



## DRAFT

# Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

February 9, 2021

Noon to 1:30 pm

Via ZOOM Conferencing

### In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Amy Kuhn, Chair	Falmouth
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Misha Pride	South Portland
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Jeremy Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Belinda Ray	Portland
Kate Snyder	Portland
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
<b>Presenter</b>	Tae Chong, Portland City Councilor
<b>Guest</b>	Dan Coyne, United Way Greater Portland
<b>For GPCOG:</b>	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Zoe Miller, Tori Pelletier, Tom Bell, Julia Dubovsky

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Amy Kuhn called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm and welcomed everyone.

### 2. Acceptance of the January 12, 2021 meeting minutes

Mike Foley moved acceptance of the minutes from the January 12, 2021 MRC meeting, seconded by Belinda Ray. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

### 3. Public Comment.

There was no public comment offered.

### 4. MRC request to PACTS for TOD planning

At the January 2021 MRC meeting members suggested exploration of how PACTS funded transit-oriented development (TOD) planning could be wed to MRC municipal comprehensive planning and local/regional efforts to address the information contained in Jeff Levine's [Multifamily Housing and Land Use Regulation](#) study.

PACTS has included TOD planning as part of its work over the last couple of years, completing the Maine Mall TOD plan and developing the Saco/Biddeford Mill District plan. [Transit Tomorrow](#) recommends creating TOD plans for about two dozen additional places.

PACTS has several potential sources of funding for advancing this planning. The first is the regular planning funds that PACTS receives every two years. The second is CARES transit relief funds. While the vast bulk of the CARES funds are needed to offset losses due to ridership declines, some funding has been allocated to advance the recommendations of regional plans, including Transit Tomorrow. There's potential for funding support for additional, accelerated TOD plans for PACTS communities who were interested in having a TOD plan. These TOD plans would be completely voluntary – no municipality would be required to participate.

Staff emphasized that PACTS makes the decisions about what funding might be available and if TOD planning were funded, which planning proposals would be selected. Since multiple communities will be eligible if a TOD request is made and approved, staff stressed that the process to award individual TOD plans could be competitive, depending on the level of interest among communities and the funding available.

Members discussed how transit oriented development planning is a successful way to unify community housing and transit policies. Members were supportive of making a request from MRC to PACTS to allocate funding for additional TOD plans, beyond the level and timeframe envisioned in Transit Tomorrow.

Members noted that integration of housing and transit policies creates the need for additional funding for related infrastructure – for example bus stop shelters. Staff noted that TOD planning services from GPCOG can include technical assistance for zoning changes, as well as support for PACTS infrastructure investments.

Members discussed the costs and required funding for additional TOD plans. Staff estimated, given current projections from transit agencies, at least \$5 million in PACTS CARES Act funds may be available for a variety of innovation investments, including TOD planning and technical assistance.

TOD plans cost about \$50,000 - \$80,000 per plan. With normal PACTS funding, PACTS has been doing one TOD plan every one to two years. An allocation of additional funds could accelerate this rate.

Members proposed requesting PACTS allocate \$350,000 from the region's available CARES Act funds to pay for 5 to 6 additional TOD plans, beyond those already in the PACTS workplan, for which MRC and PACTS communities could compete.

**Motion:** Matt Sturgis moved that the MRC request PACTS to allocate \$350,000 from available CARES Act funding to pay for 5-6 additional TOD plans, which MRC communities can compete for, to align transit and housing policies and focus PACTS infrastructure resources on areas where TOD plans are implemented. Belinda Ray seconded the motion.

A roll call was conducted – members voted unanimously to approve the motion.

**Next steps:** Staff will prepare a letter from MRC Chair Amy Kuhn conveying MRC's request to the PACTS Policy Board for their consideration at their March meeting.

## **5. Homelessness Proposal from Portland City Councilor Tae Chong**

Portland Councilor Tae Chong has been following the MRC's discussions about homelessness. He offered the following idea as a partial solution to issues surrounding shelter referrals and the best ways to get people facing a housing crisis the supports they need:

*“Ryan Cullen, former director of the Portland Emergency Shelters and current CEO of CHOM housing did an in depth study of people experiencing homelessness. 33% of people experiencing homelessness stayed at the shelter for 3 days or less. This population needed access to emergency funds to stay in their homes but had no choice but to disrupt their housing which often includes children and seek help in Portland.*

*Encouraging vulnerable populations experiencing housing disruption to seek assistance in emergency shelters puts a large number of people at risk, especially in time of Covid. I believe if we created a Cumberland County 211 GA program, many families could stay in their homes, keeping them safe (as well as front line service workers). I would like to explore how we as a community of municipal leaders can expand the current 211 GA program administered through the Opportunity Alliance in partnership with the Greater Portland of United Way.”*

Councilor Chong presented his proposal and explained how an expanded 211 system might keep people out of homeless shelters during the pandemic (and afterwards), especially people who have a short-term housing crisis. He also noted the fiscal tradeoff between greater local general assistance costs, and reduced staffing costs as 211 services take over General Assistance (GA) intake processes.

As he envisioned it, 211 could provide a higher level of specialized professional counseling and GA referrals for people experiencing housing instability, increasing their access to resources, and reducing their need for shelter services.

He outlined three potential program designs: MRC municipalities could pay for this 211 expansion themselves for their own communities only; United Way Greater Portland could fund the expansion through Thrive 2027 for any number of communities; or MRC could find funding for a countywide expansion.

Dan Coyne, VP at United Way Greater Portland, thanked Councilor Chong for his ideas. He noted that 211 is not now configured as a general assistance intake system, rather it is a quick referral system to connect people with expertise in other places.

Members noted that each municipality already has a GA intake system, as required by law, and some level of aligning existing procedures would be needed.

However, members were enthusiastic about the goal of a unified GA intake system for the entire county that was able to improve support and outcomes for people facing housing instability and to reduce or eliminate short stays (3 days or fewer) in homeless shelters.

Jim Gailey noted that Cumberland County is in the process of redeploying rental assistance CARES Act funding in light of new federal rental assistance resources arriving in Maine and indicated that he would review whether those funds might be used for this proposal.

Dan Coyne said he would be happy to talk to one of the existing 211 service providers (The Opportunity Alliance) to get their help evaluating the costs and adjustments needed to move in the direction the Councilor outlined.

Members also noted that the changes envisioned will require reorienting the public and the service community to a new GA intake process. Getting the word out to everyone will be critical to any reform and will need to be included in cost assessments.

**Next Steps:** Jim Gailey will evaluate County funding. Dan Coyne will speak with the Opportunity Alliance and check back with Jim Gaily about available resources and costs. MRC will place this item on a future agenda when it is ready for further action.

## **6. Racial Equity**

GPCOG Director of Community Engagement Zoe Miller and Special Projects Coordinator Tori Pelletier briefed members on progress to date around GPCOG efforts to support local action addressing racial equity.

GPCOG participated in the MLK Day events, hosting a webinar (that included some MRC members) focused on local municipal progress toward local action against racial inequality. This work built on GPCOG webinars in the fall of 2020 that brought national expertise to local leaders as they dealt with the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent calls for racial justice.

Today GPCOG is developing additional local resources for the continuing work around racial equity. Currently GPCOG is envisioning virtual monthly 'conversations' about local implementation, creating a peer-to-peer network of exchanges, a community of practice.

Also, GPCOG is crafting a readiness assessment for municipalities with expert consultants to enable every community to advance its dialog on racial equity.

These efforts are supported by GPCOG members dues. However deeper work will require additional funding. GPCOG is actively seeking grants (with some success) and is also assessing the possibility of new fee-for-service offerings.

Staff asked MRC members to consider what else their communities need or want to support their work on racial equity.

Several members spoke strongly in support of GPCOG's efforts, and praised Zoe and Tori for their great work.

**Next Steps:** Members will communicate their needs for additional racial equity support from GPCOG to Zoe, Tori or Kristina.

## **7. Adjourn**

At 1: 26 pm Amy Kuhn adjourned the meeting by unanimous roll call.