

PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)
Minutes of the Virtual Zoom Meeting Held on Thursday, April 9, 2026, at 5:30 P.M.

Commission Members Present

Alvin Allen	Alternate Commissioner	Southwick
John Bowen	Commissioner	Westfield
Bruce Colton	Commissioner	Longmeadow
Robert Daley	Alternate Commissioner	Chester
William Dwyer, Jr., Esq.	Commissioner	Hadley
Judith Eiseman	Commissioner	Pelham
Peri Hall	Alternate Commissioner	Goshen
Sarah Hamilton	Alternate Commissioner	Chesterfield
Stephen Thor Johnson	Commissioner	Southampton
George Kingston	Alternate Commissioner	East Longmeadow
Kate Kruckemeyer	Commissioner	Holyoke
Rosanna Lopez	Alternate Commissioner	Holyoke
Jack Luttrell	Commissioner	Wilbraham
Nestor Matthews	Commissioner	Worthington
Rosemary Morin	Commissioner	Springfield
John Paquette, Jr.	Commissioner	Chicopee
Sarah L. Ryan	Commissioner	Wales
Jessica Thornton	Commissioner	Southwick

PVPC Staff Present

Kimberly H. Robinson, Executive Director
Rana Al-Jammal, Principal Transportation Planner
Laura Bandara, Deputy Director of Land Use and Environment
Ken Comia, Director of Land Use and Environment
Patty Gambarini, Chief Environmental Planner
Carl Jackson, Principal Transit Planner
Indrani Kowlessar, Director of Human Resources
Gary Roux, Principal Planner/Traffic Manager
Deanna Young, Administrative Services Coordinator

Guests

James Bradbury, Pelham Planning Board Member
Kayla Northup, Project Manager, VHB

Communities Not Represented at the April 9, 2026, Commission Meeting

Agawam	Easthampton	Ludlow	Plainfield
Amherst	Granby	Middlefield	South Hadley
Belchertown	Hatfield	Monson	Thorndike
Blandford	Holland	Northampton	Williamsburg
Cummington	Huntington	Palmer	

1. Chairman's Call to Order, Welcome, and Approval of the Minutes of the Commission Meeting Held on February 19, 2026

The April 9, 2026, virtual Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) meeting was called to order at 5:33 p.m. by William Dwyer. Indrani Kowlessar took roll call and noted there was a quorum.

MOVED BY JOHN PAQUETTE, SECONDED BY JUDITH EISEMAN, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 19,

2026, COMMISSION MEETING. THE MOTION CARRIED WITH FIVE ABSTENTIONS FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

2. Housing Leadership Academy Presentation

Laura Bandara reported that the planned presenter was unable to attend; she therefore shared program information on behalf of the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA). Ms. Bandara explained that CHAPA's Housing Leadership Academy is a free, six-month fellowship intended to equip local officials with the knowledge, skills, and peer network needed to advance housing production for people of all ages, incomes, and abilities. She noted that the Academy is offered at no cost to mayors, city councilors, select board members, planning board members, and other local officials, and includes monthly virtual seminars with housing policy experts, monthly peer meetings with officials from similar communities, and periodic social events, with optional one-on-one community engagement support available. Ms. Bandara stated that applications were open at the time of the meeting and will close on April 27, 2026. She indicated she would share links and contact information in the Zoom chat and via email to the Commission.

Ms. Bandara also described CHAPA's Municipal Engagement Initiative, a resident-led, pro-housing advocacy cohort operating in multiple communities that provides training and resources to help local advocates advance housing initiatives. She noted that applications for the Municipal Engagement Initiative are open until May 4, 2026, and that CHAPA planned informational open houses, including one scheduled for April 10, 2026, at noon, and another scheduled for April 14, 2026, from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Ms. Bandara advised members to contact CHAPA's program director, Will Rattigan, with questions. PVPC staff confirmed that the program information would be sent to the full Commission by email. Mr. Dwyer added that CHAPA publishes a frequent email newsletter and encouraged interested members to subscribe through CHAPA's website.

3. Safe Streets and Roads for All: Presentation on the Pioneer Valley Regional Safety Action Plan

Gary Roux introduced Kayla Northup, who provided an update on the PVPC's federally funded Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) planning and demonstration grant and the development of the Pioneer Valley Regional Safety Action Plan. Ms. Northup explained that the PVPC is the regional grant recipient, with oversight from the U.S. Department of Transportation, and that five municipalities in the region also received separate SS4A funding to prepare their own local safety action plans. She described SS4A as a competitive, discretionary program established under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to advance a Safe System approach and work toward the long-term goal of zero roadway deaths. Ms. Northup noted that the regional effort will produce an action plan to pursue future SS4A implementation and demonstration funding for construction and other safety projects identified in the plan.

Ms. Northup reviewed the plan's data-driven safety analysis, explaining that the consultant team is combining a reactive "high injury network" analysis, focused on crash concentrations and crash rates, with proactive "high risk network" screening, focused on roadway characteristics and risk factors associated with key crash types, including lane departure, intersections, pedestrian and bicycle crashes, motorcycle crashes, and speeding-related crashes. She reported that limited-access highways were excluded from the analysis. She noted that the PVPC's Metropolitan Planning Organization adopted a regional Vision Zero statement with a goal year of 2050, informed by trend analysis of fatalities and serious injuries.

Ms. Northup outlined ongoing and upcoming engagement activities, including public meetings, stakeholder interviews, pop-up outreach at community events, and a hybrid open house anticipated in mid-May, and she encouraged commissioners to use the project's online comment tool to identify safety concerns, locations, and examples of successful practices. She stated that the final plan deliverables will include prioritized project lists by community and for the region, a safety countermeasure toolbox ranging from low- to high-cost strategies, and recommendations spanning engineering, enforcement, education, and policy actions.

Rosemary Morin asked whether the regional plan would reflect work already underway in individual municipalities, citing safety concerns on State Street in Springfield. Ms. Northup responded that the team is coordinating with the five communities completing their own SS4A action plans to avoid duplication, reference local efforts, and incorporate lessons learned.

Judith Eiseman raised a question regarding roadside memorials placed on public property following a recent fatal crash in Pelham and asked about approaches other jurisdictions have taken. Ms. Northup noted that the issue is sensitive and can pose additional safety risks. She described instances in which agencies have removed or relocated items for safety reasons while attempting to be respectful to families.

Jack Luttrell from Wilbraham shared that the town proactively reduced the speed limit to 25 miles per hour townwide to address speeding cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets.

4. Discussion and Final Approval of the PVPC's Proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Budget, Presented in Draft Form at the February 19th Commission Meeting

Kimberly Robinson explained that the budget presented for approval was the same version presented in February, with no changes because the PVPC had not received new information about additional grant revenue in time to revise it. Ms. Robinson stated the proposed 2027 budget reflects an overall 2.5% to 3% reduction in both revenues and expenditures (from about \$6.695 million to about \$6.524 million) to be conservative amid uncertainty. She noted the apparent salary/benefits reductions were not staff pay cuts, but rather more accurate budgeting, especially for health insurance, based on updated numbers. She also explained a roughly 16% to 17% decrease in office expenditures due to recent prior-year investments, such as new laptops/equipment, server, and a redesigned website, meaning the coming year is primarily maintenance rather than major purchases. Finally, Ms. Robinson highlighted a projected increase in consultants/subcontractors (from \$700,000 to \$1 million) tied to grant-funded project work.

MOVED BY JUDITH EISEMAN, SECONDED BY JACK LUTTRELL, TO ADOPT THE RECOMMENDED FINAL VERSION OF THE PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC) BUDGET (I.E., JULY 1, 2026 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2027) AS WAS OUTLINED IN A STAFF BUDGET REPORT WHICH WAS DISTRIBUTED AT THE FEBRUARY 19 COMMISSION MEETING. IT IS ALSO UNDERSTOOD AND MADE KNOWN THAT THE COMMISSION'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IS HEREBY AUTHORIZED TO FURTHER REVISE THE PVPC'S ADOPTED FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET AS THE AGENCY'S NEEDS AND CIRCUMSTANCES DICTATE. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

5. Approval of the PVPC Borrowing Resolution for the Commission's Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027

Ms. Robinson explained that the borrowing resolution is a standard annual authorization that allows the PVPC to borrow short-term funds via an existing \$150,000 line of credit if needed to manage cash flow while awaiting receipt of funds from municipal assessments, grants, and project contracts.

MOVED BY JUDITH EISEMAN, AND SECONDED BY ROSEMARY MORIN, THAT THE DULY ELECTED CHAIRMAN AND TREASURER OF THE PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION FOR 2026/2027 ARE HEREBY AUTHORIZED TO BORROW NECESSARY FUNDS IN ANTICIPATION OF REVENUES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RELEVANT PROVISIONS OF CHAPTER 40B M G.L. FOR A TOTAL AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$500,000 TO COVER OPERATING EXPENSES OF THE COMMISSION DURING THE PERIOD JULY 1, 2026, THROUGH JUNE 30, 2027 (I.E., FISCAL YEAR 2027). IT IS ALSO UNDERSTOOD AND MADE KNOWN THAT THE PVPC CHAIRMAN, TREASURER, ASSISTANT TREASURER, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SHALL BE AUTHORIZED TO EXECUTE ALL NECESSARY LOAN/BORROWING DOCUMENTS ON THE COMMISSION'S BEHALF. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

6. Executive Director's Highlights and Updates

Ms. Robinson reported that Congressman Neal recently hosted an event at Union Station at which MassDOT provided a comprehensive update on the Compass Rail initiative, including West-East Rail and North-South service improvements, and she stated that she was inviting MassDOT to present the same information at the Commission's June meeting. Ms. Robinson also recognized PVPC staff who partnered with Way Finders to hold two regional housing events, one in Hampden County and one in Hampshire County, in late March, with approximately 60 residents attending each event, and she noted that the events served as an initial public engagement step for the PVPC's Regional Housing Plan work. Ms. Robinson indicated that additional opportunities for commission member engagement in the housing plan process would be shared in future meetings.

7. Community Reports/Updates from the PVPC Commission Members

Nestor Matthews described two proposed solar projects in Worthington and reported that the first project, submitted by Bluewave, required a special permit and generated significant resident participation and opposition during multiple continued planning board hearings. Mr. Matthews stated that a second proposed project would not require a special permit, thereby shortening the statutory review timeframe, and he noted that Worthington voters recently supported local articles seeking solar and battery energy storage system (BESS) moratoria and restrictions, as well as state legislation intended to provide additional moratorium authority. Mr. Matthews expressed concern that "by-right" siting standards and new Department of Energy Resources regulations could accelerate approvals and impose process requirements that exceed the staffing capacity of small towns. He cited local issues including proximity to neighbors, impacts to rural character and visible landscapes, potential effects on aquifer and wetland resources, and uncertainties regarding BESS fire response, air impacts, and runoff management. He requested additional support and resources for small towns, including model bylaws better tailored to rural conditions and water resource protection.

Sarah Hamilton acknowledged similar pressures on nearby towns. She stated that small communities often lack the staff capacity to meet rapid solar permitting timelines while also navigating community divisions over whether to support renewable energy or oppose large-scale projects. Judith Eiseman reported that Pelham is anticipating a potential proposal involving an Article 97-protected forest parcel. She emphasized the need to balance renewable energy goals with the protection of farmland, forests, clean air, and water resources, and encouraged continued regional coordination and advocacy. Sarah Hamilton and other members referenced an Eversource webinar intended to explain mapping and infrastructure information that may help communities understand areas attractive to developers.

Mr. Dwyer noted that the PVPC had circulated the webinar information by email. John Bowen commented that the Dover Amendment and related "by-right" siting provisions have expanded beyond their original intent and can limit local decision-making in ways that communities find problematic. Judith Eiseman cited the Sunpin case and its resulting viewpoints weighing solar over forests or vice versa.

Nestor Matthews added that his community's planning board and board of health had also begun discussing possible actions in response to solar and BESS proposals. Ms. Robinson indicated that the PVPC has model solar bylaws available and offered to follow up with Mr. Matthews to understand rural concerns better and identify additional ways the PVPC might assist.

8. Other Business

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

MOVED BY WILLIAM DWYER, TO ADJOURN TODAY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 6:44 P.M.

9. Action Items

- Ms. Young is to distribute information shared in the meeting's Zoom Chat to members by email.
- Following this meeting, Ms. Robinson will have a follow-up conversation with Nestor Matthews.

Respectfully Submitted,

Doug Albertson, Secretary/Clerk
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

List of Documents and Other Items Distributed at This Meeting

1. April 9, 2026, Commission Meeting Agenda
2. February 19, 2026, Commission Meeting Minutes
3. April 9, 2026, Possible Motions
4. Proposed FY27 Budget
5. Housing Leadership Academy Draft Flyer