



DRAFT

Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

January 11, 2022

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Amy Kuhn, Chair	Falmouth
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Susan Gillis	Cape Elizabeth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Kate Snyder	Portland
Anne McGuire	Portland
John Cloutier	Scarborough
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Mark Winters	Office of Senator Collins
Gail Kezar	Office of Senator King
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Tom Bell, Vanessa Farr

1. Welcome and introductions

Amy Kuhn called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm and welcomed everyone.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the December 14, 2021 meeting

Matt Sturgis moved acceptance of the minutes from the December 14, 2021 MRC meeting, seconded by Virginia Wilder-Cross. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

3. Public Comment

George Rheault suggested that GPCOG offer education on the 2020 U.S. Census numbers for our region.

4. COVID-19 Roundtable

Members shared with each other their pandemic-related questions, learning, and community updates which included:

- Mayor Snyder explained the recent Portland Council actions on ending the state of emergency, and enacting a mask mandate.
- Mayor Foley suggested the possibility of a state-level action on masking and other pandemic response actions.
- Amy Kuhn said that MRC will keep the option open of contacting the Governor to urge a statewide approach in the future.

5. Scarborough Update

Scarborough Town Manager Tom Hall gave an 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.

Hall began by setting the context, including a recent survey of Scarborough residents that showed concern with the pace of growth in town, as well as increasing demands on town resources. He also noted that in 2021 Scarborough rewrote its Comprehensive Plan, and observed that most of the new development in Scarborough in 2021 was located in just 9% of the town's landmass. In December of 2020 the town hit its growth cap, and the Council responded in ways that continued to manage increased growth in 2021.

Next Hall focused on The Downs project. He shared slides showing development to date, as well as planned growth in the middle of the project parcel. In total The Downs contains about 500 acres of mixed use development, and so far no amendments have been needed to the zoning put in place to advance the project.

The Downs will have up to 20 units per acre of mixed housing types with 10% of all housing units made affordable by deed restriction. To date 37% of all housing units that have been built are affordable to working households. Hall also discussed a recent town approval for an Idexx office building – something that Westbrook Mayor Michael Foley spoke in favor of as a regional win-win.

Hall described the infrastructure costs needed to support the project, and explained how the town has created a TIF district to facilitate private investment so that no public dollars are at risk.

As The Downs advances a new town center is planned at the heart of the development. The Scarborough Council is actively inviting public engagement as the build out continues and the town considers a Growth Management exemption request from the developer.

Hall concluded by praising the Council, the developers, and the residents for a continuing collaboration that is producing regionally impactful growth.

In Q&A Mayor Foley and Mayor Snyder both praised Scarborough's efforts and said how important it is to expand housing choices throughout the region.

Hall noted that transit is an important consideration for The Downs, but critical mass of ridership is needed for major expansions. GPCOG has modeled various scenarios and is helping the town explore route expansions.

6. Advocacy on Housing & Zoning Commission Recommendations

The Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions released its final report ([link](#)) on December 28th. Chris Hall briefly walked members through the Commission's final recommendations which include.

- 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.

Hall asked members for their feedback on the proposals. In the conversation that followed many points were made, including:

- Local control is very important to members and municipalities across Maine. Proposals that erode local control will face strong opposition.
- One-size-fits-all strategies are unwelcome because municipalities across the region, and the state, are so different. Proposals that mandate strategies that don't work in some communities will face strong opposition.
- State goals and specific outcomes are better approaches to expanding housing in Maine, as opposed to zoning and land use mandates, especially when combined with incentives and funded support.
- The Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) by right proposal must clearly and effectively eliminate the chance that ADU's will become short term rentals.

- The proposal to allow four housing units where one is now permitted was received very skeptically by many members who saw the prospect for significant homeowner resistance.
- Members said that more public education will be needed to get political support for many of the recommendations.
- Members were opposed to eliminating growth caps. They discussed possible changes to existing state law governing growth caps, but urged caution about unintended consequences.
- Members voiced support for the proposed changes to the Maine Fair Housing Act statute.
- Members emphasized that incentives would be a much preferred approach, especially combined with specific goals and outcomes.
- Members were supportive of technical assistance and state funding to pay for the costs involved in any state action on housing.

Chris Hall thanked everyone for their valuable insights and said the MRC feedback will be shared with the GPCOG Executive Committee when it sets GPCOG advocacy policy on housing at its 1/18/22 meeting.

7. Adjourn

At 1:32 pm Amy Kuhn adjourned the meeting by acclamation

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