

GPCOG Executive Committee

MEETING MINUTES

January 16, 2024

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Krista Chappell	Gray
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Misha Pride	South Portland
Jarrod Maxfield	Windham
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Mary Fernandes	Casco

Welcome

Jarrod opened the meeting, welcomed Misha Pride, Mayor of South Portland and welcomed Andrew Zarro, GPCOG's new Director of Community Partnerships.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Nomination of Executive Committee Member

Krista moved the nomination of Misha Pride, South Portland Mayor, to fill the vacancy on the Executive Committee. Sue seconded. The roll was called. All voted in favor.

Approval of 11/14/23 Minutes

Mary moved approval of the 11/14/23 minutes. Krista seconded. Misha abstained and all remaining members voted in favor.

Spotlight: Regionalizing Technical Assistance

Tony Plante, Director of Municipal Collaboration and COO described three services GPCOG has been able to provide with member dues funding.

On behalf of communities that require a stormwater permit, GPCOG hired a lawyer and stormwater and geotechnical consultants to secure an "MS4 permit". While the participating towns paid for the consultant, member dues provided the runway to develop and staff the project.

Fifteen communities banded together to hire a premier national law firm to conduct cable franchise evaluations in preparation for renewal negotiations, and fee audits to explore whether towns were being paid what they are owed by Charter Communications. Through the law firm, the communities have engaged in talks with Charter but made limited progress. Meanwhile, we developed a model cable TV franchise ordinance that some communities have adopted, strengthening their oversight. Most recently, this work has evolved to request support from Senator Bennett and the Attorney General to require that local access programming be broadcast in high definition as it's provided by the station. The project is ongoing.

Several communities in the Lakes Region are working together on a joint effort to build out broadband infrastructure to serve rural areas. The towns issued a joint RFP through GPCOG to hire technical assistance and then sought bids for a regional network, with Sebago Fiber being chosen. Sebago Fiber is working with towns to leverage their own municipal network needs to build out fiber throughout the region. GPCOG member dues support for this project was crucial until state and federal funding became available. The project is ongoing.

Executive Director's Report

Kristina highlighted upcoming events and new grant awards. Nathan asked about the new grant to make coastal bluffs more climate resilient and described some of the recent impacts of the storm surge in Falmouth. Kristina did not have the answer but said she would get back to Nathan after asking Sara Mills-Knapp for that information.

Chris Hall provided an update on GPCOG's advocacy priorities, including a bill that would establish transitional housing campuses and a bill that will build the capacity of regional councils across the state to deliver support to municipalities. Jarrod asked how priorities are established and mentioned a bill that would certify contractors that could help municipalities avoid sub-par work. Staff said that the Executive Committee selects advocacy priorities in advance of the legislative session, in November, and that we focus on items that directly impact the region, and partner with Maine Municipal Association on items of general interest to all municipalities.

FY23 Audit Report

Josh Kochis, Finance Director, introduced Tim Gill from Runyon Kersteen Ouellette. Tim gave the auditor's report on GPCOG's FY23 audit and audit of the indirect rate, using [this slide deck](#). Tim said GPCOG has a clean audit (an unmodified opinion), with no material weaknesses and no significant deficiencies. The only comment is to improve segregation of duties, which is difficult to do with limited administrative staff.

Nathan asked why the member dues for FY23 were so much higher than FY22. The answer is that some member dues were carried over from FY22 into FY23, the FY23 dues were discounted at 5%, rather than the 10% in FY22, and the FY23 dues were adjusted for population growth.

Nathan asked for a definition of "assigned funds." These are investment funds that require Executive Committee approval for any use. They comprise about 21% of the budget, which is more than a couple of months of expenses. These funds can be best understood as an endowment, rather than a fund balance in the way that municipalities have them.

Sue moved to accept the FY23 audit report. Mary seconded. All were in favor.

FY25 Member Dues

After the staff presentation, Krista suggested that GPCOG keep dues the same for FY25 and keep with the schedule of increases recommended by the Executive Committee last January. This would mean a dues increase to \$2.20 for FY26 and an increase to \$2.25 for FY27. Sue asked why the County's dues increased by \$500 while the island dues stayed at a flat rate of \$750. Josh answered that the 5% increase in dues in FY24 for municipalities was applied to the County but was not applied to the islands because the populations are so small and vary so much by season. Jarrod agreed with Krista. Mary also indicated her support.

Misha moved to provide guidance to staff and members that there will be no dues increase for FY25, directed staff to prepare an FY25 budget based on the current dues rate of \$2.10 per capital, and to advise the General Assembly to anticipate a dues increase to \$2.20 for FY26 and a dues increase to \$2.25 for FY27. Mary seconded. The roll was called, and all were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.