

GPCOG Executive Committee

MINUTES January 18, 2022

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Sandy Carder	Gray
Jarrold Maxfield	Windham
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Mark Winter	Sen. Collins
Gail Kezer, Adam Lachman	Sen. King
Sarah Lawrence	Congresswoman Pingree
Kristina Egan, Josh Kochis, Sara Mills-Knapp, Tony Plante, Chris Hall, Vincent Edwards, Chris Chop, Julia Bruel, Vanessa Farr, Tom Bell	GPCOG Staff

Acceptance of 11/16/21 Minutes

Sue moved acceptance of the 11/16/21 meeting minutes. Nat seconded. A roll call was conducted. All were in favor.

Public Comment

Eamonn Dundon, Portland Regional Chamber, said that expanding affordable housing for the region's workforce is a high priority for the business community. He urged GPCOG to lead on the issue as the legislature considers the Housing and Zoning Commission's recommendations. While some provisions are controversial, such as the elimination of single-family zoning, the Maine Municipal Association has endorsed many of the recommendations. GPCOG's advocacy should not be limited to MMA's position.

Executive Director's Report

Kristina encouraged Executive Committee members to participate in the spring “Ride with Me” event to learn about our public transportation network. GPCOG will be hosting a Coffee with COG on 1/25 at 2 p.m., hosting Mayors Foley and Levesque about successful development. Sara Mills-Knapp spoke to the new state opportunity for 2 – 5 communities to join a grant application with GPCOG to ready themselves for climate resiliency state funding.

Spotlight: Resilience Corps

Julia Bruel reviewed the accomplishments of GPCOG’s first year of the Resilience Corps and shared the hosts and partnerships for the second year. She noted that recruitment in today’s labor market is much more difficult than last year. View the [Resilience Corps Spotlight \(PDF\)](#)

FY21 Audit Report

Don Gaudet from the audit firm RKO presented the FY21 audit. He thanked Josh Kochis for a smooth audit, despite the remote work environment. Don reported a clean, unmodified opinion, consistent with prior years, noting that the audit was as good as an agency can get. RKO tested internal controls and found no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies. An indirect cost rate is required by the federal government. RKO reviewed our indirect rate and found no exceptions to the indirect expenses. GPCOG’s federal and state grants increased by about \$1M in FY21, not counting the Maine Economic Recovery Program, which represented a one-time increase of \$67M. Josh added that GPCOG continues to administer federal relief funds and will be distributing another \$5M this spring. View [Don Gaudet’s audit presentation \(PDF\)](#).

Kate moved acceptance of the FY21 audit and indirect cost rate audit reports. Nat seconded. A roll call was conducted. All were in favor.

FY23 Member Dues

Staff reviewed the history of the dues rate and of recent pandemic-related discounts. Kate asked whether people experiencing homelessness are included in the census numbers. Kristina said she didn’t know but would find out. The group discussed the importance of addressing homelessness, with Mark noting the importance of addressing the needs of the recently-arrived asylum seekers. The group agreed it would be a good for GPCOG staff to incorporate work on these pressing issues into GPCOG’s work. Staff will incorporate this into the development of the draft FY23 budget.

Nat expressed concern that with the increase in population and an elimination of FY22’s 10% dues credit, members would see an increase in dues of 19%. He added that GPCOG is delivering value for the dues. Jerre added that we need to wean ourselves from the pandemic credits. Consensus emerged that the dues should be adjusted for the population increase, as reported in the decennial census, and that GPCOG should offer a 5% dues credit for FY23 with a plan of returning to the full dues amount (no credit) for FY24. The group did not vote, but provided this guidance to staff for the development of the FY23 budget.

Housing Advocacy

Chris Hall reviewed the Housing and Zoning Commission's recommendations and recapped the discussion at the recent Metro Regional Coalition meeting. Members expressed the importance of local control, how mandates of 'one size fits all' do not work for diverse communities, that municipalities need flexibility in how they approach increasing housing choices, and a concern that accessory dwelling units will become short-term rentals and fail to address local housing need. Jerre remarked that the recommendations, as drafted by the legislature's commission, are 'too much stick and not enough carrot'. Kate agreed that as municipalities build more housing, particularly accessory dwelling units, housing should be for people in Maine. Matt agreed.

Kate noted that if single family zoning is eliminated, she would want to be sure that municipal services, like emergency services, were not stretched thin by serving more density in outlying areas. Jarrod expressed that Windham wants to preserve its farmland, that the state already incentivizes priority development areas through tax increment financing districts, and that he generally disagreed with the recommendations. Matt suggested that rather than eliminate growth caps or allow them to be permanent, they should sunset.

Sandy said that we all agree there is an affordable housing issue that was exacerbated by the pandemic. Where new growth is located makes a big difference to a municipality like Gray, which wants to preserve open space, protect its lakes, and reinforce its village. Growth permits allow the town to incrementally control the costs of new municipal service costs associated with growth. Mark said that the commission's recommendations are a starting point for a conversation, and the legislature will likely be mindful of the importance of Maine's long history of local control.

The group considered the recommendation in the agenda packet, and agreed that GPCOG recognizes the importance of the housing challenge and the role of municipalities in addressing it. GPCOG will advocate for the state to set housing goals and provide technical assistance and meaningful financial incentives to municipalities to meet those goals. The state also needs to articulate clear metrics to determine if policies changes are generating new, affordable housing.

While there was no vote, each member expressed support for proceeding with GPCOG's position, as described by staff and written in the recommendation in the packet.

The meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.