



Metro Regional Coalition Agenda

December 12, 2023

Noon to 1:30 pm

Hybrid meeting – In Person at GPCOG and Via ZOOM Conferencing

If attending via Zoom, please click the link below to join the webinar:

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87406527810>

Webinar ID: 874 0652 7810

This meeting will be conducted in person and remotely in accordance with the requirements of GPCOG Executive Committee policy, [LD 1772, PL 2022 Ch. 666](#), 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 Michael Foley will call the meeting to order, remind attendees that the meeting is being recorded, and ask attendees to briefly introduce themselves.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the November 21, 2023 (Attachment A)

The minutes from the November 21, 2023 MRC meeting are found below as Attachment A. A motion for acceptance is in order.

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. Update on Portland Shelters and Encampments (25 minutes)

Staff report: Portland City Manager Danielle West will share information about Portland's two shelters (one new, one expanding), as well as the current situation at encampments in the City. She will discuss next steps in Portland, and how neighboring municipalities can continue to support the City as it supports in the unhoused.

Action: Information and exploration of how Metro Coalition members can continue to help Portland.

5. Discussion with Representative Annie Graham (25 minutes)

Staff report: Representative Graham (District 105 North Yarmouth and Gray) serves as a member of the Legislature’s Health and Human Services Committee, which is working on reforms to General Assistance. Rep. Graham will update members on the Committee’s work to date and share her insights into the prospects for changes to General Assistance in the upcoming legislative session.

Action: Information and an opportunity to engage with General Assistance reform.

6. Legislative Update (15 minutes)

Staff report: Chris Hall will provide updates on three bills that directly impact our region:

- [LD 1721](#), *An Act to Create Transitional Housing Communities for Homeless Populations in the State*, submitted by Senator Jill Duson in collaboration with the MRC.
- [LD 602](#), *An Act to Provide Regional Support to Deliver State and Federal Programs to Cities and Towns in the State*, legislation to strengthen regional planning organizations in Maine.
- [LD 1976](#), *An Act to Update the Growth Management Program Laws*, a bill to rewrite the Growth Management Act.

Action: Learn about recent legislative developments and prepare for engaging in legislative action in the upcoming session.

7. MRC Member Roundtable: Council Challenge for 2024 (15 minutes)

Staff report: For today’s meeting, this standing agenda item will ask Metro Coalition members to share each member’s thoughts on the biggest facing their Council in 2024.

Action: Information and an opportunity to share member experiences with each other.

8. Adjourn

Upcoming Meetings (all Noon to 1:30 pm both in person and remote via Zoom)

January 9, 2024
February 13, 2024
March 12, 2024
April 9, 2024
May 21, 2024
June 18, 2024

Attachment A
Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes
November 21, 2023

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Hope Cahan	Falmouth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Travis Kennedy	Cumberland County
Sarah Lawrence	Office of Rep. Chellie Pingree
For GPCOG	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Belinda ray, Matt Panfil, Dani Deason, Tom Bell

1. Welcome and introductions

Chair Michael Foley called the meeting to order at 12:06 pm and welcomed everyone. Attendees gave brief introductions.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the October 10, 2023 meeting

Hope Cahan moved acceptance of the minutes of the October 10, 2023 MRC meeting seconded by Matt Sturgis. The motion passed by roll call with unanimous support of all those voting.

3. Public Comment

None.

4. MRC Input into GPCOG Strategic Planning

GPCOG is finalizing a new 5-year Strategic Plan. Metro Coalition members were updated and asked for their input into the most important roles GPCOG plays for the MRC and the outcomes the MRC seeks to achieve via GPCOG by 2030.

Kristina Egan presented the attached slide deck describing input received from members and community partners to date. She discussed the information gathered, including member and partner feedback on various GPCOG programs and projects.

She asked MRC members how the MRC forum serves each member, what value it provides, and how could MRC be improved to do better.

In response many members offered insights and thoughts, including:

What makes MRC valuable?

- MRC creates a space where elected officials and managers can interact with their peers and expand their network for mutual support and new ideas.
- MRC brings an urban focus to the table, allowing communities to focus on issues that are unique or different in more developed municipalities.
- MRC brings urban voices together, making them stronger.
- MRC works against a siloed approach to complex issues that all member communities share.

How can MRC be improved?

- Increase the presence of all communities at MRC meetings so that every community is present at every meeting.
- Focus MRC work more on specific, tangible outcomes like the Crime Lab, as the original founders of the MRC (Ed Suslovic and Jim Cohen) envisioned.
- Consider expanding the membership of MRC to other communities.
- Expand MRC contact with all elected officials in the MRC communities. This could include written updates. The need for more frequent, better communications was noted.
- Catalyze a regional solution to homelessness. Consider the County as one option or establish and fund a regional organization that can manage services and facilities for the unhoused.
- Do more visible advocacy as a group, including press conferences.

Evaluating MRC priorities against regional priorities

MRC's work plan contains priorities for housing and homelessness – other regional priorities include public transportation, active transportation, climate action, and issues with governance and civility. Members explored whether MRC priorities should shift.

Member feedback included:

- Collaborate with the County on addressing substance misuse. Members were reminded that they can connect with a group convened by (and still facilitated) by Jonathan Sahrbeck when he was in his role as Cumberland County DA, called Cumberland County Council for Substance Use Prevention, or CCCSUP, which meets monthly.

- MRC needs to remain focused on practical, outcome-based efforts. Municipal members struggle to find entry points for specific actions on broad social problem.
- Additional work should include commitment to work together on regionally impactful issues like the Gorham Connector.

Kristina thanked members for the robust discussion and said that the GPCOG Strategic Planning process will be improved with today's feedback.

5. Housing Data Needs

Kristina Egan introduced this item by saying that GPCOG needs help from MRC communities to collect housing data to advance both regional and state housing growth goals.

Matt Panfil, GPCOG's Planning Director, shared his team's housing data needs and asked for member support as GPCOG puts together a 2024 Housing Progress Report for our region.

Specifically, Matt explained that we need building permit data by month, and this data is only available through municipalities. In addition, information about affordability (the definition of 'affordable' is subsidized, deed-restricted housing) and location of new housing is important to understand our regional progress toward equitable, sustainable housing development.

In member discussion the following points were made:

- Middle-income housing is a subject worth convening the region to discuss. New state policies and better understanding of municipal tools that can support middle-income housing development should be better understood by all communities.
- Sales data should be used as an additional data source. Tax assessors have information that can illuminate how new housing fits into the marketplace.
- Much of the new housing that's being built is priced by the market and prices are driven by supply and demand.

Matt thanks the members for their input and ideas and said requests for housing permit data will be going out at the end of November.

6. Economic Development Update

Chris Hall briefed members on two economic development grant programs ([Domestic Trade Grant Program](#) and the [New Business Recovery Grant](#) program) that GPCOG is running for the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. Details of both programs are available by visiting the links.

Hall asked members to publicize the availability of both programs to their networks. Members received links to all the social media graphics by separate email.

7. MRC Member Roundtable: Housing

Members were asked to share each community's experience with LD 2003 compliance and other progress on expanding housing choices. Cape Elizabeth, Westbrook, Scarborough, and Gorham shared updates which ranged from completing LD 2003 required changes to municipal ordinances to continuing work in progress.

8. Adjourn

Mayor Foley adjourned the meeting by acclamation at 1:28 pm.