

## GPCOG Executive Committee

Tuesday, January 16, 2024

Noon – 1:30 p.m.

Meeting Agenda

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***In-Person:***

*Greater Portland Council of Governments*

*970 Baxter Boulevard, Room 201*

*Portland, Maine*

*(Lunch provided)*

***Remote:***

*Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85682163515>*

*Webinar ID: 856 8216 3515*

*One tap mobile: +13052241968,,85682163515# US*

*Participating by phone? Use \*9 to raise your hand and \*6 to unmute.*

*As of April 26, 2022 GPCOG and PACTS are holding committee meetings in hybrid format, both in person at GPCOG's offices and via webinar. The remote portions of all meetings are conducted in accordance with the requirements of GPCOG Executive Committee policy, [LD 1772](#), [PL 2022 Ch. 666](#), and [1 MRSA Chapter 13, Subchapter 1](#).*

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**1. Welcome**

This meeting is being recorded and will be made available at [gpcog.org/AgendaCenter](http://gpcog.org/AgendaCenter).

**2. Public Comment**

Members of the public are welcome to provide up to three minutes of public comment on any topic, including items on the agenda.

**3. Nomination for Executive Committee Member**

**5 minutes**

The Executive Committee may fill vacancies in offices occurring between annual elections. With Kate Lewis' departure from the South Portland City Council, there is an opening. Misha Pride, Mayor of South Portland, will be considered by the Executive Committee to fill this vacancy.

**4. Approval of the 11/14/23 Meeting Minutes (Attachment A)**

**5. Spotlight: Regionalizing Technical Assistance 10 minutes**

Tony Plante, Director of Municipal Collaboration and COO, will discuss three needs on which varying groups of municipalities have collaborated: broadband in the Lakes Region; stormwater permitting; and cable franchise agreements.

**6. Executive Director’s Report (Attachment B) 10 minutes**

**7. FY23 Audit Report 30 minutes**

Staff Report

GPCOG’s FY23 audit was completed by Runyon Kersteen Ouellette. The audit team will provide a slide deck on the annual financial statement audit and discuss the results of the audit of GPCOG’s overhead rates. Executive Committee members will have time without staff in the room to discuss the audit with RKO. The audit documents can be accessed through the following hyperlinks: [financial statements \(FS\)](#), the [uniform guidance compliance report \(UG\)](#), the audit of [direct labor, leave, fringe, and indirect costs \(ICR\)](#), the [management letter \(ML\)](#), and the [statement on auditing standards \(SAS\)](#).

Recommended Action

Accept the FY23 financial statement audit and the FY23 audit of overhead rates.

**8. FY25 Member Dues Rate 15 minutes**

Staff Report

In 2017 the General Assembly approved an increase in the member dues rate for the first time in 27 years. The dues rate remained at \$1.00 per capita for FY2018, increased to \$1.60 for FY2019, and \$2.00 for FY2020. The proposal adopted at that meeting says, in part, “Going forward, the General Assembly will review the dues rate every three years.” In 2020 the Executive Committee interpreted this to mean every three years after the initial dues rate proposal had been completely implemented.

The dues rate remained at \$2.00 per capita for FY2021, 2022, and 2023, but members received dues credits of 20% for FY2021, 10% for FY22, and 5% for FY2023 to help cushion the anticipated economic impact of the pandemic. The federal census increase was applied in FY2023. For FY2024, a dues rate increase went into place, with the rate becoming \$2.10.

The increase in member dues has directly resulted in more responsive member services, more flexibility in meeting needs without being as dependent on other funding sources, and the capacity to contribute meaningfully to meeting the region’s challenges.

The General Assembly did not specify an approach to reviewing the dues rate every three years, so the Executive Committee is free to make whatever recommendation it thinks best balances the needs of the agency and its member communities. Many communities use various cost indexes as guides to their budgets; some cost indexes are built into union contracts (and, hence, drive portions of municipal budgets). Even more than most municipalities, GPCOG’s main budget driver is wages and benefits, so we

looked at the Employment Cost Index as a guide instead of the commonly used (and not very relevant) Consumer Price Index. For the most recent 12-month period available, through September 2023, the percent change in wages and salaries for public administration employees was 5.1%.

Since the pandemic there has been a significant tightening of the labor market, with employers having difficulty remaining competitive in the marketplace for talent. Many of our member communities, and GPCOG, have made market adjustments to help keep up. While inflation has eased in recent months to an annual rate of 3.1% through November 2023, we are continuing to experience pressure on wage rates as we try to fill new and vacant positions.

At this time last year, the GPCOG Executive Committee recommended the \$2.10 dues rate for FY2024 (which was adopted), and anticipated raising the dues rate to \$2.20 for FY2025, and \$2.25 for FY2026. Staff anticipate that these future increases in dues will help offset wage inflation and allow GPCOG to further strengthen and enhance member services. However, staff recommends that we postpone the dues increase of \$2.20 to FY2026 to allow time for the new strategic plan's recommendations to be scoped and budgeted.

The Executive Committee guidance on the dues rate for FY2025 will be incorporated into the annual budget submitted for the General Assembly's approval. An anticipated dues increase for FY2026, should that be recommended by the Executive Committee, will also be included in the communication to the General Assembly to allow ample time for municipalities to integrate the increase into 2026 budgets.

Recommended Actions:

Staff recommends that the Executive Committee (1) provide guidance to agency management and GPCOG's members to include no dues rate increase for FY2025, remaining at \$2.10 per capita, (2) direct staff to develop a proposed budget including a dues rate of \$2.10 per capita for FY2024 for consideration by the General Assembly in May 2023, and (3) provide guidance to members to anticipate a recommended increase to \$2.20 for FY2026.

**9. Other Business**

**Adjourn**

**Upcoming Meetings.** All meetings held from 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. except for General Assembly and Summit

February 27, 2024 – 5 Year Strategic Plan Workshop

March 19, 2024 – Annual Review of Executive Director

April 23, 2024 – Annual Budget (First Draft); Executive Director’s Performance Goals; Rural Vision Zero Plan Adoption

May 14, 2024 – Strategic Plan Adoption; Annual Budget (Final Recommendation); Executive Committee Nominations; Investment Policy; FY25 Meeting Calendar

May 30, 2024 – General Assembly and Summit at St. Joseph’s College in Standish

Board and committee members, the public, and other stakeholders are encouraged to subscribe to the GPCOG Executive Committee calendar at [gpcog.org/Calendar](http://gpcog.org/Calendar).

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*If you require accommodations to review materials or participate in this meeting (such as captioning or interpreting—at no cost to you), please contact: (207) 774-9891 or [transportation@gpcog.org](mailto:transportation@gpcog.org)*

*Notification 72 hours prior to the meeting will help us to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting.*

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# Attachment A

## GPCOG Executive Committee

### MEETING MINUTES

November 14, 2023

In Attendance:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Krista Chappell	Gray
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Mark Dion	Portland
Jarrold Maxfield	Windham
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Mary Fernandes	Casco

### **Welcome**

Jarrold opened the meeting. The group congratulated Mark Dion on his election to serve Portland as the new Mayor. Jarrold welcomed Nathan Poore as a new Executive Committee member. The group thanked two departing members of the Executive Committee for their service: Nat Tupper and Kate Lewis.

### **Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

### **Nomination of Executive Committee Member**

Nat nominated Nathan Poore, Town Manager of Falmouth, to fill the vacancy on the Executive Committee. Carmen seconded. The roll was called. All voted in favor.

### **Approval of 10/17/23 Minutes**

Approval of the 10/17/23 meeting minutes was moved and seconded. All members voted in favor.

## **Executive Director's Report**

Kristina highlighted upcoming events. There were no questions on her report.

## **Rural Transportation Projects**

Matt Panfil briefly presented the recommended transportation studies for 2024, including a Durham request for \$4,000 to look at traffic safety, a New Gloucester request for \$11,000 to study an intersection, and a Yarmouth request for between \$12,000 and \$15,000 to map trails.

Matt Sturgis moved to award the three studies. Krista seconded. All were in favor.

## **Advocacy: Growth Management update**

Chris Hall reported on the public hearing for [LD 1976](#) stating that some municipal planners who have reviewed this bill see it substituting a broken system for a new broken system. The Growth Management Act needs to be fixed, and the regional planning agencies have requested a convening of affected parties to work through the changes. Maine Municipal Association's testimony on the bill agreed with this approach. Krista asked whether GPCOG had a representative working with the organizations behind the bill, and Kristina said there was no official GPCOG representative to any working group. Krista shared that there are good ideas in LD 1976, including focusing growth in designated growth areas, and Chris agreed. Jarrod, Krista, and Carmen discussed the challenges of implementing comprehensive plans with limited resources.

## **PACTS – MaineDOT MOU**

Kristina briefed the group on the work MaineDOT and PACTS are doing to develop a new agreement about each party's roles and responsibilities. The new MOU may spell out an arrangement in which PACTS no longer receives federal highway funding to allocate, but PACTS will drive the project selection for roadway investments in the region, coordinating closely with MaineDOT on projects on the National Highway System. Nathan and Matt said that they are encouraged, and hope that a new agreement will speed project delivery. Nat expressed that with PACTS giving up funds, there is a risk that the state will make all decisions and PACTS will be relegated to being a nominal group. If the negotiations move in that direction, PACTS will need to decide not to sign the agreement. There's a positive outcome that's possible, but we may need to be forceful about the region's role. Kristina noted that it will be up to the municipalities. Nat said that it's important to understand the federal requirements and the Federal Highway Administration's interpretation of how the process should work, and Kristina clarified that the federal guidance is clear that PACTS should be driving the project selection for the TIP and working in coordination with MaineDOT as it selects projects in the region on the national highway system.

## **Spotlight: Grants for Businesses**

Paul Johnson, Economic Development Director, described funds available to expand domestic trade markets and to help businesses that started operations during the pandemic. Paul described which types of businesses qualify for each of the two grant opportunities. The second round of funding for the domestic trade grants will be in March. Carmen asked if Paul had connected to the regional chambers, and he replied he had. Krista

requested Paul send materials so that all Executive Committee members can share the opportunities with businesses in their communities.

### **Strategic Plan Work Session**

This item focused on developing GPCOG's mission and values. Kristina provided a brief slide deck summarizing input from members and stakeholders earlier in the fall. The group then provided feedback on the vision and values in the 2017 Strategic Plan:

- Can we better define the geographic region? Perhaps we can just say “strengthen member communities in the region” rather than referencing “Greater Portland” and “Sebago Lakes”
- Our role is to educate, engage and inspire the region to move toward a bigger vision. We strengthen and inspire our communities too.
- We do together what we can't do alone. This is the number one thing we do. We work as a coalition (more than a “Council”), trying to deal with the same issues together, rather than as separate islands. We are all on the same team, even though we have some different issues.
- The vision from 2017 doesn't capture this idea of convening and unifying the region.
- On our values, the group discussed “perspective”, with Kate saying that the way the value was expressed, it makes it seem like others might not have the courage to lead. This should be changed. Nat said perspective is an important value: ‘together, we see the big picture and work together’ may address Kate's objection to the 2017 phrasing. Our value is helping member communities grow and act on the bigger perspective and the big picture.
- The group agreed a key value is “responsive” – being flexible and adaptive. GPCOG is remarkable in its ability to change gears in the middle of a race. It can respond faster than most government agencies move. It's able to grow to meet new challenges.
- Another key value is “inclusive”. This value could be incorporated into the ‘professional’ value. Kristina noted that “inclusive” communicates commitment to social and racial equity.
- Another suggestion was to integrate the value of ‘professional’ into the 2017 value of ‘integrity’.
- Mark noted that this current list omits the value of “leadership”. Leadership can mean developing collective leadership across the region. It can also mean supporting and nurturing leadership in member communities. GPCOG provides communities access to information and skills. GPCOG doesn't have a dog in the fight, so communities can always rely on GPCOG to provide useful information, which is then up to the community to use. Carmen added “we call you guys when we can't figure it out”.

Tom Bell, Communications Director, introduced Nick Rogacki, Creative Director at Anania Bailey to discuss the process for exploring whether GPCOG should change its name as part of the 2030 Strategic Plan. Tom described two parts to the process: a) determine whether the benefit of the change is worth the cost through research; b) if the benefit exceeds costs, then develop an RFP to develop a new name.

## *GPCOG Executive Committee Meeting Agenda*

If a small group knows GPCOG, it's easier to change the name. Kate expressed that name recognition amongst members and state/federal partners is important and she is concerned about losing that name recognition and is concerned about the cost of doing a brand change. We shouldn't go overboard in appealing more broadly to the public. Kate is glad we're going through the process but wants to make sure GPCOG stays focused on serving members. Jarrod asked for examples of other COGs that have dropped the "council of governments" from the name and added that dues-paying members are "government".

Nat noted that residents in Yarmouth don't know what GPCOG is and what it does, and the current name doesn't catch interest or strengthen the organization. Nat cited the example of the Greater Portland Transit District maintaining its official name but rebranding itself as METRO for simplicity. He didn't think GPCOG stood to lose much by jettisoning the name since members and funders can easily pivot to a new name. Nathan agreed. He shared Carmen's and Kate's caution about not spending too much money on exploring or making a name change. Nathan said that GPCOG is more of a 'coalition' of communities than a 'council'.

The group acknowledged that there's no common, well-accepted name for our region that feels inclusive of all the communities GPCOG serves.

Mary said that when she first got to know GPCOG, she only understood it as an organization that made joint purchases for products. It's so much more, and GPCOG should have greater name recognition, which means we need to do a better articulation of the brand.

Tom said that the next steps are to conduct two surveys to different audiences and to convene two focus groups. This will happen in January, and the results will be brought back to the Executive Committee.

The group adjourned at 1:30 p.m. to celebrate Nat's retirement.



# Attachment B

## Executive Director's Report

### Strategic Priority – Serve our Members

- **Events** – Several events are coming up, including:
  - 1/25: Rescheduled Chairs in a Circle
  - 3/26: Regional Housing Summit at Ocean Gateway in **Portland** from 1 p.m. – 6 p.m. GPCOG is partnering with United Way Southern Maine, the Portland Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Natural Resources Council of Maine on this event.
- **Resilience Corps** – Our 4<sup>th</sup> cohort of Resilience Corps Fellows has started service. Host municipalities include **Chebeague Island, South Portland, Portland, Long Island, Falmouth, and Scarborough**. Host non-profits include the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission, and Portland Trails.
- **Short-Term Rental Software** – Members are eligible to access GPCOG's short-term rental software platform. So far, **Casco** and **Cape Elizabeth** have signed MOUs with GPCOG, and their platforms are operational. There is an opportunity for us to create regionalized short-term rentals service that would allow for shared costs and shared enforcement staff.

### Strategic Priority – Regional Prosperity

- **Advocacy** – Chris Hall will provide an oral update on the latest developments with:
  - LD 602 *An Act to Provide Regional Support to Deliver State and Federal Programs to Cities and Towns in the State*, which is legislation to strengthen regional planning organizations in Maine, and
  - LD 1721, *An Act to Create Transitional Housing Communities for Homeless Populations in the State*, submitted by Senator Jill Duson in collaboration with GPCOG's Metro Region Coalition. Belinda Ray has completed a [highly-readable explanation](#) of the transitional housing campus solution, which is a cost-effective and effective model for helping asylum seekers integrate into Maine's workforce and communities.
- **Vision Zero for Rural and Island Communities**. Since the "project spotlight" at the Executive Committee's October meeting, staff met with stakeholders, tabled at events, hosted three public workshops (in **Gray, Bridgton**, and a virtually), and conducted two meetings with our advisory panel. Between now and April, we will focus on promoting our survey and interactive map, continuing to meet with stakeholders, and collaborating with our advisory panel to develop a draft plan. In April, we expect a plan to be presented to the Executive Committee for review and adoption. We are operating under a

tight timeline to ensure that rural and island communities are eligible for Safe Streets and Roads for All Round 3 funding (the expected application deadline is June/July).

- **Rapid Transit** – This project, which will introduce bus rapid transit to the region, will serve downtown **Portland, Westbrook** and **Gorham**. An alignment has been selected. The next phase will decide between some ‘micro-alignment’ alternatives and move into engineering and design. For a high-level overview of this exciting new project, click [here](#).
- **Business Grants** – GPCOG is administering two grant programs through the Maine Department of Community and Economic Development to help businesses. The first round of grant applications recently closed, and the second round will open in February. The Domestic Trade Recovery Grant program, which is statewide, received 350 applications, totaling \$20M in requests. There is \$3M available in the first round. Of these applications, 150 were from Cumberland County businesses, and of these over 10% are minority-owned. The second grant program, the New Business Recovery Grants for Cumberland County, received 60 applications, totaling \$1M in requests. Of these applications, 25% are from minority-owned businesses.
- **Let’s Connect** – Recent show topics and guests include: [electric buses](#) with Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit, municipal [communications](#) with staff from **Portland, Scarborough, and South Portland**, local [climate action](#) with staff and a volunteer from **Falmouth**, [electric bikes](#) with staff from **South Portland**, the [housing](#) shortage with Greg Payne from the Governor’s Office for Policy, Innovation and the Future, [energy efficiency](#) with Window Dressers, a Resilience Corps host site, political [polarization](#) with former **Portland** Mayor Kate Snyder, and about [piping plovers](#) with a **South Portland** author and Audubon.

## Strategic Priority – Operate with Excellence

- **Recruitment.** We hired Andrew Zarro as GPCOG’s new Community Partnerships Director and Cashel Stewart as Regional Transportation Planner.
- **Strategic Plan.** February’s Executive Committee meeting will focus on mission, values, and key strategies.
- **Grants.** In FY24, GPCOG raised about \$3M for regional initiatives. The following grants have been awarded since the last meeting:
  - **\$637,000 for Safe Streets and Roads for All Round 2 Demonstration.** The grant includes funding for 11 quick-build demonstration projects throughout the PACTS region and three “supplemental planning activities,” including walk audits, a region-wide roundabout feasibility study, and more in-depth analyses of three intersections in **Portland** and **South Portland**.
  - **\$350,000 National Fish & Wildlife Foundation National Coastal Resilience Fund.** This will build on our first grant to plan for coastal resilience, and focus on restoration and management of coastal bluff in Casco Bay.
  - **\$250,000 Maine Connectivity Authority Regional Broadband Partners.** This will continue our broadband work with a focus on expanding digital equity.
  - **\$15,000 National Renewable Energy Laboratory Clean Energy to Communities.** This is for cohort-style training for our staff in electrification of transportation.