



DRAFT

Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

February 14, 2023

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Pete LaFond	Falmouth
Jon Anderson	Scarborough
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Jeremey Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Kate Snyder	Portland
Danielle West	Portland
Travis Kennedy	Cumberland County
Sarah Lawrence	Office of Representative Pingree
Gail Kezer	Office of Senator King
Guest	Kate Dufour, Maine Municipal Association
For GPCOG	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Belinda Ray, Sara Mills-Knapp, Matt Panfil, Tom Bell

1. Welcome and introductions

Chair Michael Foley called the meeting to order at 12:04 pm and welcomed everyone. Attendees gave brief introductions.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the January 10, 2023 meeting

Chair Foley moved acceptance of the minutes of the January 10, 2023 MRC meeting by unanimous consent. The motion was passed without objection.

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Legislative Updates

Chris Hall provided a brief update on MRC housing efforts. Since the January MRC meeting, staff has worked with members and Senator Jill Duson on submitting legislation to address General Assistance. With Belinda Ray's help the Senator has submitted a bill that both directs state funding toward the creation of new temporary shelter housing in locations across Maine and directs Maine state government to support services to unhoused people at these new temporary shelter facilities.

Hall noted that testimony from members would be essential to advancing Senator Duson's bill. He urged members to communicate their support to their local legislators and consider testifying when the bill is scheduled for a public hearing in the future.

5. Long-term Resilience Update

Sara Mills-Knapp, GPCOG's Director of Sustainability, followed up the January MRC discussion in the wake of December storm damage with an update that focused on several long-term resilience building GPCOG initiatives in the region, including how communities can access resources, and how GPCOG is supporting regional planning for resilience.

Sara's slide deck can be [found here](#). She recapped the losses from the December 2022 storm for context, then detailed GPCOG efforts that boost coastal resilience including the Climate Ready Casco Bay grant from US National Fish & Wildlife that is funding work from Scarborough to Brunswick, and state funded Maine Won't Wait municipal climate action plans that help map climate hazards, craft vulnerability assessments, and implement adaptive action plans.

Sara shared many potential sources of federal and state funding for increased resiliency, and briefly discussed regional partnerships that are leveraging these resources. She concluded by noting that GPCOG tracks funding opportunities and shares them with members, helps members actively scope potential projects, and collects information on existing shovel ready projects to assist in positioning them for available funding. She urged members to contact her for more information.

During Q&A members noted that:

- All our Congressional offices are available to help support appropriate funding requests;
- State resources, for example DEP culvert grants, are also a valuable source of funding;
- Data on road closures due to storms would be a valuable regional resource – Sara said she would investigate collecting that data.

6. Housing Strategies Preview

At the December MRC meeting Kristina Egan presented a preview of GPCOG's draft Housing Strategies which has been revised based on member input and Executive Committee review. She presented a

revised and refined housing strategies draft that eliminated the earlier 'Housing Leadership Council' and refocused on a more 'bottom-up' structure that includes:

Three goals (subject to continuing refinement):

- **Amount** - 24,000 new homes and apartments in greater Portland by 2030
- **Accessibility** - 75% of them near jobs, schools, and services, and
- **Affordability** – Priority on middle- and low-income households

Four Strategies:

1. Identifying local housing needs. Listen to elected officials and professional staff in our member communities to find out what they need to make housing work for their community, and how (or if) we can help.

2. Advising. As needed and where wanted, GPCOG can provide a wealth of technical expertise to share with our members to help them find housing solutions, including technical land use and zoning assistance, planning support, and project analysis and development services.

3. Assessing and Sharing. GPCOG will establish a Housing Solutions Clearinghouse that includes housing data that tracks and reports on local and regional progress toward building more new homes and apartments, best practices drawn from around the state and the country, and success stories that highlight local and regional housing accomplishments, sharing what works (and what doesn't), and enabling communities to collaborate on housing initiatives.

4. Engaging and Educating. Our housing shortage has many faces, and many different aspects. To help everyone in our region understand why the expanding housing choice matters, and what they can do about it, GPCOG will tell the region's many stories about why housing choice matters, offer educational presentations upon request to help people understand how their community can shape new housing, instead of being shaped by it, and celebrate the progress that communities make toward a better housing future for all of us.

Kristina indicated that these revised strategies will be up for approval by the Executive Committee later in February.

The new approach recognizes that all housing is not created equal, and that poorly located housing can harm a community, while well-located development can enhance economic, quality of place, equity, and climate progress.

Member reactions were positive, and the following points were made and discussed:

- Westbrook is seeing delays in construction driven by rising costs and interest rates. Smaller in-fill projects are advancing faster but encountering greater local opposition.
- Scarborough is reviewing its Growth Management ordinance and could benefit from education for residents to help explain increases to growth allowances.

- Falmouth is revising its comp plan and faces a similar immediate need for resident education.
- With interest rates climbing, the region needs new incentives to make middle and low-to-moderate income housing construction economically viable. A discussion is ongoing with MaineHousing about this topic.
- Education should include visualizations and expand the public dialog beyond its current rate of growth focus to a broader understanding of the benefits of properly located density.
- Education should also debunk myths, such as all housing growth brings higher K-12 school enrollments.
- Falmouth shared a housing chart ([found here](#)) that relates median income to housing affordability by type.

Kristina asked for any objections to the strategies. There were none, and members gave a thumbs up to advancing the draft as presented.

7. Member Roundtable

Member discussions centered on the unhoused crisis:

- Ginny Wilder-Cross shared that her church has applied for MaineHousing funding to provide temporary shelter for 4 families at the church.
- Mayor Snyder and Danielle West gave an update on the situation in Portland, where shelter options are maxed out and every night presents the possibility of children sleeping in the street, despite heroic work being done by City staff. In 2019 400 unhoused people were in Portland – today that number is over 900, with more arriving daily.
- The Mayor stressed that temporary shelter spaces are desperately needed, immediately, and asked everyone to look again at any possible options.
- Several members discussed the regulatory barriers to using spaces for shelter, but also expressed their willingness to find ways to help.

8. Adjourn

Mayor Foley adjourned the meeting by acclamation at 1:32 pm.