



# DRAFT

## Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

January 10, 2023

### In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Pete LaFond	Falmouth
Jon Anderson	Scarborough
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Jeremey Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Kate Snyder	Portland
Danielle West	Portland
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Sarah Lawrence	Office of Representative Pingree
Gail Kezer	Office of Senator King
<b>Guest</b>	Kate Dufour, Maine Municipal Association
<b>For GPCOG</b>	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Belinda Ray

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Chris Hall called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm and welcomed everyone.

Sarah Lawrence from Representative Pingree’s Office shared information about a new FEMA funding opportunity contained in the FY23 omnibus appropriations bill that Congress just passed which included a significant increase for FEMA’s Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), from \$150 million up to \$800 million, specifically to help migrant-receiving communities respond to the crisis at the border and elsewhere in the U.S.

Sarah urged members and eligible Maine entities to apply immediately. More information including links to the funding opportunity are included in Sarah’s follow up email, found below as Attachment A.

## 2. Acceptance of minutes from the December 13, 2022 meeting

Matt Sturgis moved acceptance of the minutes of the December 13, 2022 MRC meeting, seconded by Virginia Wilder-Cross. The motion was passed without objection.

## 3. Public Comment

None.

## 4. Legislative Updates

Kate Dufour, Maine Municipal Association's Director of Advocacy and Communications, joined us to discuss the upcoming legislative session and preview MMA's legislative agenda.

Kate provided an introduction to the MMA legislative policy process, including the Legislative Policy Committee's [membership](#) and [meeting schedule](#). She urged everyone to communicate directly with our region's LPC members on issues of concern.

Kate previewed the MMA policy platform for the upcoming legislative session which includes roughly a dozen proposals to change existing law in the following areas:

- School Budget referendum timing
- Sharing revenues from recreational marijuana sales
- First responder preventative health
- Shared cost of training for EMS/Dispatcher personnel
- Non-residential Law Enforcement Officer training
- Amendments to tax increment financing laws to incentivize greater housing production
- Amendment of the Tree Growth law
- Reforms to General Assistance, including increased reimbursement and amended municipal responsibilities. See below.
- Reworking LD 290, last session's Property Tax Stabilization law, by repealing last year's law and replacing it with an enhanced resident homestead exemption that is available to people 65+ years old, is means-tested with eligibility determined by the Maine Revenue Services, and which reimburses municipalities 100% of lost revenues.

Kate shared many details of MMA's General Assistance legislation, which she emphasized was the product of good discussion and collaboration by a working group of representatives from large and small municipalities. Copies of the MMA bills on General Assistance and Property Tax Stabilization will be shared with MRC members. Highlights include:

- 120 days for newly appointed municipal GA administrators to complete their training
- Acceptance of GA applications during regular working hours
- Increase of state reimbursement from 70 to 90% in all cases
- State reimbursement of 100% of 'beyond maximum' costs, as well as costs of administration and interpreters
- Extension of municipal responsibility for GA cases from 30 days to 6 months for relocated applicants

- Extension of municipal responsibility from 6 months to one year when GA applicants are in shelters, motels, nursing homes, etc.
- Better state GA administration including written decisions, consistent interpretation of laws and regulations, a 24-hour hotline to support municipal GA officials, and a web portal

Kate discussed the implementation of last session's LD 2003. She noted that the law's promised technical assistance and funding have not been provided, and the law's regulations have not been released (they are expected in March or April). She suggested that LD 2003's effective date of 7.1.23 should be pushed back to give municipalities enough time to prepare zoning changes and other planning before the law goes into effect.

During Q&A members asked Kate to carefully consider impacts of the Law Enforcement Officer non-resident training proposal. They were supportive of repealing LD 290, which many said was unworkable, in favor of targeted property tax relief to those who need it.

## **5. Shelter Housing update**

Chris Hall and Kristina Egan conveyed requests from the community for any shelter housing facilities that might be available to respond to the growing numbers of unhoused people in our region. Members were asked to contact Kristina or Belinda Ray if they had any thoughts about possible shelter locations that might be put into use and staff will investigate them.

## **6. CEDS development**

Chris Hall gave a brief update on the ongoing work GPCOG staff is doing to produce a new 5-year Regional Prosperity Plan (otherwise known as our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) plan). This work is part of GPCOG's responsibilities as the Economic Development District for the Greater Portland region. Public engagement meetings are in progress, and members were welcomed to provide their thoughts on the opportunities and barriers to greater regional prosperity by contacting Chris Hall.

## **7. Member Roundtable**

Members discussed several items.

- Ginny Wilder Cross shared her experience with constituents' misunderstanding of public service and the need to educate people to reverse misinformation that circulates in the community.
- Jeremy Gabrielson asked if any other communities were giving thought to re-positioning failed bond proposals from last fall.
- Several members discussed storm damage from the recent December storm, and Jim Gailey noted that Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency has compiled an inventory of storm damage in support of a requested FEMA disaster declaration that he will share.
- Nathan Poore noted how essential municipal communications have become, and the great value that a municipal communications professional can provide.
- Tom Hall noted his staff's great response to a '1<sup>st</sup> Amendment audit,' something that other members had also experienced.

## 8. Adjourn

At 1:30 pm Chris Hall adjourned the meeting by acclamation.

### Attachment A

*Email from Sarah Lawrence to Chris Hall 1.10.23*

Dear Chris,

As promised, I'm following up on my announcement at today's Metro Regional Council meeting with further details. Please pass on this message to Danielle West, Kate Snyder, Scott Morelli, Kate Lewis, and any others who may wish to apply; thank you!

The FY23 omnibus appropriations bill that Congress just passed included a significant increase for **FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), from \$150 million up to \$800 million, specifically to help migrant-receiving communities respond to the crisis at the border and elsewhere in the U.S.** We are thrilled by this news and I know Chellie has been advocating for years to increase this pot of money.

We have been told by DHS that the EFSP is intended to be the federal government's primary source of funding for state/local gov'ts and non-profits to respond to influx of migrants, including asylum seekers, thus we want to make sure relevant Maine municipalities and nonprofits Maine are vying for some of those funds. While the increase in funding is significant, we expect many cities across the country to be applying, so I'd say the sooner applications can be submitted the better. However, applications are not yet open; we anticipate them opening up in a month or two, so please be on the lookout.

**There's an application period open right now, from January 2 – February 17, for different funding. This is the \$75M for humanitarian relief that was included in the most recent Continuing Resolution (CR) before the omnibus passed, and applies to costs incurred from October 1 – December 31, 2022.** EFSP website and application info for this opportunity:

<https://www.efsp.unitedway.org/efsp/website/websiteContents/index.cfm?template=EFSPAwardByPhase.cfm>.

If municipalities are still accessing funds through the COVID Category B Emergency Protective Measures program, great- we just want to make sure they also apply for this program since it is likely to outlast the COVID emergency programs.

If and when municipalities do apply for that CR money or (in the future) the funds passed in the omnibus, I hope they will let me know so our office can convey to FEMA the Congresswoman's support for their application.

Lastly, Beth Campbell at United Way of Southern Maine is the EFSP Local Board POC and probably the best contact for questions, but we are happy to help as well.

Please let me know of any questions.

Best,  
Sarah

--

**Sarah Lawrence** (she/her)

District Representative, U.S. Representative Chellie Pingree (ME-01)

Portland main office: 207-774-5019 | Direct: 207-228-0665 | [sarah.lawrence@mail.house.gov](mailto:sarah.lawrence@mail.house.gov)