



Metro Regional Coalition Agenda

January 12, 2021

Noon to 1:30 pm

Via ZOOM Conferencing

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82571764292?pwd=anJ2L0wwYUdoYXBsdFFVYtXOEJ1UT09>

Passcode: 500116, Webinar ID: 825 7176 4292, or call 312 626 6799

Note: As of March 31st, 2020 PACTS and GPCOG will be holding all committee meetings via [Zoom conferencing technology](#). We remain committed to full public access and participation in our meetings through remote access during the COVID-19 crisis. Remote meetings will be held in accordance with the requirements of [LD 2167, Public Law Chapter 618](#).

1. Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)

Chair Amy Kuhn will call the meeting to order.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the December 8, 2020 meeting (Attachment A)

3. Public Comment. (3 minutes per speaker)

4. Presentation from Jeff Levine, Levine Planning Strategies LLC (45 minutes total, including Q&A)

Staff report: Jeff Levine, former Portland City Planner and Principle of Levine Planning Strategies, LLC, will present his report [MULTIFAMILY HOUSING & LAND USE REGULATION](#). A copy of the report is also attached as a pdf to this agenda.

In addition to analyzing zoning in each MRC community, the report looks at the intersection of housing and transportation corridors in the region. The report will be a valuable tool for municipal policymakers and will also open an MRC discussion of local and regional planning for housing choice expansion and future transportation.

Action: Understand and discuss the report and its findings.

5. Next Steps (20 minutes)

Staff report: Jeff Levine's report sets the stage for considering how housing policies and transportation investments can be brought together across adjoining municipalities.

In addition, municipal action focused on housing and transportation can be aligned with state recovery and resilience goals, as the MRC heard at their December meeting.

As GPCOG staff work this month with MRC member communities to document 2019-20 housing choice baselines and progress, members will have the opportunity to discuss ways they can use Levine's report to build on existing housing and transportation initiatives, and advance future investments in resilience and recovery.

Action: Establish priority actions that bring housing and transportation together with state recovery and resilience goals..

6. Homelessness Update (5 minutes)

Staff report: Chris Hall will briefly update members on his discussions with partner organizations and review legislative initiatives that focus on homelessness.

7. MRC Workplan Check-In (Attachment B) (5 minutes)

Staff report: Members will have a mid-year opportunity to review the MRC FY 2021 strategic goals and priorities and discuss any adjustments.

Action: Members review, adjust and reaffirm MRC workplan for the balance of FY 2021

8. Adjourn

Upcoming Meetings

Feb 9, 2021 12:00 PM

Mar 9, 2021 12:00 PM

Apr 13, 2021 12:00 PM

May 11, 2021 12:00 PM

Jun 8, 2021 12:00 PM

Attachment A



DRAFT

Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

December 8, 2020

Noon to 1:30 pm

Via ZOOM Conferencing

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Amy Kuhn, Chair	Falmouth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Jeremy Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Kevin Jensen	Gorham
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Public	Ken Capron, Orion Breen, George Rheault
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan Chris Hall

1. Welcome and introductions

Amy Kuhn called the meeting to order at 12:04 pm and welcomed everyone.

2. Acceptance of the minutes of the October 13, 2020 meeting

Mike Foley moved acceptance of the minutes from the October 13, 2020 MRC meeting, seconded by Virginia Wilder-Cross. The motion passed by unanimous acclamation.

3. Housing Recommendations from Governor's Economic Recovery Committee

Chris Hall updated members on the recent [recommendations](#) of the Governor's Economic Recovery Committee related to housing. Please see page 21 in the linked document.

Hall reported that the ERC recommendations are well aligned with MRC's work over the last several years to address homelessness, affordable housing, and expanded housing choice.

The ERC has called for the creation and preservation of more affordable, efficient, and high-density housing options as a key economic recovery strategy. They have also endorsed a legislative study of barriers to expanded housing choices contained in municipal zoning ordinances and other land use regulations. GPCOG supported similar legislation in last year's legislature.

Hall pointed out that the Metro Regional Coalition is poised to lead, with joint resolutions passed in 2019 by many MRC communities endorsing expansion of housing choices. With the elevation of housing affordability to an economic priority by the ERC, GPCOG will seek opportunities to work with the Mills Administration and the legislature to translate state policy into regional action.

Hall concluded by introducing Jeff Levine and explaining how Levine's work on economic recovery and on housing and zoning tie together to support MRC action on housing in a post-pandemic world.

4. Presentation from Jeff Levine, Levine Planning Strategies LLC

Jeff Levine, former Portland City Planner and Principle of Levine Planning Strategies, LLC, presented his recent report [Rebuilding Main Street After COVID-19](#), which includes a case study of Portland Maine.

The study focuses on downtowns after the pandemic and asks what municipalities can do to support small businesses over the next 5 to 10 years.

The study draws heavily on small business survey results and interviews with downtown organizations. It includes 6 case studies, including three in New England (one of which is Portland Maine). Cities were chosen on an array of factors including size, economic similarity, and demographics.

The study found short term business needs were dominated by financial need, including grants, loans and rent relief.

Long term needs for small employers included a wider range of suggestions including financial supports, health code changes, business regulation easing or rationalization, zoning changes to make business activity easier, a parking regulatory changes that repurposed existing parking to better business utility.

Levine identified five primary recommendations for municipal support of small business recovery and resilience in downtown areas:

1. Reimagine downtown land uses, such as covered outdoor activities, nighttime activities in unused spaces, and repurposing vacant commercial or retail spaces to housing.
2. Invest in downtown housing, especially to support increased small business customer traffic.
3. Prioritize grants over technical assistance to small businesses. Funding to support investments in small business operations was particularly needed.
4. Evaluate the need for commercial rent relief and/or stabilization. Rental costs represent the top concern for most small businesses surveyed.
5. Determine a long-term plan for repurposed parking and access downtown. Balancing the competing interests in using outdoor spaces for dining and activities against the need to preserve foot traffic and parking access are difficult but necessary for business certainty and future business investment.

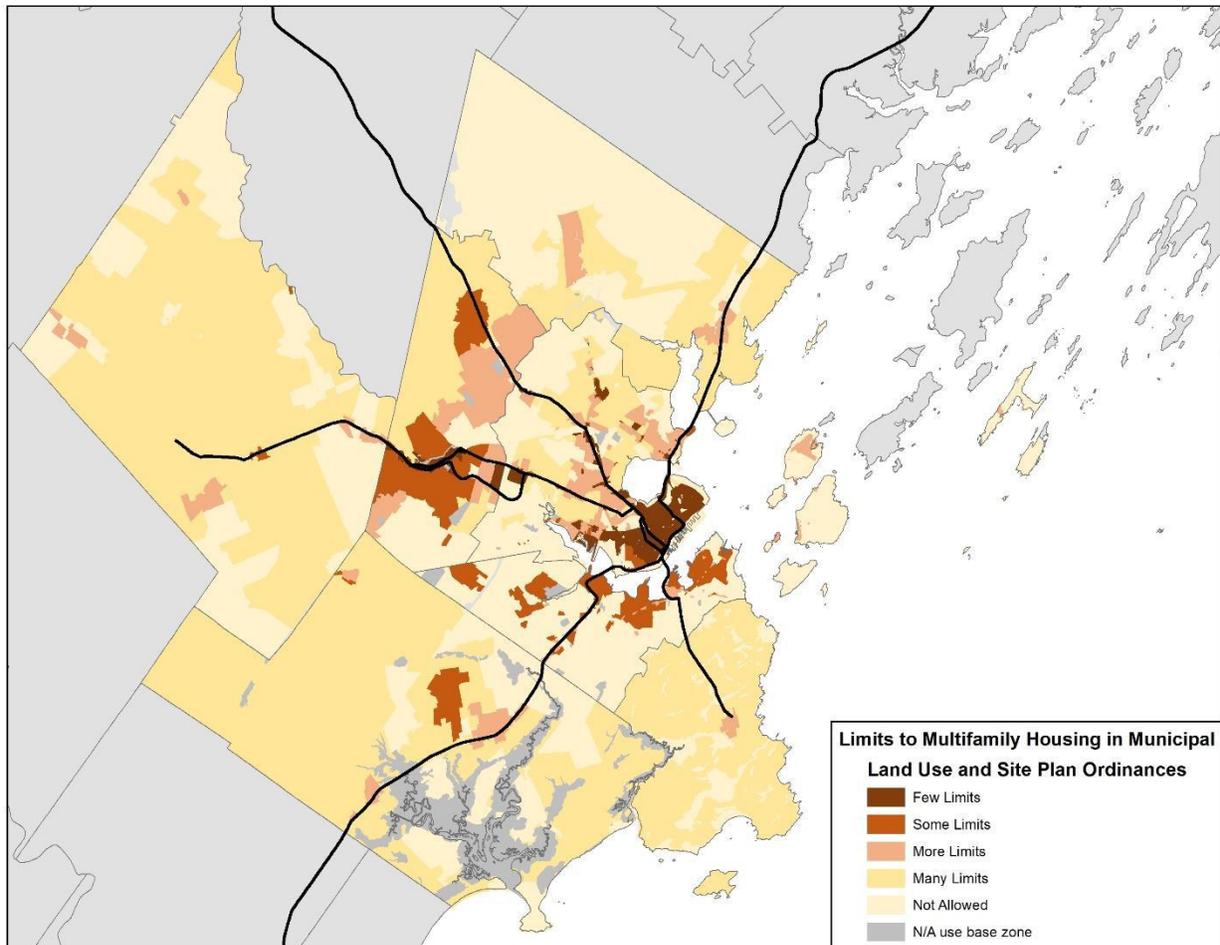
In Q& A the following matters were discussed:

- The report applies to all downtowns, urban or suburban.
- Commercial spaces have yet to hollow out, but some could, depending on larger trends like online shopping. Planning in advance for all eventualities is recommended.
- Housing increases in downtowns can occur without triggering additional parking spaces, but planning must include careful mobility analysis.
- Municipalities should consider playing the role of mediator between small business tenants and their landlords. Both have compelling economic needs – municipalities can help find middle ground solutions.
- Over-leased spaces are becoming more common – employers are seeing less need for large offices spaces as remote work takes hold. This may lead to opportunities to reimagine downtown uses.

- Municipal business regulations have gone through a stress test during the pandemic, and some regulations have been found to be overly restrictive or unneeded. Municipalities should continue to reexamine regulatory requirements after the pandemic and make adjustments where appropriate to strengthen small businesses without compromising public health and safety.
- Regarding rent control in Portland, Levine expected increased condo conversions.

As a second part of his presentation Levine shared a work in progress that he is doing under contract to GPCOG, looking at land use regulations in the MRC communities and assessing the ease of building multifamily housing.

Levine will have his full report ready later this month, and we hope to have it available to the MRC at their January meeting. But as the MRC considers housing in the context of economic recovery and resilience, the following information is valuable:



Darker shaded areas have fewer limits on multifamily housing, and lighter shaded areas have more. The dark lines are proposed rapid transit corridors identified in the Transit Tomorrow report from PACTS that was presented to the MRC in October 2020. The information in the map is subject to the continuing review of municipal planning staffs in all seven MRC communities, and may be adjusted before the report is finalized.

Levine emphasized the map is informational, not a judgment in any way.

During Q&A members discussed the potential for a landscape flow analysis to accompany this research. Members were reminded that 32 centers of development – nodes, or pearls on a string – would be added to the map to emphasize that continuous development in a darker shaded area is not intended or contemplated.

5. Next Steps on Housing Choice and Homelessness

Chris Hall summarized proposed next steps:

GPCOG will have a ResilienceCorps member available to assist with MRC's continued work on housing and homelessness. MRC members will work with staff to define next steps, which may include:

- Housing choice progress reports from individual MRC members, following up last year's joint resolutions passed by MRC Councils in support of expanded housing choice. GPCOG staff will be available to help MRC communities with their reports.
- In 2021, individual community exploration of regulatory barriers to expanded housing choice
- Individual community exploration of economic recovery strategies in a changing land use environment
- Further alignment of local and regional initiatives with state funding (including bond funds)
- Regarding homelessness, GPCOG staff exploration of a regional coordination effort with Maine Housing and other stakeholder groups to facilitate state resources in support of regional action. Also continued discussions with Cumberland County about mechanisms to facilitate municipal financial support for the costs of homeless services.

6. Public Comment

Mr. Reault shared his concerns regarding the comparability of data contained in Mr. Levine's report, and the scope of problems addressed in the meeting.

Mr. Breen shared information about the South Portland Council's work related to the meeting topics.

Mr. Capron shared his thoughts questioning the effectiveness of MRC homelessness efforts.

7. Adjourn

At 1: 29 pm Amy Kuhn adjourned the meeting by acclamation.

Attachment B

Metro Regional Coalition FY 2021 WORKPLAN

Below is a summary of the Coalition's goals for FY21 and its planned actions to achieve those goals.

COVID-19

Goals:

- To meet the needs of member communities for response and recovery
- To obtain state and federal aid for local governments
- To provide a network for sharing ideas and support

FY21 Deliverables:

- Increase federal aid to state and local government to support response and recovery
- Align with state initiatives and resource opportunities

Actions:

- 1) Continue to advocate with Mainer Congressional delegation.
- 2) Continue to advocate with state lawmakers and the Governor.
- 3) Work with the Governor's Economic Recovery Committee to align state and regional investment priorities and programs.
- 4) Continue to share experiences and insights for mutual support.

Homelessness

Goals:

- To house more of the homeless in the Greater Portland area
- To distribute the responsibility of caring more equitably for the homeless across municipalities

FY21 Deliverables:

- Increase the number of supportive housing developments outside of Portland
- Explore and define a means of municipal or county financial contribution to support homes services in Portland
- Develop a coordinated regional plan for responding to acute and chronic homelessness events through partnership with the Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency.

Actions:

1. Develop a MOU or emergency response agreement for homelessness through CEEMA inventory and planning development.
2. Advocate for additional state resources and supportive policy in Augusta, particularly regarding the new Homeless Services Center in Portland
3. Meet with elected County and local officials to find agreement on a funding mechanism for regional financial support of Portland homeless services.

Integrating MRC work with State Economic Recovery Plans and Transportation

Priorities

Goals:

- To better coordinate local land use, transportation, economic, and resilience strategies with state and regional efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic's economic and social impacts
- To connect MRC efforts with the Governor's Economic Recovery Committee's recommendations and state implementation efforts.

FY21 Deliverables:

- MRC will become a regional implementing partner with the Mills Administration's statewide economic recovery efforts.
- MRC members will become active participants in implementing PACTS' Transit Tomorrow plan.
- MRC members will engage in the development of PACTS' Long Range Transportation Plan.
- MRC members will engage with the development and implementation of 'recovery zones' which will focus investments on transportation, broadband, housing, and economic development in corridors that promote compact, diverse growth and preserve/expand open space.

Actions:

- 1) Continue to meet with state economic development officials to define specific local and regional implementation opportunities;
- 2) Expand Transportation planning engagement opportunities to ensure 'corridor' participation as growth and recovery opportunities are identified; and
- 3) Facilitate public engagement designed to educate and support new approaches to development, and re-shape public resistance to changing land use patterns.

4) Work in collaboration the GPCOG-led Resilience Recovery Roundtable as it defines and implements 'recovery zones' throughout the region.

Expanding Housing Choices

Goal:

- To expand housing choices and increase the supply of workforce housing in MRC communities for low- and middle-income households in the region by 10% by 2025.

FY21 Deliverables:

- MRC members and the public are regularly educated on the need for expanded housing choices in our region.
- Continued implementation of the existing joint commitment of MRC communities to diversify housing options.
- Ensure that housing, economic development and public transportation decisions are more closely integrated, and made in a regional context when possible

Actions:

- 1) Publish a 2021 report on expanded housing choices based on the individual progress reports of MRC member communities,
- 2) Work with individual MRC members to implement their municipal resolutions on expanded housing choices
- 3) Work with partners in the region, including the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce and the United Way of Greater Portland, to expand public acceptance of well-planned housing and transportation growth.

Racial Equity (conditioned on acquisition of additional resources)

Goals:

- To educate communities about the reality of racial inequality in our region
- To understand how greater racial equity can be achieved in our region
- To create opportunities for local governments to take action to increase racial equity.

FY21 Deliverables:

- Secure funding for a local assistance program to assist individual municipalities in addressing racial inequality.
- Continue webinars on aspects of racial inequality in our region.
- Offer local governments and regional partner organizations opportunities to participate in pilot efforts to improve racial equity in their organization and community.

Actions:

- 1) Raise funds needed to do racial equity work.
- 2) Provide a pilot program to one or more MRC municipalities, modeled on GPCOG's opioid prevention work, that supports local education and action to reduce racial inequity.
- 3) Continue webinar series as needed and practicable.

MRC's Effectiveness

Goals:

- To increase the consistent participation in MRC activities by all seven communities
- To increase the consistent participation in MRC activities by the chief elected official, chief administrative official, and other Councilors

FY21 Deliverables:

- High level officials from all communities engaged

Actions:

- 1) Focus meetings on decision-making