley
George Kingston, Vice Chair – East Longmeadow
Doug Albertson, Secretary/Clerk – Belchertown
Marilyn Gorman Fil, Treasurer – Monson
T.J. Cousineau, Assistant Treasurer – Blandford
Peri Hall, At-large Member – Goshen
Jack Jemsek, At-large Member – Amherst
Jack Luttrell, At-Large Member – Wilbraham

Guests:

Benjamin Estabrooks

PVPC Staff Present:

Kimberly H. Robinson, Executive Director
Rana Al-Jammal, Principal Transportation Planner
Becky Basch, Principal Planner
Ken Comia, Director of Land Use and Environment Department
Lisa Edinger, Director of Finance
Gary Roux, Director of Transportation Planning
Deanna Young, Administrative Services Coordinator

1. Chairman's Call to Order, Welcome, and Approval of the Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting Held on October 23, 2025

The Executive Committee meeting on November 20, 2025, was called to order at 5:02 p.m. by Chair William Dwyer.

MOVED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, SECONDED BY T.J. COUSINEAU, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 23, 2025, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING. THE MOTION CARRIED WITH ONE ABSTENTION FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

2. Listing of Payments/Financial Reports

Lisa Edinger addressed a question raised at the previous month's meeting regarding accounts receivable being much higher than accounts payable. Ms. Edinger clarified that accounts payable not only include expenses but also staff time, which is paid in advance.

3. Authorization for the Executive Director to Negotiate and Execute a Mutually Acceptable Contractual Agreement with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities for an Update to the Pioneer Valley Regional Housing Plan

Ken Comia explained that the item relates to the One Stop Grant and that the regional planning agency applied for it to update the regional housing plan, which was last completed in 2013/2014. This grant provides an opportunity to refresh the plan along with other regional plans.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY T.J. COUSINEAU, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO NEGOTIATE AND EXECUTE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT WITH THE MASSACHUSETTS EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HOUSING AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES FOR AN UPDATE TO THE PIONEER VALLEY REGIONAL HOUSING PLAN. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

4. Authorization for the Executive Director to Negotiate and Execute a Mutually Acceptable Contractual Agreement with the Town of Goshen to Assist with an Update and Revision to the Town's Zoning Bylaw and Map

Mr. Comia explained that their team assisted the Town with an application to the Community One Stop program for updating the zoning bylaw and map. They have been working with the Town for two years, providing technical assistance for zoning diagnostics and reorganization. Additional grant funding will support a comprehensive update, including a community engagement component to understand the Town's needs better and update the zoning and map accordingly.

MOVED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, SECONDED BY T.J. COUSINEAU, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO NEGOTIATE AND EXECUTE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT WITH THE TOWN OF GOSHEN TO ASSIST WITH AN UPDATE AND REVISION TO THE TOWN'S ZONING BYLAW AND MAP. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

5. Authorization for the Executive Director to Negotiate and Execute a Mutually Acceptable Contractual Agreement with the Town of Hatfield to Assist with an Update and Revision to the Town's Zoning Bylaw and Map

Doug Albertson noted that the written motion mistakenly referenced Goshen rather than Hatfield, and the correction was accepted. Mr. Comia shared that the project is supported by a grant from the Community One Stop program, following Hatfield's completion of its comprehensive plan, with the zoning update identified as a strategic next step.

MOVED BY T.J. COUSINEAU, SECONDED BY DOUG ALBERTSON, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO NEGOTIATE AND EXECUTE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT WITH THE TOWN OF HATFIELD TO ASSIST WITH AN UPDATE AND REVISION TO THE TOWN'S ZONING BYLAW AND MAP. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

6. Authorization for the Executive Director to Negotiate and Execute a Mutually Acceptable Contractual Amendment with Health Resources in Action to Continue Work on Engagement and Implementation of the Hampden County Health Improvement Plan (Hampden CHIP)

Becky Basch provided an update, explaining that they have been convening with organizations and individuals around the Hampden County for the past five years. The project was recently extended for six months through the end of December, and the new grant will allow continued meetings through the spring, at which point they can apply for additional supplemental funding. The funding is primarily allocated to health and social service organizations to implement strategies to improve health outcomes, convening almost quarterly to share updates and progress. Currently, they are working towards completing the plan update and enhancing its online presence. The initiative focuses on addressing social and environmental factors that impact health, and has been valuable for developing relationships with community-based organizations and health and social service organizations throughout the County.

MOVED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, SECONDED BY T.J. COUSINEAU, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO NEGOTIATE AND EXECUTE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT WITH HEALTH RESOURCES IN ACTION TO CONTINUE WORK ON ENGAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HAMPDEN COUNTY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN (HAMPDEN CHIP). THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

7. Authorization for the Executive Director to Negotiate and Execute a Mutually Acceptable Contractual Agreement with Tremont Strategies to Provide Government Relations Assistance to the PVPC in the 2026 Calendar Year

Ms. Robinson shared that this was the first year working with Tremont Strategies on state-level government relations, resulting in a \$150,000 earmark for a water plan—the first since their arrival. The organization is hosting its first legislative breakfast on December 12, 2025, focusing on Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) funding needs, and plans to hold quarterly briefings on specific subjects. Most funding for these initiatives has come from the state legislature, and the legislative breakfast will bring together the delegation and CSO providers from Springfield, Holyoke, and Chicopee. Funding for these activities comes from dues paid by member communities, due to restrictions on using certain funds for lobbying purposes.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY DOUG ALBERTSON, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO NEGOTIATE AND EXECUTE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT WITH TREMONT STRATEGIES TO PROVIDE GOVERNMENT RELATIONS ASSISTANCE TO THE PVPC IN THE 2026 CALENDAR YEAR. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

8. Authorization for the Executive Director to Negotiate and Execute a Mutually Acceptable Contractual Agreement with Capital Edge to Provide Federal Government Relations Assistance to the PVPC during the 2026 Calendar Year

Ms. Robinson explained that this contract is for federal government relations assistance. The total contract amount is capped at \$30,000, with the PVPC responsible for \$10,000, and the remaining \$20,000 split equally between the Capital Region Council of Governments and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments. The partnership provides weekly newsletters and has been instrumental in negotiating federal issues, such as securing an earmark for Belchertown's project, which had faced delays. Their support was presented at the October 9, 2025, meeting, and it was described as invaluable.

George Kingston noted that the Washington report, which is part of the deliverables, has been shared with their town manager and received positive feedback. Ms. Robinson added that, following a suggestion at the October meeting, a team is developing a new deliverable, which may be distributed monthly rather than weekly. There was a brief discussion about the earmark for Belchertown, confirming it was for Sports Haven.

MOVED BY DOUG ALBERTSON, SECONDED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO NEGOTIATE AND EXECUTE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT WITH CAPITAL EDGE TO PROVIDE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RELATIONS ASSISTANCE TO THE PVPC DURING THE 2026 CALENDAR YEAR. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

9. Authorization for the Executive Director to Negotiate and Execute a Mutually Acceptable Contractual Agreement with P2 Advisors to Conduct a Pioneer Valley Capital Absorption Study

Ms. Robinson shared that the study aims to determine whether small- and mid-sized businesses in the region can absorb a proposed \$10 million, 10-year closed fund, funded by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and the Massachusetts Gaming Commission's community mitigation fund. The results of the study will be shared publicly, and the new fund will offer flexible capital options, such as patient capital and forgivable loans, to support businesses that may not qualify for traditional bank loans. Technical assistance from the Small Business Association (SBA) will be integrated with the fund to ensure business owners receive both capital and support.

MOVED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, SECONDED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO NEGOTIATE AND EXECUTE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT WITH P2 ADVISORS TO CONDUCT A PIONEER VALLEY CAPITAL ABSORPTION STUDY. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

10. Authorization for the Executive Director to Negotiate and Execute a Mutually Acceptable Contractual Agreement with the Center for Urban and Racial Equity (CURE) to Provide Facilitation Services related to the Formation and Establishment of a New Fund designed to Provide Working Capital to Women- and Minority-Owned Small Businesses

Ms. Robinson shared that an advisory group has been formed to develop the fund's structure, criteria, and board, with guidance from experts who have managed similar funds. Two consulting groups, Bernuth & Williamson, and the Center for Urban and Racial Equity, were selected for their complementary strengths and community representation. The process includes community engagement through focus groups and "possibility conversations" to identify the capital needs of minority business owners. The PVPC manages the grants and oversees the project, ensuring outreach and community feedback collection. Funding comes from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and the Massachusetts Gaming Commission.

MOVED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, SECONDED BY DOUG ALBERTSON, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO NEGOTIATE AND EXECUTE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT WITH THE CENTER FOR URBAN AND RACIAL EQUITY (CURE) TO PROVIDE FACILITATION SERVICES RELATED TO THE FORMATION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW FUND DESIGNED TO PROVIDE WORKING CAPITAL TO WOMEN- AND MINORITY-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

11. Authorization for the Executive Director to Negotiate and Execute a Mutually Acceptable Contractual Agreement with Bernuth & Williamson to Provide Facilitation Services related to the Formation and Establishment of a New Fund Designed to Provide Working Capital to Women- and Minority-Owned Small Businesses

Ms. Robinson presented the authorization for the Executive Director to negotiate and execute a contract with Bernuth & Williamson. The purpose is to provide facilitation services to establish a new fund that provides working capital to women- and minority-owned small businesses.

Mr. Dwyer asked about the sources of funding, noting that recent funds have come from the Gaming Commission and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. Ms. Robinson explained that this is part of a larger project initiated in 2021 when the federal government provided economic development districts (EDDs) with funds to help local economies recover from COVID-19. The PVPC used these funds to research and develop solutions to build economic resilience, which led to an update of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs).

The research highlighted that the most significant barrier for minority- and women-owned businesses in the region is access to capital. The PVPC won a technical assistance grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA), being one of only eight recipients nationwide and the only one in the Northeast. This grant allowed them to explore solutions, including the creation of an equity fund targeting these businesses.

The PVPC engaged with the Federal Reserve Bank and the Massachusetts Gaming Commission's community mitigation fund. Initially, they considered providing technical assistance to small businesses, but found that access to capital was the more pressing need. They conducted a gap analysis to assess local service providers' ability to meet MGM Springfield's procurement benchmarks for buying from veteran-, minority-, and women-owned businesses. The analysis showed these benchmarks were not being met, reinforcing the need for capital access rather than just technical support. The PVPC presented their findings and the pivot from a physical business hub to a capital fund to the Gaming Commission, which responded positively to the results and the project's direction.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY JACK JEMSEK, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO NEGOTIATE AND EXECUTE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT WITH BERNUTH & WILLIAMSON TO PROVIDE FACILITATION SERVICES RELATED TO THE FORMATION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW FUND

DESIGNED TO PROVIDE WORKING CAPITAL TO WOMEN- AND MINORITY-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

12. Report and Action on the Recommendations of the PVPC Operations Subcommittee Regarding the Executive Director's 2024 Performance Evaluation

Mr. Kingston stated that the Executive Committee endorses the 2024 performance evaluation and findings of the PVPC's Operations Subcommittee, which are applicable to the Planning Commission's Executive Director. The Committee also approves the Executive Director's recommended 2024 merit salary adjustment, as outlined in the Operations Subcommittee's report. Mr. Kingston clarified that the operations subcommittee of the PVPC recommended that Kimberly Robertson, the PVPC's Executive Director, receive a 4% salary increase, retroactive to July 1, 2025. This recommendation was based on her outstanding performance during a period of uncertain federal funding and policy. The performance review period covered is from October 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025. Future performance reviews will be conducted on a fiscal year basis, from July 1 to June 30.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY T.J. COUSINEAU, TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ENDORSEMENT OF THE 2024 PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AND FINDINGS OF THE PVPC'S OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE APPLICABLE TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND APPROVAL OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S RECOMMENDED 2024 MERIT SALARY ADJUSTMENT AS OUTLINED IN THE APPLICABLE REPORT OF THE OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

13. Discussion and Approval of Proposed 2026 Executive Committee and Commission Meeting Schedules

The Executive Committee meeting schedule and Commission meeting schedule will remain unchanged from previous years. Executive Committee meetings will be held on the fourth Thursday of each month, except July. Commission meetings will be held on the second Thursday of February, April, June, October and December.

MOVED BY DOUG ALBERTSON, SECONDED BY JACK LUTTRELL, TO APPROVE OF PROPOSED 2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULES. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

14. Contracts Signed Under \$25,000

Ms. Robinson reported that in October 2025, several contracts were signed totaling nearly \$122,000. Three contracts are dedicated to historic preservation efforts, including the preparation of a draft National Register nomination for the Brookside Cemetery in Easthampton divided into two components, and the creation of inventory documentation for approximately 36 properties in Longmeadow. The organization will coordinate and facilitate community engagement activities focused on agricultural ditches in the agricultural areas of Hatfield and Hadley. The PVPC is set to participate as part of the design team for the Live Well Springfield initiative. An amendment has been made to extend the contract end date for food systems planning assistance to the Springfield Food Policy Council. Professor Henry Renski has been engaged as a strategic data advisor for the PV data redesign project and will be involved through the end of April 2026.

15. Human Resources Items

Ms. Robinson reported that the search for a new Deputy Director for Land Use and Environment has concluded successfully. Laura Bandara has been hired and will start on January 12, 2026. She brings over 15 years of experience in land use and environmental work, including roles in municipal planning offices in Charlotte and Salt Lake City. Ms.

Bandara holds a master's degree in landscape architecture and a bachelor's degree from Hampshire College.

Kyle Finnell has resigned from the PVPC to take a position as Community Development Director in New Hampshire. His last day will be December 5, 2025. The team is assessing whether to recruit a new senior planner. Catherine Ratté will retire at the end of the year but will continue working on the Pioneer Valley Data project.

16. Executive Director's Highlights and Updates

Ms. Robinson shared that the second cohort of the Quantum Training Academy has graduated. A student from the previous cohort secured a quantum field job at \$24 per hour while completing their high school equivalency and is inspired to pursue physics further. This semester, 40 high school freshmen participated, focusing on quantum skills, STEM education, and positive psychology. The program included lab visits at UMass Amherst and activities to build soft skills and emotional intelligence. Springfield Technical Community College has adopted the bridge-to-quantum curriculum, and UMass Amherst is evaluating the pilot for potential ongoing funding.

Jack Jemsek addressed challenges in Amherst regarding student housing, particularly balancing on-campus versus off-campus living and its impact on local taxes. Mr. Comia acknowledged Amherst's condition of having multiple universities in a community and highlighted that the regional housing plan aims to address affordability and development, leveraging existing studies by Wayfinders and the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute. The plan will involve a committee of housing professionals and planners from various communities. There is optimism about state investment in housing development in Western Massachusetts, with recent funding for projects such as the Monson Development Center.

The federal government has reopened, and the team is preparing to reapply to the EDA as an economic development district. An end-of-year celebration is scheduled for December 17, 2025, at noon, with a potluck at the PVPC.

17. Committee Member Comments, Suggestions, and Future Agenda Items

T.J. Cousineau noted that Blandford is planning to upgrade its zoning bylaw and map and would like to connect with Mr. Comia regarding this initiative. Jacqueline Coury was mentioned as the project lead.

Mr. Comia mentioned that Ms. Ratté will be honored as the Professional Planner of the Year at the American Planning Association Massachusetts Chapter's annual awards luncheon, scheduled for December 5, 2025, in Northampton. Additionally, the PVPC will receive two awards: the Professional Planner of the Year and the President's Award for the Climate Resilience Playbook, awarded jointly with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

Peri Hall congratulated the award recipients and specifically recognized Angela Panaccione for outstanding work on the *Climate Resilience Playbook* and contributions to Goshen and other communities. Ms. Hall shared that their team has submitted four expressions of interest for the One Stop program and suggested the Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)'s planning assistance opportunity; ECO One Stop. She and Ms. Robinson offered to assist Mr. Cousineau and Blandford with their grant applications as DLTAs, the One Stop Grant, and Energy and Environmental Affairs planning assistance have multiple communities applying concurrently, facing similar challenges.

Mr. Dwyer concluded with a reminder that the next meeting will be held on the third Thursday of December, as the fourth Thursday conflicts with the holidays.

MOVED BY WILLIAM DWYER, TO ADJOURN TODAY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 6:11 P.M.

18. Action Items

- Ms. Robinson will send out invitations to the PVPC potluck year-end December 17, 2025, celebration to the Executive Committee members.
- Mr. Cousineau will send Mr. Comia contact information for Ms. Coury, project lead, regarding Blandford's zoning bylaw and map updates.

Respectfully Submitted,
Doug Albertson, Secretary/Clerk

List of Documents and Other Items Distributed at the November 20, 2025, Meeting

1. Executive Committee November 20, 2025, Meeting Agenda
2. Executive Committee October 23, 2025, Minutes
3. November 20, 2025, Possible Motions
4. October 2025 List of Payments
5. October 2025 Financial Summary
6. Signed Contracts – October 2025
7. October 2025 Check Listings