



Metro Regional Coalition Agenda

January 11, 2022
Noon to 1:30 pm
Via ZOOM Conferencing

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85676857436>

Webinar ID: 856 7685 7436, or call 646.558.8656

Note: At the direction of the GPCOG Executive Committee, PACTS and GPCOG are holding all committee meetings via [Zoom conferencing technology](#) due to the continuing pandemic. We remain committed to full public participation in our meetings through remote access during the COVID-19 crisis. Remote meetings are conducted in accordance with the requirements of [LD 32, 2021 Public Law 290](#) and [1 MRSA Chapter 13, Subchapter 1](#).

Participants are reminded that this meeting will be recorded and posted on the GPCOG website.

1. Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)

Chair Amy Kuhn will call the meeting to order and ask attendees to briefly introduce themselves.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the December 14, 2021 meeting (Attachment A)

3. Public Comment (3 minutes per person)

Residents of the region are invited to share up to 3 minutes of comment on any topic, including items on the agenda.

4. COVID-19 Roundtable (10 minutes)

Staff report: This standing agenda item is intended to provide a forum for MRC members to share with each other their pandemic-related questions, learning, and community updates.

Action: Information exchange.

5. Scarborough Update (20 minutes)

Staff report: Scarborough Town Manager Tom Hall will share a brief update on recent growth and development progress in Scarborough. Many of Scarborough’s newer housing and land use policies are directly responsive to MRC priorities as reflected in this [op-ed](#) on Scarborough’s growth. We’ll leave time for Q&A.

Action: Information and opportunity to understand how regional priorities are advancing in Scarborough.

6. Advocacy on Housing & Zoning Commission Recommendations (20 minutes)

Staff report: The Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions released its final report ([link](#)) on December 28th. Following up the briefing on this issue at the last MRC meeting we will ask members for their input on the central Commission recommendations, including:

- Elimination of single family zoning and growth caps
- Establishment of a state appeals board for review of certain local land use decisions
- Creation of ‘by right’ Accessory Dwelling Uses (ADUs) Density Bonuses, and Priority Development Areas (PDAs)
- Provision of technical assistance to municipalities through local, regional, and state programs
- Establishment of a 3-year incentive program for municipalities to advance housing opportunities
- Changes to Maine’s Fair Housing Act eliminating the terms “character,” “overcrowding of land,” and “undue concentration of population” as legal bases for zoning regulations.

Later this month the GPCOG Executive Committee will be setting GPCOG advocacy policy on the Commission’s recommendations. MRC member input will be a valuable perspective for those discussions.

Action: Information, discussion and advice regarding the Commission’s recommendation.

7. Advocacy on Climate (20 minutes)

Staff report: At its next meeting the GPCOG Executive Committee will also be setting GPCOG advocacy policy regarding climate action. Their discussion will be framed by three options for how GPCOG might approach climate advocacy in 2022:

1. Do not engage in policy debates, and remain as a local and regional program implementation partner for state and federal partners.
2. Engage as an advocate for [Maine Won’t Wait](#), and related Mills Administration initiatives that move Maine toward the state goal of carbon neutrality by 2045. Avoid advocacy that moves beyond state plans.
3. Engage as a supporter of [Maine Won’t Wait](#), but also take on the advocacy role of moving more aggressively toward the goal of carbon neutrality by 2045. Depart from state policies where they are demonstrably insufficient to meet the goal.

We’ll spend some time discussing each option, and their implications, before asking for your guidance.

Action: Information, discussion and advice regarding the GPCOG's level of advocacy effort regarding climate action.

8. Other Updates

Staff report: As time allows.

9. Adjourn

Upcoming Meetings

All meetings from Noon to 1:30 pm on Zoom

February 8, 2022

March 8, 2022

April 12, 2022

May 10, 2022

June 14, 2022

Attachment A

DRAFT Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

December 14, 2021

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Amy Kuhn, Chair	Falmouth
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Kate Snyder	Portland
Danielle West	Portland
Anne McGuire	Portland
John Cloutier	Scarborough
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Sarah Lawrence	Office of Rep. Pingree
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Guests	Senator Cathy Breen, Representative Teresa Pierce
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Tom Bell, Vanessa Farr

1. Welcome and introductions

Amy Kuhn called the meeting to order at 12:01 pm and welcomed everyone.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the November 9, 2021 meeting

Michael Foley moved acceptance of the minutes from the November 9, 2021 MRC meeting, seconded by Matt Sturgis. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

3. Public Comment

No public comment was offered.

4. Senator Cathy Breen and Representative Teresa Pierce

Senator Breen and Representative Pierce are co-chairs of the Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, guiding state budgets and spending

priorities. They shared the legislature's accomplishments in 2021, and looked ahead to legislative priorities for the upcoming legislative session.

Among the Legislature's fiscal accomplishments discussed by our guests were the following:

- Increasing General Purpose Aid to Education (GPA) to 55% of school costs – the first time the 55% threshold has been met and a reversal of reductions made by prior administrations.
- Increasing Municipal Revenue Sharing to 5%, again reversing reductions made in the past by prior administrations.
- Retaining existing income tax levels, including reductions made by the prior administration.
- Passage of a bipartisan supplemental budget in June
- Directing \$40 million to Land for Maine's Future without borrowing
- Increasing transportation funding and passing a \$100 million bipartisan transportation bond for Maine voters' approval
- Allocating new funding to Maine's K-12 school replacement fund for the first time in more than a decade
- Increasing funding for all higher education systems to support workforce and training needs
- Allocating almost \$1 billion in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, including pandemic relief and recovery funds for state parks, career and technical education, broadband extension, child protective services, and establishment a Property Tax Fairness Credit ([see program details](#))
- Increased the Maine Rainy Day Fund to \$492 million, an all-time high

Other notable laws mentioned were:

- Passage of new environmental protections against PFAS chemicals
- Creation of a first-in-the-nation extended manufacturer's responsibility law for packaging which shifts the cost of waste disposal from local property tax payers to packaging manufacturers.

- Universal school lunch funding for all children

During Q&A several issues were discussed, including:

- As a part of ARPA funding, MaineHousing has received \$50 million to support additional affordable housing construction. Combined with \$32 million in savings from MaineHousing refinancing existing debt, the agency has \$82 million to support expanding affordable housing opportunities in Maine.
- The state is currently enjoying a large revenue surplus over projections of about 10%. Members asked about plans for the funds. Our guests noted that the Governor will make a proposal that the legislature will consider next session, but everyone is cautious given the volatility in the economy.
- Members were urged to review the Maine Property Tax Fairness program (linked above and [here](#)).
- Several members expressed their thanks for the work done by Senator Breen and Representative Pierce, especially regarding restoration of GPA and Revenue Sharing. The increases in those programs eased municipal budgets which would otherwise have suffered in 2021. Members also expressed the hope that both programs would remain untouchable in the future, even if state finances were troubled.
- Regarding homelessness, Rep. Pierce shared that \$10 million in ARPA funding was dedicated to shelter repair, and Sen. Breen noted that funding was also included for housing navigators at MaineHousing.
- Kate Snyder raised the issue of resettlement costs for newly arrived Americans, and the need for additional state funding to support local efforts to house new arrivals and provide them with services as they join our community. The lawmakers were engaged by the problem and discussed activating local state legislators to work with the Governor and the community to help find a solution.

5. Update on Housing & Zoning Commission Recommendations

Vanessa Farr, GPCOG Senior Planner, updated members on the final recommendations of the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions.

Kristina Egan introduced the update by noting that even generous state funding of affordable housing can never be sufficient to meet the need for more housing that is affordable to every income level. GPCOG has studied this issue and commissioned research by Jeff Levine that demonstrates how little land in our region is free from restrictions on building multiunit housing developments.

GPCOG welcomed the Zoning and Housing Commission, participated in the Maine Municipal working group, testified before the Commission, and made recommendations to the Commission regarding state funding of technical assistance to municipalities so they can implement zoning and other land use changes that encourage more housing development at all levels.

Vanessa outlined the Commission's nine recommendations, noting that many details remain to be worked out as the Commission report moves through the legislative process. Three recommendations stand out:

1. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are recommended to be allowed anywhere other dwelling units are allowed, subject to health, safety, and other requirements.
2. Up to four dwelling units are recommended to be allowed where one unit is now allowed, again subject to health, safety, and other requirements.
3. Density bonuses (allowing additional dwelling units above existing limits) are recommended to be allowed in designated areas of a municipality.

Members asked if ADUs allowed by right would turn into additional short term rentals, undermining efforts to regulate that use. Vanessa noted that the legislation coming from the Commission's recommendations would need to have a provision to prevent that outcome.

Members asked if 'up to 4 units' would apply across the board to all lots. Vanessa responded that as the report currently stands it would, but noted other local ordinances, and the physical limitations of a lot, might reduce the number of allowable units.

Members asked about density bonuses, and observed that local conditions would require flexibility to tailor a bonus to a specific place.

Vanessa walked through the legislative process timeline. The Commission's final report will be drafted by staff at the State House and submitted to the Legislature in January. Two bills have been approved by Legislative Council, each implementing the Commission's recommendations. Those bills will be referred to the Labor and Housing Committee, which will hold public hearings in early 2022 and then work the bills to develop a final piece of legislation later in the session. The Committee bill will need to be passed by the House and Senate, and signed by the Governor.

Nathan Poore noted that zoning changes allowing new housing development tend to attract expensive housing, and do not result in housing prices that many households can afford. He asked how the Commission's work would address this.

Chris Hall noted that this is a central question for policy and politics surrounding the Commission's work.

6. Housing and Homelessness Update

MRC Chair Amy Kuhn briefly updated members on the letters that were sent by the MRC to the Cumberland County Commissioners, supporting County ARPA funding for Portland and South Portland applications. Jim Gailey reported that the County Commissioners had awarded \$3 million in response to Portland's funding request.

Scott Morelli shared an update on a housing study commissioned by South Portland. The report shows that housing demand in the City is outpacing supply currently, and will result in a 3000 unit shortfall over 30 years. Scott noted that lower income households face the greatest shortfall of over 1800 units.

Since 2019 South Portland has seen 384 total housing units built. Of those, 46% were market rate, and 54% were below market rate.

Kristina thanked Scott, and noted that the MRC annual report on regional housing would be gathering data from communities next month.

7. Adjourn

At 1:14 pm Amy Kuhn adjourned the meeting by acclamation