

## **Rural Policy Advisory Commission 2018 Annual Report**

This report of the Rural Policy Advisory Commission, established under Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 23A, Section 66 (G.L. c. 23A, § 66), is submitted to the Clerks of the Senate and House of Representatives for transmission to the Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies, pursuant to paragraph (g) *The commission shall annually, not later than June 2, report the results of its findings and activities of the preceding year and its recommendations to the governor and to the clerks of the senate and the House of Representatives who shall forward the same to the joint committee on economic development and emerging technologies.*

### **Members:**

*Speaker of the House or Designee*  
Representative Paul Mark

*Senate President or Designee*  
Corinne Fitzgerald

*Secretary of Housing and Economic Development or Designee*  
Chrystal Kornegay (*Chair*)

*Appointed by the Governor*  
Jay Coburn (Cape Cod Commission)  
Wendy Hudson (Nantucket Planning and Economic Development Commission)  
Nathaniel Karns (Berkshire Regional Planning Commission)  
Trish Settles (Central Massachusetts Regional Planning District Commission)  
Judy Terry (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission)  
Linda Dunlavy (Franklin Regional Council of Governments) (*Treasurer*)  
Bill Veno (Martha's Vineyard Commission)  
Brian Bullock (At-Large)  
Dave Christopolis (At-Large)  
Donna Hamel (At-Large)

### **Full Commission Meetings to Date:**

Minutes from all meetings and additional documents can be found on the Rural Policy Advisory Commission's [website](#).

Friday, June 10, 2016: Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Greenfield, MA  
Friday, September 30, 2016: Town of Truro Community Center, Truro, MA  
Friday, January 6, 2017: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, Worcester, MA  
Friday, March 10, 2017: Massachusetts State House, Boston, MA  
Friday, April 28, 2017: Massachusetts State House, Boston, MA  
Friday, June 23, 2017: Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Greenfield, MA  
Friday, September 8, 2017: Town of Truro Community Center, Truro, MA  
Friday, January 12, 2018: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, Worcester, MA  
Friday, March 9, 2018: Massachusetts State house, Boston, MA

*Friday, June 15, 2018: Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Greenfield MA\**

*\*This report was approved at the June 15 meeting. Information on that meeting can be found in the addendum at the end of this report.*

### **Broadband:**

The commission recognizes the recent progress MBI has made, but notes that the lack of broadband remains a serious issue in a number of rural communities affecting our access to education, healthcare, economic growth, and the stability of our population. Rural Policy Advisory Commission requested to receive frequent status updates from the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) and has received three presentations and updates from MBI. The Commissioners reiterated their request to MBI that the commission be copied on any future activity.

### **Rural Community Survey:**

At the September 2017 meeting, Commissioner Linda Dunlavy presented the results of the RPAC Municipal Survey that was conducted to get a better understanding of how communities are affected by the policy areas that commissioners had previously decided to focus on (Water/Sewer and Title V, Rural Service Delivery and Small Business Support). The survey was conducted online and was responded to by 59% of the rural communities in Massachusetts. A copy of the presentation is available on the RPAC [website](#).

### **Presentation – Massachusetts Housing Partnerships’ Center for Housing Data**

Callie Clark, Co-Director of the Center for Housing Data at the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) attended the January 2018 meeting to present on MHP’s Center for Housing Data. The goal of the presentation was to introduce the Center for Housing Data to members of the RPAC and to begin a discussion as to where they can be helpful to rural communities. A copy of the presentation is available on the RPAC [website](#).

### **Housing Choice Initiative Briefing**

At the March 2018 meeting, RPAC Commissioners welcomed Chris Kluchman, Housing Choice Program Director, to discuss proposals for thresholds to the Housing Choice Grant Program for small or low-growth communities. Commissioners expressed concerns about rural community’s ability to compete for grants under the current program and also discussed concerns surrounding capacity to manage these grants in small communities. RPAC Chair Kornegay assured the group that their concerns and recommendations will be taken into consideration and Chris Kluchman offered to come to any community to speak about the program.

### **DEP Educational Program:**

RPAC Commissioner Linda Dunlavy continues to work to create an educational program intended to better educate members on water/sewer and Title V issues and how they affect rural communities.

## **RPAC Votes**

The RPAC enabling legislation, Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 23A, Section 66 (G.L. c. 23A, § 66), paragraph (d) states that the commission shall *(ii) advise the general court and the executive branch of the impact of existing and proposed state laws, policies and regulations on rural communities: and (iii) advance legislative and policy solutions that address rural needs.* Over the last year, RPAC commissioners have voted on three items. Those items and the final vote are described below:

### **RPAC Letter Supporting Short Term Rental Legislation: January 12, 2018**

Commissioners discussed the draft letter that supported concept of legislation addressing Short Term Rentals in Massachusetts. Commissioner Corinne Fitzgerald expressed concerns about the legislation and the rights of property owners. After minor changes to the draft letter, a vote was held to approve submitting the letter to House Speaker Robert DeLeo and Senate President Harriet Chandler. By a vote of 7 to 1, with Chair Chrystal Kornegay abstaining, the RPAC voted to submit the letter.

### **Draft Letter of Support for Small business Technical Assistance: March 9, 2018**

Commissioners discussed the draft letter drafted by Commissioner Dave Christopolis calling for the Governor to restore \$2 million in funding for Small business Technical Assistance in FY19. After discussion, it was decided to send the letter to House Ways and Means Chair Jeffrey Sanchez instead of Governor Baker. By a vote of 10 to 0, with Chair Chrystal Kornegay abstaining, the RPAC voted to submit the letter.

### **Proposed Executive Director Position: March 9, 2018**

Commissioners were presented research comparing two similar rural focused statewide organizations in Maryland and Pennsylvania. This document outlined how each organization is organized, their mission, and how they are funded as compared to the RPAC. Commissioners had asked for this document to be prepared as part of a larger discussion on how the RPAC can better meet the needs of rural Massachusetts. Commissioners were interested in the fact that each organization had at least one full time staff member. As a result, a working group was formed to develop a scope of work for a full time staff person or a consultant to investigate outside funding sources for such a position. The ultimate goal of this work is to present a proposal to the Rural Caucus.

Commissioners discussed the draft job description for a proposed Executive Director position and a legislative memo. The proposal calls for the creation of an Office of Rural Policy led by a full time Executive Director who reports to the RPAC. Commissioners discussed the proposal, specifically where the organization would be located. By a vote of 10 to 0, with Chair Chrystal Kornegay abstaining, the RPAC voted on approving the draft job description and legislative memo and voted to forward these documents on to the Rural Caucus and request a meeting.

Members of the RPAC met with the co-chairs of the Rural Caucus on May 16, 2018 to discuss the proposal. The meeting concluded with the following actions:

- Prepare with specificity, justification of need for rural representation availability to government executive departments of recent state programs and initiatives that would have benefited from rural input prior to implementation.
- Presentation of the organizational structure of the Maryland and Pennsylvania rural commission demonstrating organizational structure.
- Review, explore and present a discussion of what organizational structure within the present state organization will best meet the purpose and objective of RPAC that will serve the Commonwealth the best.

The Commission will continue to work with the Legislature's Rural Caucus to advocate for a full-time Executive Director and the creation of an Office of Rural Policy.

**Conclusion:**

Over the next year, the Rural Policy Advisory Commission will continue to work towards researching critical issues that face residents and communities in rural Massachusetts and will produce policy recommendations to further enhance the economic vitality of rural communities.

## ADDENDUM

*Friday, June 15, 2018: Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Greenfield MA*

### **New RPAC Commissioners:**

At the June 15<sup>th</sup> RPAC meeting, commissions welcomed two new members, Helena Fruscio Altsman and Sara Smiaroski. Below is a list of the current membership of the RPAC as of June 15, 2018:

*Speaker of the House or Designee*

Representative Paul Mark

*Senate President or Designee*

Corinne Fitzgerald

*Secretary of Housing and Economic Development or Designee*

**Helena Fruscio Altsman**

*Appointed by the Governor*

Linda Dunlavy (Franklin Regional Council of Governments) (**Chair**)

Jay Coburn (Cape Cod Commission) (**Vice-Chair**)

Wendy Hudson (Nantucket Planning and Economic Development Commission)

Trish Settles (Central Massachusetts Regional Planning District Commission)

Judy Terry (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission)

Bill Veno (Martha's Vineyard Commission)

VACANT (Berkshire Regional Planning Commission)

Brian Bullock (At-Large)

Dave Christopolis (At-Large) (**Clerk**)

Donna Hamel (At-Large)

**Sara Smiarowski** (At-Large)

### **Vote on New RPAC Officers:**

Commissioners voted on a new Chair, Co-Chair, and Clerk at the June 2018 meeting. The votes are listed below:

- (Chair) Linda Dunlavy – Confirmed by 12-0 vote
- (Vice-Chair) Jay Coburn – Confirmed by 12-0 vote
- (Clerk) Dave Christopolis – Confirmed by 12-0 vote

### **Rural Agenda:**

Commissioner Helena Fruscio Altsman discussed with the whole commission the desire of the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development to develop a Rural Agenda with the assistance of the RPAC. The initial conversation focused on the process of developing the agenda and a working group was formed. The RPAC voted 12-0 to allow the working group the ability to call additional full meetings of the RPAC if necessary. A full update on the process of developing the Rural Agenda will be available in the 2019 RPAC Legislative Report.

**Other Items:**

At the June 2018 meeting, Commissioners welcomed representatives from the Mass Small Businesses Development Center Network to discuss their work in helping to develop small businesses in rural Massachusetts. Additionally, Commissioners received a status update from Peter Larkin, Special Advisor to the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development and the Chair of the Mass Broadband Institute on their progress in bringing broadband to rural communities. More information can be found in the RPAC meeting minutes for the June 15, 2018 meeting on the RPAC [website](#).