MASSACHUSETTS
RURAL POLICY
ADVISORY COMMISSION

July 27, 2023

To the Honorable Governor Healy, Senate Clerk Hurley and House Clerk James

Subject: Rural Policy Advisory Commission FY23 Annual Report

Per the legislation that created the Rural Policy Advisory Commission, please accept this annual summary that "reports the results of [the Rural Policy Advisory Commission's] findings and activities of the preceding year and its recommendations to the governor and to the clerks of the senate and house of representatives."

The Rural Policy Advisory Commission met seven times in Fiscal Year 23 focusing on topics that addressed the goals and recommendations of the 2019 Massachusetts Rural Policy Plan (RPP) and to identify legislative priorities that would enhance the economic vitality of rural communities. Meetings included:

A rural-focused State Economic Development Plan listening session with RPAC members and invited guests
Meeting with EOED Secretary Yvonne Hao and Deputy Secretary Ashley Stolba to discuss Director of Rural Affairs Job Description and hiring
Discussion of the Resilient Lands Initiative with Bob O'Connor, EOEEA
Preparation and prioritization of legislative advocacy activities for the upcoming 193rd legislative session ▪ Legislative priorities and tracking ▪ Introducing RPAC to new legislators and administration ▪ Advocating for ARPA 2 and rural equity analysis ▪ Coordinating priorities with partners o MMA o MACDC o Food System Collaborative o MA Healthy Aging Consortium o MA Housing Partnership
Received a briefing on Rural Schools Commission report with Michael Sullivan
Partnered with Mass Humanities "Rural Crossroads Museum on Main Street Exhibits"

In addition, the RPAC provided written and/or verbal testimony, letters of support and advocacy; and participated in the following in FY23:

- RPAC 193rd Session legislative priorities
- Support for Office of Rural Policy and Director of Rural Affairs
- Rural TDI model with MassDevelopment that led to an Efficiency and Regionalization grant award to the FRCOG to examine feasibility of rural village center models
- Member of the Commission on Long-Term Fiscal Health of Rural School Districts
- Rural priorities of Fair Share distribution of transportation funds
- Testimony supporting Rural Schools, PILOT reform, Chapter 90 reform, expansion of passenger rail and overall rural conditions and health to Joint Committee on Ways and Means
- Analysis of current Chapter 90 and PILOT formulas to consider adjustments to improve rural equity
- Discussion with the Legislative Rural Caucus on priority bill refilings and sponsorship

RPAC Top Priorities for FY24:

The RPAC had many successes in FY23. Governor Healy created a Director of Rural Affairs position – the first of its kind in Massachusetts; rural issues and priorities are being recognized as a focus area of the upcoming state economic development plan; RPAC members assisted EOED with review of Rural Development grants, which continues to be a needed and over-subscribed program of One Stop.

To build on these successes, FY24 priorities for the RPAC are:

1. Work with and support the Director of Rural Affairs to ensure that the position is as effective as possible to advance rural issues.
2. Pass legislation to create and fund an Office of Rural Policy that will remedy some aspects of the original RPAC enabling legislation and provide further strength and support to the Director of Rural Affairs.
3. Ensure that the unique needs of rural Massachusetts are thoughtfully considered prior to the development and enactment of policy and legislation and distribution of funding, and include RPAC representation on study commissions.

This annual report is submitted by the members of the Rural Policy Advisory Commission:

Representative Natalie Blais, appointed by the Speaker of the House at the end of FY23
Dave Christopolis, Hilltown Community Development Corporation and Governor's Appointment
Jay Coburn, Vice Chair, Community Development Partnership, representing the Cape Cod Commission
Linda Dunlavy, Chair, from and representing the Franklin Regional Council of Governments
Helena Fruscio-Altsman, Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Designee
Wendy Hudson, Nantucket Planning and Economic Development Commission

Senator Paul Mark, appointed by the Senate President at the end of FY23
Tom Matuszko from and representing the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Kim Robinson from and representing the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Trish Settles from and representing the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
Shaun Sukowski, Town of Athol and representing the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
Bill Veno from and representing the Martha's Vineyard Commission
Helen Zincavage, Governor's Appointment and representing the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District