
Meeting Minutes

RPA-1 Policy Board

Thursday, May 21st, 2020 at 11:00 a.m. – Electronic Meeting

This meeting took place via electronic means pursuant to the provisions of the Iowa Open Meetings Law, Section 21.8, Code of Iowa.

As a result of the spread of COVID-19 in the state of Iowa and based on the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it was impractical for the Policy Board to meet in person. Therefore, the meeting will take place virtually via the Zoom electronic meeting platform. It is open to the public and those in attendance can hear the proceedings and provide comments and questions as appropriate. Public notice of the meeting was issued in accordance with Iowa Code Section 21.4.

Committee Members in attendance: Jerry Steven, Howard County; Lorraine Borowski, City of Decorah; Larry Schellhammer, Allamakee County; Dylan Mulfinger, City of Oelwein; Ray Peterson, Clayton County; Janell Bradley, Fayette County.

Others in attendance: Aaron Detter, UERPC Transportation Planning Administrator; Rachelle Howe, UERPC Executive Director; Jeremy Bril, City of Decorah; Victor Kane, City of Oelwein; Lori Egan, NEICAC EARL Transit; Jenna Pollock, Clayton County Conservation; Joel Fantz, Fayette County; Brian Ridenour, Allamakee County.

1. The meeting was called to order by Bradley at 11:05 a.m.
2. A motion to appoint Bradley as chair and Peterson as vice chair was made by Schellhammer, seconded by Steven, and passed unanimously.
3. A motion to approve the agenda was made by Mulfinger, seconded by Borowski, and passed unanimously.
4. A motion to approve the September 19, 2019 meeting minutes was made by Borowski, seconded by Mulfinger, and passed unanimously.
5. A motion to open the public hearing for the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021 Transportation Planning Work Program (TPWP) was made by Schellhammer, seconded by Mulfinger, and passed unanimously.

Detter explained that the TPWP contains the budget and transportation planning work tasks and products that UERPC will work on within the RPA-1 region in the upcoming fiscal year. He added that board and committee members have had a chance to review the draft TPWP, and the document had been posted for public review and comment for at least 15 days, per the RPA-1 Public Participation Plan (PPP). He told board members that he did not receive any comments from the public.

Hearing no comments from the public, a motion to close the public hearing was made by Borowski, seconded by Peterson, and passed unanimously.

6. A motion to pass a resolution to approve the RPA-1 SFY 2021 TPWP was made by Schellhammer and seconded by Peterson. Detter conducted a rollcall vote and the resolution was passed unanimously.

7. Board members proceeded to consideration of Iowa's TAP regional funding for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2024.

Detter informed board members that the Enhancement Committee met on April 22 to review the applications and discuss the scores that they had individually made and then combined into one average score per county per application. He noted that the Enhancement Committee voted unanimously to recommend Clayton County Conservation Board's application in the amount of \$192,000 as partial funding for a 10'-wide paved trail for one mile from 250th Street to Grape Road.

Detter then told the board that he had received a written comment from one of the applicants, Denise Schneider of Guttenberg, and that she had asked him to read her comment for the record. With the approval of Chair Bradley, Detter proceeded to read the comment, which is produced in full below as a matter of record.

"I will not be able to participate in the meeting on Thursday, but I would appreciate if you would ask the Policy Board why the people making the recommendations for who is awarded the grant funds work for the entities that are being awarded the grants. I do not feel it is fair to other applicants for these grants, as they are not able to vote for themselves to get a grant – no other entities have any real chance of receiving grant funds. This seems to be a big conflict of interest. I believe that an independent appointed board (not the grant applicants) should be reviewing the grant applications and making recommendations to the policy board on who should be awarded the grant funds. I have not heard of any other grant award program where the applicants are able to basically award themselves grant funds.

I would appreciate a written explanation as to how this is a fair and legal way to award federal grant funds."

Schellhammer commented that she makes a valid argument. Mulfinger asked if there have ever been comments like this in the past. Detter said that he has never received a direct comment from an applicant or the public to this effect and summarized the process used by the Enhancement Committee in recommending applications for funding by the Policy Board. Detter commented that he also understands the potential conflict and is happy that Schneider raised the issue, but that it is up to the board to consider and discuss. Peterson commented that it is something for the board to look at. Mulfinger commented that it may be a best practice going forward to ask members to not vote on their application if they have submitted one.

After discussion, a motion to award funding for the Clayton County Conservation Board's application, as recommended by the Enhancement Committee, was made by Peterson, seconded by Mulfinger, and passed unanimously.

8. Board members proceeded to consideration of STBG/Swap funding for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2024.

Detter explained to board members that they received a good number of applications which included some TAP applicants who also submitted an application for STBG funding. He noted that the Technical Committee had met immediately before this meeting and had gone through the applications and had applicants who were available discuss their project.

Detter explained that Upper Explorerland had increased their STBG funding request from \$30,000 to \$35,000 to be used for transportation planning in the region, and that the Technical Committee found that to be reasonable and recommended continued funding for transportation planning and that it continue to be considered “off the top” before other projects are awarded.

Detter then explained that the Technical Committee discussed which county’s turn it was to receive funding and had determined that Winneshiek County was next in line and voted unanimously to recommend award of \$2.2 million for Winneshiek County’s project to repave W14 from Spillville to Fort Atkinson.

After discussion, a motion to approve the award of STBG/Swap funds as recommended by the Technical Committee was made by Borowski, seconded by Peterson, and passed unanimously.

Peterson asked Detter who was in line to receive funding next year and the year after that. Detter explained that nothing is predetermined and the Technical Committee would have to answer to that. Ridenour explained that, based on the way the Technical Committee calculates who is next in line for funding, Allamakee would be next, then Fayette, then Clayton.

9. Bradley moved on to discussion of the Policy Board’s advisory committees and their membership. Detter explained that this stems from earlier in the year when he contacted board members about a vacancy on the Enhancement Committee to see if the board wanted to hold a special meeting to appoint someone to serve on that committee. He said that the board’s consensus at the time was to leave the Enhancement Committee membership as-is and discuss the general composition of the advisory committees at the next meeting. Detter noted that there are some regional planning agencies around the state that utilize a single advisory committee made up of diverse membership representing multiple modes of transportation who would make recommendations to the board on all funding and policy matters. He added that it is solely up to the Policy Board as to what they want to consider or explore and how they want the advisory committees to be set up.

Mulfinger said he supports further reconsideration of the committees and their membership, adding that there are a lot of good people on these committees with years of experience which is extremely helpful. He suggested that the item be tabled until it can be considered in person, but that it continue to be a discussion item on agendas, and that perhaps staff can come up with a proposal or plan for how this could look for the board to consider.

Bradley concurred that she thinks this is a topic that needs to be considered and that discussion of the issue would be better in person in the future, whenever that may be.

10. Detter provided RPA-1 staff updates. He noted that RPA-1’s Public Participation Plan (PPP) will be due for an update later this year, adding that the document was last completed in January of 2016 and is updated every five years. He also noted that now that the TPWP is finalized and will be submitted to Iowa DOT, his current

focus is preparing the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for federal fiscal years 2021-2024, and that he is coordinating with project sponsors to get updates and ensure accurate information is programmed in the TIP. He informed board members that his coworker Micelle Barness is continuing to work on the regional trail economic impact study. He also told the board that the Enhancement Committee has been considering options to begin collecting trail pavement condition data for regional trails and would potentially rent equipment from the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (DMAMPO), something they may request STBG funds for.

11. Detter gave the board updates from Iowa DOT provided by District 2 Planner Krista Rostad.
12. As a floor item, Mulfinger provided an update on the Highway 150 Coalition efforts, saying that representatives from the group presented to the IDOT Commission last month via video conference and that the group hopes to do a virtual meeting in June to talk about the next steps.

Also as a floor item, Pollock provided additional details on the funding for the TAP funds that Clayton County Conservation Board was awarded, which is for an extension of the Pony Hollow Trail near Elkader.

13. Board members set the next meeting date for Tuesday, July 7.
14. A motion to adjourn was made by Peterson, seconded by Schellhammer, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:52 a.m.