PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)
Minutes of the Virtual Zoom Meeting Held on Thursday, February 19, 2026, at 5:30 P.M.

Commission Members Present

Doug Albertson	Alternate Commissioner	Belchertown
Alvin Allen	Alternate Commissioner	Southwick
Bruce Coldham	Commissioner	Amherst
Bruce Colton	Commissioner	Longmeadow
William Dwyer	Commissioner	Hadley
Judith Eiseman	Commissioner	Pelham
Marilyn Gorman Fil	Alternate Commissioner	Monson
Richard Holzman	Commissioner	Chester
Jack Jemsek	Alternate Commissioner	Amherst
George Kingston	Alternate Commissioner	East Longmeadow
Kate Kruckemeyer	Commissioner	Holyoke
Rosanna Lopez	Alternate Commissioner	Holyoke
Robert Lucier	Commissioner	Palmer
Jack Luttrell	Commissioner	Wilbraham
Nestor Matthews	Commissioner	Worthington
Rosemary Morin	Commissioner	Springfield
Sarah L. Ryan	Commissioner	Wales
Robert Szklarz	Commissioner	South Hadley

PVPC Staff Present
Kimberly H. Robinson, Executive Director
Laura Bandara, Deputy Director of Land Use and Environment
Ken Comia, Director of Land Use and Environment
Indrani Kowlessar, Director of Human Resources and Administrative Services
Gary Roux, Director of Transportation Planning
Deanna Young, Administrative Services Coordinator

Guests
Keith Fairey, President/Chief Executive Officer, Way Finders
Michael McNally, Senior Research Analyst, Donahue Institute, University of Massachusetts

Communities Not Represented at the February 19, 2026, Commission Meeting

Agawam	Granby	Plainfield
Blandford	Hatfield	Southampton
Chesterfield	Holland	Thorndike
Chicopee	Huntington	Westfield
Cummington	Ludlow	Williamsburg
Easthampton	Middlefield	
Goshen	Northampton	

1. Chairman's Call to Order, Welcome, and Approval of the Minutes of the Commission Meetings Held on February 13, 2025, and December 11, 2025

The February 19, 2026, virtual Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) meeting was called to order at 5:31 p.m. by William Dwyer. Indrani Kowlessar took roll call and noted there was a quorum.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 13, 2025, COMMISSION MEETING. THE MOTION CARRIED WITH THREE ABSTENTIONS FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

MOVED BY ROSEMARY MORIN, SECONDED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 11, 2025, COMMISSION MEETING. THE MOTION CARRIED WITH FIVE ABSTENTIONS FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

2. Introduction of New Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) Employees

Laura Bandara, Deputy Director of Land Use and Environment, was introduced.

3. Presentation of Housing Study by Way Finders and University of Massachusetts Donohue Institute

Keith Fairey, President and CEO of Way Finders, provided background on the organization and explained that this is the third housing study completed with the Donohue Institute. He noted the study expands prior work by adding Berkshire County and by creating new, publicly accessible tools to support local housing discussions and decision-making.

Michael McNally, Senior Research Analyst at the UMass Donohue Institute, presented key findings from the study, including: very low vacancy rates across Western Massachusetts; rising home prices and rents; increasing renter cost burden with racial disparities; growing eviction activity, particularly in Hampden County; and added housing pressure from investor purchases and short-term rentals. He reported that Hampden and Hampshire counties together face a projected housing gap of nearly 14,000 units by 2035, and that meeting this need would generate significant economic benefits for the region.

Mr. McNally demonstrated two new tools developed as part of the study: the Housing Data Explorer, which provides municipality-level housing indicators, and the Housing Impact Dashboard, which presents information related to infrastructure, school enrollment trends, and development capacity. Commissioners were encouraged to explore and share the dashboards locally, which are accessible on the Way Finders website

Upcoming community housing conversations were announced for Hampden County (March 18 at Holyoke Community College) and Hampshire County (March 25 at UMass Amherst). PVPC staff indicated that links and event information shared in the meeting chat would be preserved and distributed to commissioners following the meeting.

Richard Holzman described a shovel-ready over-50 housing project in Chester that has received local approvals but is stalled due to high construction costs and limited capital from developers. He asked about available funding sources and strategies to advance the project, as well as an RFP for the reuse of a former elementary school site. Presenters reviewed current state housing funding efforts, infrastructure grant programs, and ongoing challenges related to construction costs and financing.

The Commission discussed how the current study compares to earlier housing studies and whether conditions have worsened. Presenters noted that the housing gap has increased since the prior study and highlighted growing investor activity as a key concern.

Several commissioners commented positively on the dashboards' usefulness and stated that they plan to share the tools with local planning boards, housing committees, and municipal staff.

4. Certification of Local Assessments at a Proposed Per Capita Rate of $.19661 for Fiscal Year 2027

Kimberly H. Robinson presented the proposed FY 2027 local assessments, calculated using 2020 census population figures and reflecting the allowable 2.5% per-capita increase under Chapter 40B. The proposed assessments would take effect July 1, 2026, resulting in a total assessment increase of $3,010.09 over the prior year.

It was noted that providing assessment information earlier would be helpful for towns, particularly given current financial pressures. Ms. Robinson explained that Chapter 40B requires assessments to be approved by February, but the Commission could move the presentation and approval to December without difficulty. Staff expressed willingness to adjust the timeline in the future.

MOVED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, SECONDED BY MARILYN GORMAN FIL, TO APPROVE THE LOCAL ASSESSMENTS AT A PROPOSED PER CAPITA RATE OF $.19661 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

5. Presentation of Fiscal Year 2027 Draft Budget – (In Accordance with the Provisions of Chapter 40B M.G.L., with Final Approval Scheduled for the April 2026 Planning Commission Meeting)

Ms. Robinson presented the draft FY 2027 budget covering July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027, noting that final approval is scheduled for the April, 2026, Commission meeting. The proposed draft budget totals $6,524,409, representing an anticipated 2.5% decrease from the FY 2026 projected budget due to expected revenue reductions.

Ms. Robinson confirmed the budget materials will be distributed to commissioners ahead of the April meeting to allow time for review, even if only a day or two in advance.

The Commission noted several insurance line items were projected to decrease and questioned whether that reflected an assumption or confirmed information. Ms. Robinson explained that where actual confirmed premium amounts were already known, those figures were used rather than estimates, resulting in lower projected costs.

6. Executive Director's Highlights and Updates

Ms. Robinson reported that the FY 2025 audit has been completed with no findings and no management letter for the third consecutive year.

Additional updates included:

- The Governor's budget proposes level funding for District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) at $3 million statewide; the PVPC anticipates approximately $275,000 and will advocate for continued support during meetings with legislators at the state house on March 5.
- The PVPC is actively assisting communities with Environment & Climate One Stop (ECO One Stop), Community Development Block Grant, and other grant applications, with outreach ongoing.
- Staff offered orientation meetings for new town administrators to introduce PVPC services and programs.
- The PVPC has seen increased media coverage of its work in recent months.
- The PVPC has received an invitation to reapply for the Economic Development Administration (EDA) designation for three years.

Ms. Robinson noted that concerns about passenger rail and East-West Rail funding were raised with members of Congress, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding federal transportation reauthorization. Ms. Robinson confirmed that both East-West Rail and Northern Tier routes are included in statewide rail planning efforts, and that she will be able to provide more detailed updates following the upcoming MassDOT meeting.

7. Community Reports/Updates from the PVPC Commission Members

There were no updates from the Commission members.

8. Other Business

There being no further business to conduct, a motion was called for to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED BY RICHARD HOLZMAN, SECONDED BY GEORGE KINGSTON, TO ADJOURN THE FEBRUARY 19, 2026, COMMISSION MEETING. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 7:16 P.M.

9. Action Items

- Ms. Young is to preserve the Way Finders/Donahue chat links and send them to the Commission separately.
- Following input from Ms. Robinson, Ms. Young is to include the Community Forum events details in the post-meeting information distribution.

Respectfully Submitted,

Doug Albertson, Secretary/Clerk
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

List of Documents and Other Items Distributed at This Meeting

1. February 19, 2026, Commission Meeting Agenda
2. February 19, 2026, Possible Motions
3. February 13, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes
4. December 11, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes
5. FY27 Memo – Proposed Annual Assessments
6. Draft of Proposal FY27 Assessment