



MONTACHUSETT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRPC)

REMOTE MEETING

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2025, 7:00 PM

MRPC MEETING MATERIALS:

[February 6, 2025 Meeting Handouts](#)

MINUTES

1. Open Meeting, Introductions and Announcements

This meeting will be recorded to ensure we have an accurate record of our discussion. If anyone has any concerns about being recorded, please let us know.

This meeting is held under Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, signed by Governor Healey on March 29, 2023, allowing local and regional governments to hold public meetings remotely or in a hybrid fashion. All votes will be taken by roll call.

Chair L. Shifrin called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Roll Call Followed:

B. Yocum – present
R. Swartz – present
P. Cunningham – present
G. Corbosiero - present
G. Tillotson – present
E, Newman – present
D. Thornton – present
A. Reid - present
K. Norton – present
K. Munroe – present
K. Nartowicz – present
L. Shifrin – present

2. MRPC Minutes – January 9, 2025 – Approval of Commissioners Requested

P. Cunningham mentioned he did not see himself listed as attending the January MRPC Commission meeting. H. Ford has since confirm that although he was not listed in the initial roll call due to arriving late for the meeting, he is listed as present in the meeting attendance.

G. Tillotson moved to accept the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

- A. Reid – yes
- B. Yocum – yes
- D. Thornton – yes
- E. Newman – yes
- G. Tillotson – yes
- G. Corbosiero – yes
- K. Nartowicz – abstain
- K. Munroe – yes
- K. Norton – abstain
- L. Shifrin – yes
- P. Cunningham- yes
- R. Swartz – yes

3. Cash Schedule – January 2025 – Acceptance of Commissioners Requested

R. Swartz presented the January 2025 cash schedule. The opening balance for January 1, 2025, \$441,448.30, total receipts, and transfers for the month \$521,973.20, total cash on hand before this warrant \$963,421.50, less the amount of this warrant \$385,865.23, left a balance after the warrant of \$577,556.27.

G. Corbosiero moved to accept the cash schedule as presented subject to audit. Motion was seconded.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

- A. Pease – yes
- A. Reid – yes
- B. Yocum – yes
- D. Thornton – yes
- E. Newman – yes
- G. Tillotson – yes
- G. Corbosiero – yes
- K. Norton – yes
- K. Munroe – yes
- K. Nartowicz – yes
- L. Shifrin – yes
- P. Cunningham- yes
- R. Swartz – yes

4. Guest Announcements and Questions

G. Kahale, MART Representative, reminded everyone of the MassDOT grant of \$278,000 for a shuttle service to Emerson Hospital from the towns of Ayer, Shirley and Harvard. The grant will run through June 2026. This service will provide health care options for the many residents of the region who are negatively affected by the recent closure of the Nashoba Valley Medical Center. After meeting with the impacted town's elected officials, MART created a shuttle service scheduled to Emerson Hospital with one stop in each community which was selected by the town official. The Shirley Council on Aging, the Ayer Public Library and the Harvard Business Plaza are the locations, and the shuttle service will start on Monday February 24, 2025.

The schedule for the service can be found on the MART website, <https://www.mrta.us/schedule-map/emerson-hospital-shuttle> and MART staff will be taking brochures to the town offices, the hospital and the clinic. This service is free until June 2026 and is available to anyone, not just residents of Ayer, Shirley or Harvard.

P. Cunningham asked if anyone had any additional information regarding Nashoba Valley Medical Center. B. Yocum said she heard UMass Memorial is looking to set up an emergency facility in the area. They are looking at other locations as the building itself has a lot of deferred maintenance. P. Cunningham expressed how disappointing it is that the property site of Nashoba Valley Medical Center will sit vacant. There is relief to the communities that are struggling with transit times knowing they are looking to establish another emergency facility however this is going to take some time before it will be completed.

5. Guest Speaker Senator James Eldridge Invited; Nashoba Valley Medical Center – Information Only

- **Senator Eldridge was unable to attend this meeting however, will attend the March 6, 2025, Meeting of Commissioners**

6. Administrative Matters

6.1 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) : Review and Awards for Services – Action Requested

REPORT:

MRPC was awarded \$207,474 in DLTA funds for 2025. This is the 18th year regional planning agencies and councils of government have been awarded these funds from the state budget. In response to a first solicitation, issued December 17, 2024, a total of fifteen (15) proposals were received for use of District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) resources to provide a variety of services. The proposals received are as follows:

1. **Ashburnham:** Technical Assistance to bring the town to MBTA Compliance.
2. **Ashby:** Technical Assistance to bring the town to MBTA Compliance – contingent on Planning Assistance Grant (PAG) award (from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs [EOEEA]).
3. **Athol:** Route 2A Economic Development Corridor Study – in collaboration with FRCOG and Orange.
4. **Groton:** Update of Housing Production Plan.
5. **Hubbardston:** Public engagement for revisions to Commercial District Bylaw.
6. **Hubbardston:** Site preparedness activities including past activities and future potential uses, including public engagement and SWOT analysis.
7. **Lancaster:** Update Open Space and Recreation Plan.
8. **Leominster:** Revision of Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaw.

9. **Shirley:** Assistance in creating a Shirley Affordable Housing Trust.
10. **Sterling:** Technical Assistance to bring the town to MBTA Compliance.
11. **Sterling:** Update of Housing Production Plan.
12. **Townsend:** Technical Assistance to bring the town to MBTA Compliance.
13. **Townsend:** Assistance with implementing goals and objectives from Economic Development element of the Master Plan and their Economic Development Plan.
14. **Westminster:** Technical Assistance to bring the town to MBTA Compliance
15. **Westminster:** Creating a Village Center Bylaw and Map.

RESOLUTION:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) recommends that all of the above-named project requests for District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA), if eligible, be **conditionally** awarded based upon further communication/clarification/negotiation with the applying communities and **approval from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities**. Moreover, all activities in some applications may not be awardable under the DLTA program: MRPC staff reserves the right to negotiate an awardable detailed scope of services and budget amount. MRPC also reserves the right to work with towns to help them obtain funding from other available resources to complete tasks in place of the DLTA Program.

These recommended projects are conditionally awarded and are subject to the conditions listed below.

1. The services to be delivered to the communities will be completed commencing no earlier than a fully executed contract between the subject (lead) community and the MRPC.
2. Services will be delivered to the subject community(ies) during the implementation of the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program year (2025).
3. The award of services from the MRPC is subject to the:
 - a. Funding available to the MRPC during the program year (2025);
 - b. Successful negotiation of a detailed scope of services, schedule for the completion of the tasks identified in the scope of services, and budget utilizing DLTA and other funds, if available and eligible for the aforementioned project;
 - c. Execution of a contract between the MRPC and the community(ies);
 and,
4. Where and when possible the MRPC will deliver the tasks related to “analysis, preparation and presentation ... report(s) ...” as indicated above. The MRPC and the community requesting services will “outsource” consulting services only when absolutely deemed to be necessary by both the lead community and the MRPC.
5. This is an award of services from the MRPC to the applicable community(ies). This is not a cash award.
6. If at any time EOHLC determines that the project is ineligible, the award of services will be null and void.
7. The municipality and all municipal departments shall provide MRPC with cooperation/access/assistance to public data applicable to the DLTA project including providing such materials. Related costs associated with this (data collection, photocopying, etc.) will be at the expense of the municipality(s).

L. Shifrin asked if there was enough funding to handle the above requests. K. Chapman stated the money has been designated for each task based on how much time we think each project will need.

G. Eaton confirmed and also stated if that changed, it would be communicated to the affected communities.

Having no objections, P. Cunningham moved to accept the resolution as presented. Motion was seconded.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

- A. Pease – yes
- A. Reid – yes
- B. Yocum – yes
- D. Thornton – yes
- E. Newman – yes
- G. Tillotson – yes
- G. Corbosiero – yes
- K. Norton – yes
- K. Munroe – yes
- K. Nartowicz – yes
- L. Shifrin – yes
- P. Cunningham- yes
- R. Swartz – yes

6.2 Mass Trails Grant Match – Action Requested

REPORT:

On February 3, 2025, the Planning and Development Department applied for a MassTrails Grant from the Executive Office of Energy and Environment in the amount of \$90,160. The grant, if awarded, would be used for four communities (Westminster, Ashburnham, Ashby, and Winchendon) (Phase I) to create trail master plans which will include vision-planning for all their associated trails and trail-networks, GPSing of trails that are digitally undocumented, creating trail maps, and a vision for walkability and connectedness.

The match required for this grant is 20% and the Transportation Department has put forward \$12,000 from their MASSDOT-MRPC contract (United Planning Work Program [UPWP]) and the Planning and Development Department is requesting to use \$12,000 from DLTA Program Year 18 funding as a match to this grant. In addition, each of the four communities is providing in-kind or GIS hours as their match in the total amount of \$4,703. The total match calculates to be a 24% match. MRPC tries to exceed grant matching funds requirements to earn additional points in our applications.

Total Project Cost: \$118,863	Grant Amount: \$90,160	Matching Funds: \$28,703
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RESOLUTION:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) approves of the Planning and Development Department request to use \$12,000 of Program Year 18 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) award of \$207,474 as a match for the MassTrails Grant.

Having no objections, G. Tillotson moved to accept the resolution as presented. Motion was seconded.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

- A. Pease – yes
- A. Reid – yes
- B. Yocum – yes
- D. Thornton – yes
- E. Newman – yes
- G. Tillotson – yes
- G. Corbosiero – yes
- K. Norton – yes
- K. Munroe – yes
- K. Nartowicz – yes
- L. Shifrin – yes
- P. Cunningham- yes
- R. Swartz – yes

6.3 MOOR Grant Application – Action Requested

REPORT:

On February 21, 2025, the Planning and Development Department will submit an application to the MA Office of Outdoor Recreation (MOOR) requesting grant funding in the amount \$60,000 to complete an outdoor recreation inventory of the Montachusett Region. MRPC will collaborate with the North Central Chamber of Commerce through their tourism arm Johnny Appleseed/Visit North Central Massachusetts. The purpose of the grant is to collect data on sites and assets to assist in outdoor recreation planning, marketing, promotion, and public information. The data will eventually be located on a state portal where all the information will live. The model for this work is berkshireoutside.org created by the Berkshire RPA. In addition, the Chamber will locate all of this information on its website as well. The match required for this grant is 25%. The Planning and Development Department is requesting to use \$15,000 from the DLTA Program Year 18 award as a match for this grant.

RESOLUTION:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) approves of the Planning and Development Department request to use \$15,000 of Program Year 18 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) award of \$207,474 as a match for the MOOR Grant.

Having no objections, G. Corbosiero moved to accept the resolution as presented. Motion was seconded.

Roll Call Vote Followed:

- A. Pease – yes
- A. Reid – yes
- B. Yocum – yes
- D. Thornton – yes
- E. Newman – yes
- G. Tillotson – yes
- G. Corbosiero – yes
- K. Norton – yes
- K. Munroe – yes
- K. Nartowicz – yes
- L. Shifrin – yes

P. Cunningham- yes

R. Swartz – yes

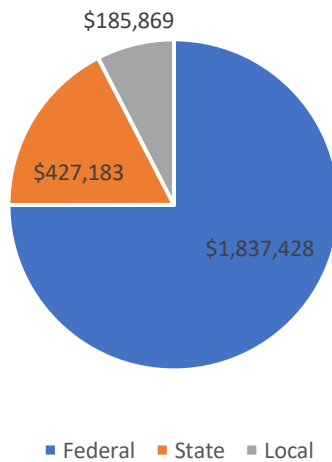
6.4 FY26 Draft Budget Presentation – Information Only

In FY26, MRPC’s leadership has estimated its revenue to be \$2,460,480, expenses at \$2,579,986, yielding a surplus/(deficit) of (\$119,507) or (-4.6%). The projected overhead, or indirect cost, rate is estimated to be 133.63% or 1.3363.

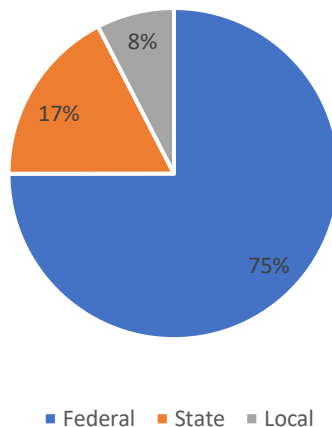
Projected FY26 MRPC Budget

Revenue	\$2,460,480
Expenses	\$2,579,986
Surplus/(Deficit) (In Dollars)	(\$119,507)
Surplus/(Deficit) (%)	(-4.6%)
Overhead Rate (Indirect Cost Rate)	133.63% or 1.3363

Rev. in \$ in FY26 by Funding Source



Rev. in % in FY26 by Funding Source



The projected deficit will need to be offset by:

1. Expending all dollars on all contracts.
2. The potential awards of three outstanding grants totaling \$250,000 or more.
3. The pursuit of Massachusetts Community One Stop program by communities in the Montachusett Region and the MRPC staff.
4. Obtaining additional locally funded planning projects.

All four of the above strategies must be implemented to offset any threat to a reduction in Federal funding which is a topic of concern to all organizations that receive funding from the US government.

The FY26 Budget projection has been provided to the Commissioners in accordance with the General Laws of Massachusetts, chapter 40B, section 7.

Please be advised that the MRPC’s FY25 Budget is as follows:

**FY25 MRPC Budget
(Amendment Date 12/5/24)**

Revenue	\$2,993,750
Expenses	\$2,916,752
Surplus/Deficit) (In Dollars)	\$76,998
Surplus/(Deficit) (%)	2.6%
Overhead Rate (Indirect Cost Rate)	129.31% or 1.2931

G. Eaton stated, between now and June, we will have better data and we will present a final budget at the June meeting.

6.5 Other Administrative Matters – Information Only

6.5.1 Federal Office of Management and Budget “Pause and Rescission” Memoranda

On January 27th, President Trump’s Office of Management and Budget Director issued a directive to Federal departments to “pause” expenditures on approximately 2,600 programs. Disbursements of federal funding “for all programs under CFR 200” were to halt at 5:00 p.m. on January 28th. According to the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) OMB rescinded this memorandum on January 29th, approximately 44-45 hours after the first “pause” memo was issued.

During this nearly two-day period, MRPC’s administrative and fiscal staff identified all our agency’s Federally funded planning contracts.

- MRPC has 21 contracts with local, State, and Federal entities.
- At least 11 of the 21 contracts are with five Federal agencies.

On February 3rd, MRPC and other Federally funded agencies were notified by the Federal District Court of Rhode Island that a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) was issued to halt the OMB's "pause" of Federal expenditures memo.

On Thursday, January 30th MRPC's Executive Director attended a webinar hosted by Tremont Strategies Group (TSG) entitled "President Trump and the 119th Congress." Chet Atkins, Tremont Strategies Group (and former Congressman) opened the webinar. He, Matthew Bartlett (TSG employee and an employee of the first Trump Administration), and Liesl Sheehan another TSG employee shared the following information with all webinar attendees.

- Trump Administration's (the "Administration") current strategy is straight out of the Silicon Valley playbook. Challenge the norms and break things.
- This Administration is different than anything than any other previous Federal Administration.
- The Administration's objective is to radically reduce federal spending. The "pause" and "rescission" memos are examples of this strategy.
- The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Executive Orders don't have a lot of teeth but do have impacts upon organizations in the future.
- TSG indicated that the Administration is:
 - On a path to remove barriers and change the Federal bureaucracy and that the Executive Orders would not stop anytime soon.
 - In the process of attacking "Deep State"/entrenched liberal Federal employees and will work on the removal of Federal employees, an Administration priority, and wishes to remove protections for Federal workers.

It is probable that any future delay or halt in Federal funding to the MRPC would result in a halt in work on the following contracts and their corresponding contracts and projects. There would also be a significant reduction in MRPC staff.

MRPC needs to diversify its revenue streams.

MRPC's State-funded District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program has entered its 18th Program Year (PY18). Free DLTA planning services help municipalities address housing, regionalization matters, zoning bylaws/ordinances, and other local issues. MRPC's "Call for Proposals" for this program has been issued.

MRPC encourages its communities to continue its local planning efforts utilizing other funding sources such as planning grants from the Massachusetts Community One Stop program. Massachusetts provides a Community One Stop for Growth program for communities to apply for approximately 12 planning and development programs. The relevant departments and their respective programs are available at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/community-one-stop-for-growth>.

The above information concerning the potential decline in Federal funding to the MRPC and the availability of the Massachusetts Community One Stop program will be shared with Montachusett's communities by Monday, February 10th.

G. Eaton informed all that on or about January 31st, Governor Healy has filed a piece of legislation to address chapter 90 reform but also addressed the virtual meetings. We will provide updates as they happen.

G. Eaton stressed that the One Stop program is really underutilized. There are 12 programs that communities can tap into this June which is the application deadline. Call Karen Chapman or Bernie Cahill for more details or with any questions.

N. Angus corrected the statement that MVP funding is sourced with Federal funding. Funds come from the state's capital plan and the environmental bond bill.

8 :00 PM

7. Department Updates

Status of all ongoing projects can be found by clicking on the link, below:

<https://mrmapper.mrpc.org/webapps/v2.27/CurrentProjects/>

MRPC staff are prepared to answer questions about any contract with any local, state, and federal entity. Commissioners are welcome to ask questions about projects in their respective communities

7.1 Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

No new updates at this time

7.2 Planning & Development

7.2.1 Energy Manager Grant – Information Only

The Planning & Development staff submitted an application to MassSAVE's Municipal Energy Manager (MEM) grant program on January 30th to fund a full-time consultant to assist interested communities in decarbonization and energy efficiency measures in their school and municipal buildings. The grant will pay for this position over three years for a total of \$360,000. Communities who have National Grid or Eversource accounts were eligible to apply. The communities who responded to the emails from National Grid to participate are Athol and Royalston in the MRPC region and North Brookfield and Berlin from the CMRPC region.

If awarded, a consultant will be hired by MRPC to work for these towns to develop an energy management plan, implement energy-saving opportunities and realize energy savings, with a priority on K-12 school buildings. Municipal buildings will also be included in the tasks.

7.2.2 Clean Energy Planning – Information Only

Under our Regional Energy Program Assistance (REPA) grant from DOER, we have hired a consultant to complete a GHG emissions inventory of all our communities. The inventory includes for each town, data on the number of electric vehicles (EVs) and charging stations, number of residential, commercial, and industrial units along with their fuel usages for electricity and gas, number of heat pumps used, and the emissions from all of these uses and an analysis of which avenues to take to reduce emissions. We would like to form a committee to explore this inventory and continue the committee or working

group to tackle other climate issues. We are currently working with CMPRC on the region's Comprehensive Climate Action Plan which this inventory and working group could have a part in.

7.2.3 MBTA Communities Update – Information Only

As many of you may know, the case against the Town of Milton was resolved. On January 8, 2025, the MA SJC published an opinion confirming that the MBTA Communities Law is constitutional and valid, and that the Attorney General has the power to enforce it. The Court also opined that EOHLC must promulgate the law's implementing guidelines through the Administrative Procedures Act if they are to be enforceable. Therefore, on January 14, 2025, EOHLC filed emergency regulations with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. There is a public comment period from January 31, 2025 through February 21, 2025 11:59 pm. Public comments on the proposed regulations can be submitted through the MBTA Communities website.

7.2.4 Municipal Digital Equity Planning – Information Only

MBI has reopened the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Grant for those communities who would like to still participate in the program. If any community is interested, they can apply online at Mass Tech Collaborative's website.

7.3 Transit & Transportation

7.3.1 TRB Conference – Information Only

TRB (Transportation Research Board), a division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, is one of the largest gatherings of transportation professionals in the world. The event offered a unique opportunity to network with transportation professionals from across the U.S. and around the world, including representatives from USDOT, MassDOT, and regional and rural planners. We focused on innovative transportation solutions relevant to rural and small urban environments, such as:

- The role of Artificial Intelligence (AI's) in data analysis.
- The future of connected and autonomous vehicles (V2X [vehicles to everything]).
- Safe Systems Approaches for addressing impaired drivers and pedestrians.
- Community engagement, including crowdsourced data and virtual workshops.
- Performance measurement technology.
- Microtransit, on-demand transit, and active transportation.

The conference provided a valuable blend of professional growth, collaboration, and new insights that can be applied to the Montachusett Region. During our time in Washington D.C., we took advantage of the snowstorm ambiance to explore the city while attending the TRB (Transportation Research Board) conference.



B. Doherty reminded everyone that the sub region representative MPO caucus is being held Thursday, February 13th at 5:00 pm in the MRPC atrium. Staff has been conducting outreach via calls and emails. We are still waiting to hear back from Athol, Hubbardston, Phillipston, Ayer, Shirley, Clinton and Lancaster. We will continue to follow up with those communities to see if we can get them to send somebody.

8:25 PM 8. New Business

Open session - This time is reserved for topics that the chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed.

8:30 PM 9. Adjournment - The date of the next MRPC meeting – March 6, 2025, 7:00 p.m.

This meeting will be recorded by the GoToMeeting app and will be made available for viewing at <https://www.youtube.com/user/MontachusettRegion/videos>.

This notice is subject to change with reasonable notice provided to all.

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Meeting Attendance					
<u>Name</u>	<u>M/A</u>	<u>Representing</u>	<u>Appointment Date</u>	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Arpano, Abby	A	Ashburnham	12.2023		X
Vacant	M	Ashburnham			X
Leab, Doug	A	Ashby	7.2023		X
Pease, Alan	M	Ashby	7.2001	X	
Bialecki, Rebecca	A	Athol	7.2020.		X
Norton, Kathy	M	Athol	11.2023	X	
Copeland, Shaun	A	Ayer	7.2020.		X
Tillotson, Geoff	M	Ayer	7.2022	X	
Vacant	A	Clinton			X
Duffy, Phil	M	Clinton	12.2011		X
Angus, Neil	N/V	DREZ	7.2023	X	
Bohart, Mary Jo	A	Fitchburg	7.2021		X
Butland, Alyne	M	Fitchburg	7.2020.		X
Labonte, Amber	A	Gardner	1.2024		X
Swartz, Robert	M	Gardner	7.2019	X	
Burke, Russell	A	Groton	7.2022		X
Cunningham, Peter	M	Groton	7.2016	X	
Minar, Kara	A	Harvard	7.2021		X
Thornton, Doug	M	Harvard	9.2024	X	
Kresge, Mark	A	Hubbardston	7.2023		X
Munroe, Kristofer	M	Hubbardston	7.2023	X	
Dolan, Kelly	A	Lancaster	7.2023		X
Streeter, Frank	M	Lancaster	7.2023		X
Vacant	A	Leominster			X

Valliere, Dean	M	Leominster	7.2019		X
Vacant	A	Lunenburg			X
Reid, Amanda	M	Lunenburg	7.2022	X	
Poodry, Deb	A	Petersham	7.2024		X
Vacant	M	Petersham			X
Jackson, Melanie	A	Phillipston	7.2022		X
Telepciak, John	M	Phillipston	7.2001		X
Barclay, James	A	Royalston	7.2017		X
Nartowicz, Kyle	M	Royalston	7.2022	X	
Oelfke, Bill	A	Shirley	7.2020.		X
Yocum, Barbara	M	Shirley	8.2017	X	
Newman, Kirsten	A	Sterling	7.2023		X
Newman, Eric	M	Sterling	8.2024	X	
Bennett, Jeff	A	Templeton	7.2023		X
Rich, Dennis	M	Templeton	7.2017		X
Kell, Veronica	A	Townsend	12.2025		X
Shifrin, Laura	M	Townsend	7.2019	X	
Vacant	A	Westminster			X
Ferris, Michael	M	Westminster	7.2025		X
Beauvais, Andrew	A	Winchendon	7.2025		X
Corbosiero, Guy	M	Winchendon	7.2011	X	

Guests: G. Kahale, MART Representative, R. Hoyt, F. Stanley

Staff: G. Eaton, H. Ford, C. McNamara, B. Doherty, K. Chapman, J. Stanton

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MEETING

- January 9, 2025, MRPC Meeting Minutes
- February 6, 2025, MRPC Meeting Agenda
- February 6, 2025, MRPC Meeting Agenda with Details
- MRPC Grant Opportunities Spreadsheet

- FY26 Expenses
- FY26 Revenues
- FY26 Salaries
- RI Temporary Restraining Order