

Western Regional Homeland Security Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, March 18, 2025, 10:00 am

Council members present: Nina Barszcz (Westfield Dispatch), BJ Calvi (Springfield Fire), Bruce Cullett (Peru PD), Stephen Gaughan (EMS/Amherst Fire), Tom Grady (BCSO), Larry Holmberg (HREPC), Sam Lemanski (Westfield State EMD; alternate for Jay Hastings), Steve Kozloski (Monson PD/WMLEC), Hugh O'Callaghan (Baystate), Norene Pease (Shutesbury BOH/MAPHCO; alternate for Jeanne Galloway), Alan Sirois (Agawam Fire), Kristen Smidy (Gateway Regional), Don Willard (Chesterfield Selectboard)

Non-members present: Raine Brown (FRCOG), Nick Demetrian (Agawam Fire), Samantha Kittle (BRPC), Sandra Martin (BRPC), Rachel Mason (FRCOG), Jeff McDonald (HCSO), Nina Miscioscia (MAPC), Brian Nichols (EOPSS), Chris Norris (Easthampton Fire), Randy Quarles (Westfield Fire/Hazmat), Alex Rock (EOPSS), Kenyi Suarez (MEMA), John Warren (DHS/CISA), Mike Westcott (Regional Dive Team)

Council members absent: Paul Burns (PVTA; alternate for Benjamin St. Amand), Dave Desrosiers (Granby DPW), Jeanne Galloway (West Springfield Public Health), Anthony Gentile (Wilbraham Dispatch; alternate for Nina Barszcz), Jay Hastings (Westfield State PD), John Paciorek (Deerfield Police/Western Mass Police Chiefs), Benjamin St. Amand (PVTA), Thomas Sammons (Pittsfield Fire)

This meeting was conducted on Zoom. The meeting was recorded.

Chair Tom Grady called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

Approval of Minutes

The Council considered the minutes from the February 18, 2025 meeting.

Motion: Larry Holmberg moved to approve the minutes from February 18, 2025 as submitted. Alan Sirois seconded the motion. Hugh O'Callaghan, Larry Holmberg, Alan Sirois, Tom Grady, Don Willard, Nina Barszcz, Steve Gaughan, Kristen Smidy, and Steve Kozloski voted in favor. Sam Lemanski, Norene Pease, Bruce Cullett, and BJ Calvi abstained. The motion was approved.

Introductions

A round of introductions followed.

Updates from the Chair

Tom Grady thanked Raine Brown for coordinating the unveiling of the high water vehicle and JHIRT vehicle in Williamsburg. It was great to see the new assets.

Updates from EOPSS

Brian Nichols had no major updates to report.

Updates from Disciplines

- FIRE: Alan Sirois reported that we are leaving winter and entering spring in a dry state. There have been a number of significant brush fires in this season. We are still in drought. BJ

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Calvi reported that they are still looking into a replacement for the foam trailers and are in a holding pattern. There is no cache of foam left in Western Mass.

- POLICE: Steve Kozloski had no updates to report. Bruce Cullett reported that there is a POST Commission meeting this Thursday. One item on the agenda is on the effort to tack on additional recert requirements for officers.
- EMS: Steve Gaughan reported that the regional annual meeting is April 10. Statewide treatment protocols are supposedly coming. There are some positions left for Regional Council members. Reach out to Lisa Herringshaw if interested.
- EMD: Larry Holmberg reported that there are several legislative initiatives to be aware of. One, sponsored by the International Association of Emergency Managers is a modernization of the Civil Defense Act of 1950, which hasn't been updated since the 80s. The second is to create a continuous funding source for the Disaster Relief Fund that was created last year. The third is to increase to MEMA's operating budget in light of the funding cuts coming out of DC. As of last week, there was no word on how MEMA would be impacted by any funding cuts. There will be an emergency management advocacy day on April 9 on Beacon Hill. EMDs will attend meetings with legislators and their staff.
- PUBLIC HEALTH: Norene Pease reported that there are still quite a few cases of flu, but the situation is improving. The CDC has gotten a panel together to decide which strains of the virus will be used for the upcoming season's vaccine. Tick borne diseases are starting to arise. February is the only month you can be unconcerned about ticks. Measles cases are up across the country. Only about 11 states have reached herd immunity, so we can expect increasing cases. There are cases in New England now.
- TRANSPORTATION: No one was present to give an update.
- DPW: No one was present to give an update.
- CORRECTIONS: Tom Grady had no updates to report.
- COMMUNICATIONS: Nina Barszcz reported that annual grants will be due soon. To get grants you will need to submit annual certificates of compliance to State 911 by July 31.
- HOSPITALS: Hugh O'Callaghan had no updates to report.
- LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Don Willard reported. Senator Mark and Representative Sabadosa have been holding town halls recently. There have been many discussions about extending the law to allow Zoom meetings. The House approved Bill 862 to allow hybrid meetings through June 2027, and it should be approved by Senate soon as well.
- K-12 EDUCATION: Kristen Smidy reported. Schools are going through budget process and advocacy at the State level for rural school aid and increased Chapter 70 funding. Outdoor sports are starting soon.

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- HIGHER ED: Sam Lemanski reported that schools are at spring break and prepping for commencement.
- Massachusetts State Police (MSP): No one was present to give an update.
- MEMA: Jeff McDonald had nothing to report.
- DHS/CISA: John Warren reported that assessments continue in Central and Western Mass. The big focus in DC is on water and water systems. John has been conducting school assessments predominantly in Central Mass, but he can take on others if anyone needs it. With Cliff Hedges retiring this spring, the Big E planning meetings have already begun.

Updates from Subcommittees

All Hazards Planning and Equipment: Larry Holmberg reported that all projects are moving along. We are working on closing out the cybersecurity project. Election security is closed out. We had some money left over from that and we need to figure out what to do with it. The fairgrounds project seems to be running well; the subcommittee is reviewing the template and getting comments back to Raine. It could use some improvements but is a good first draft.

Interoperability/Information Sharing: Raine Brown reported that there are two motions to bring forward. The first is from BCSO for an equipment upgrade at the repeater site at Tanglewood, which serves not only Tanglewood but also rest of the area. Tom Grady explained that the equipment has reached end of life.

Motion: Tom Grady moved to approve \$60,200 for the Tanglewood equipment upgrade. Larry Holmberg seconded the motion. High O’Callaghan, Sam Lemanski, Norene Pease, Alan Sirois, Don Willard, Bruce Cullett, Kristen Smidy, Nina Barszcz, Larry Holmberg, Steve Gaughan, and Steve Kozloski voted in favor. Tom Grady abstained. The motion was approved.

The second project is to upgrade the WMLEC GPS routers and clock batteries. Steve Kozloski explained that WMLEC is about 10 years old and some of the key components are approaching end of life. It is a 10 site UHF simulcast system that serves the four Western Mass counties. They no longer have any backup components and need to replace network switches, GPS units, and battery backup systems at the ten sites. Tom noted that this had the unanimous support of WMRIC, and also the SWIC and ASWIC. CoMIRS is not up and running everywhere yet, and in meantime we need this system. \$103,500.

Motion: Nina Barszcz moved to approve \$103,500 for WMLEC equipment upgrades. Larry Holmberg seconded the motion. Hugh O’Callaghan, Sam Lemanski, Norene Pease, Tom Grady, Don Willard, Bruce Cullett, Kristen Smidy, Nina Barszcz, Larry Holmberg, and Steve Gaughan voted in favor. Steve Kozloski abstained. The motion was approved.

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Training and Exercises: Tom Grady reported. This month's de-escalation trainings attracted over 200 participants. It was well done and received a lot of good feedback. The subcommittee will look at doing another round of that. Other trainings are coming up as well.

Equipment /PPE: Raine Brown had no updates to report.

CBRNE/IED: Alan Sirois reported that there was an unveiling of the high water vehicle, which can ford 50 inches of water with no trouble. It also has other capabilities, and could potentially be outfitted for brush fires. The Tech Rescue Team vehicle purchase is still a challenge, but we now have two vendors who may be interested. The TRT used WRHSAC resources in North Adams recently to assist in the recovery of a victim. Raine reported that they asked for an update on the Greenfield vehicle and hope to have that soon. Body armor procurement is proving to be a challenge. We are waiting on final EOPSS approval of last two amendments to the project justification before we can move forward with procurement. Brian Nichols will follow up.

Fiduciary Report:

Raine reported that FFY 21 is set to wrap up by the end of June. Two projects are still active but in process. MAPC will be seeking an extension for FFY22, which we need for the Greenfield Prime Mover and a few other projects. After today's allocations, there is probably still about \$250,000 unallocated in FFY23, mostly in T&E and some in WMRIC. MAPC is also seeking an extension on FFY23. We are starting to work on some FFY24 projects and should see some equipment procurement soon. Raine has not heard anything about a next round of grant funding.

MAPC – Nina Miscioscia reported that they are hiring a financial specialist and have received 24 applications.

Old Business: None.

New Business: Alan Sirois brought up the question of adding a cybersecurity rep to the Council, as he feels that we have a gap in that discipline. Critical infrastructure is at risk, and all agencies here would be impacted significantly by a cyberattack. Raine responded by detailing the extensive history of the Council's involvement with cybersecurity, much of which was before Alan joined the Council, as cybersecurity was removed from our required spending several years ago when it was added to the infrastructure bill. Tom suggested that we could try to recruit cybersecurity people to the All Hazards subcommittee. Larry replied that he wouldn't turn down anyone who wants to join the committee on this, but that the problem is getting rural communities together and having enough funding to do anything worthwhile. John Warren noted that the Central Region has a formal cybersecurity subcommittee chaired by the Mass National Guard, but he acknowledged that there have long been questions among the Councils about how to spend cybersecurity money. CISA services do not require grant funds. Raine noted that we tried to set up a Regional Chief Information Officer, but it didn't fly because so many towns are doing so many disparate things.

Alan suggested that even without spending, it would be helpful just to get more information. Having this meeting with multiple disciplines is helpful because we share with our counterparts what is going on. There is a lot of value in that. He would like more info about cybersecurity to

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share and discuss, such as a monthly update on current trends, etc. Raine noted that Mass Cyber Center hosts a round table every other week; they will share info about that. It includes updates from the Fusion Center and DHS/CISA. John Warren also offered to assist with that. Brian Nichols added that the Program Coordinator for Cyber also runs a meeting. He will look into it.

Business Unforeseen by Chair:

Alan Sirois asked if public health has an estimation of the potential impact of measles on the region based on current trends. Norene Pease replied that there have been some single isolated cases in some New England states, but incidence is very limited now outside of Texas and New Mexico. The main thing is to encourage people to get MMR shots, to get herd immunity up again to the 95% range. Alan noted that a measles outbreak could be a huge strain on the EMS system.

Next Steps/Future Meetings

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 15, 2025 at 10:00 am, as a virtual meeting. Raine explained that the virtual meeting extension has gone through the House and is expected to go through the Senate. There is also some legislation out there to make it permanent. In preparation for possibly meeting in person, Kristen Smidy had volunteered some space at Gateway. Raine has heard from some people that they are missing the networking that happens when we are in person, so it might behoove the Council to do some meetings in person/hybrid. Tom asked that this be added to next month's agenda. We could consider an in-person meeting twice a year, or quarterly, to give people an opportunity to get together face to face.

Motion: Alan Sirois moved to adjourn. Bruce Cullett seconded the motion. Hugh O'Callaghan, Sam Lemanski, Norene Pease, Alan Sirois, Tom Grady, Bruce Cullett, Kristen Smidy, Larry Holmberg, Don Willard, Nina Barszcz, Steve Gaughan, and Steve Kozloski voted in favor. The motion was approved.

The meeting adjourned at 11:01 am

List of Documents Reviewed at the Meeting

- WRHSAC Council Meeting Agenda for March 18, 2025
- WRHSAC Council Meeting Minutes from February 18, 2025 (draft)
- Project Justification for BCSO radio system upgrade (draft)
- Project Justification for WMLEC equipment upgrade (draft)
- WRHSAC Fiduciary Report for FFY23 Homeland Security Grant, 3/18/2025
- WRHSAC FFY21 Budget Report through 3/13/25
- WRHSAC FFY22 Budget Report through 3/13/25
- WRHSAC FFY23 Budget Report through 3/13/25
- WRHSAC FFY24 Budget Report through 2/14/25

Respectfully submitted by:

Rachel Mason, WRHSAC Program Assistant
Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council
Franklin Regional Council of Governments