

GPCOG Executive Committee

MINUTES February 15, 2022

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Sandy Carder	Gray
Jarrod Maxfield	Windham
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Mark Dion	Portland
John Hawley	Naples
Speaker of the House Ryan Fecteau	
Kristina Egan, Tony Plante, Chris Hall, Vincent Edwards, Belinda Ray, Tom Bell	GPCOG Staff

Welcome

Sandy Carder opened the meeting and welcomed Speaker Fecteau.

Public Comment

George Rheault noted his opposition to the Front Street development, which is proposed for a brownfields grant in agenda item #7. He said that development will not create new square footage and will not restore the number of units. He said that the City of Portland is underbuilding housing and the region is failing, as a whole, to produce what's needed.

Executive Committee Vacancy

Matt moved to appoint John Hawley to the GPCOG Executive Committee. Sue seconded. The roll was called, and all were in favor. Sandy welcomed John aboard, and John joined the group as a voting panelist.

Conversation with Speaker Fecteau on Housing

Kristina thanked the Speaker for his work to expand housing choices for Mainers. She noted that our members understand the housing crisis and the important role municipalities play in being part of the solution. GPCOG is in support of the state setting a goal for housing production, asking municipalities to help meet that goal, and providing technical assistance and meaningful incentives to enable municipalities to change zoning to allow for more housing.

The Speaker presented a slide deck that shared his experience of growing up in a low-income development in Saco, explained the high transportation costs associated with sprawl development, and noted that Maine needs 1000 new units of affordable housing to meet demand. Maine is falling far short of this need, only producing 25% of that number. The Speaker walked the group through the housing and zoning Commission's nine recommendations.

Kate thanked the Speaker for his work and noted her concerns that new housing will be used for short-term rentals. The Speaker said that the legislation will seek to address the concern by requiring Accessory Dwelling Units to be rented for over 30 days. He noted that municipalities can enact local ordinances and the challenge of developing a statewide solution to regulate these rentals.

Nat cautioned that Accessory Dwelling Units are usually spoken about as if the unit is for relatives. There is a need to ensure non-discrimination and that communities cannot restrict who can live in one of these units.

Jarrold said that Windham is doing great work in identifying priority areas for density and he is concerned mandates would undermine this progress. He noted that fast growing towns need growth caps to protect schools.

Matt congratulated the Speaker and the legislature for tackling the housing challenge. He noted that there is an enforcement challenge with short term rentals.

The Speaker noted that some of the concerns discussed today will be addressed in the bill. In thanking the Speaker, the group urged the Speaker to focus on carrots and to minimize sticks.

Acceptance of 1/18/22 Minutes

The 1/18/22 meeting minutes were moved and seconded. A roll call was conducted. All were in favor.

Executive Director's Report

Kristina reported on her trip to Washington, DC for the National Conference of Regions, noting the excellent information that was provided by national associations and Biden Administration officials about federal resources through the American Rescue Plan and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. She noted that GPCOG will host a Coffee with COG to share more information with members. She thanked Freeport, Yarmouth, North Yarmouth, Cumberland, and Brunswick for forming a cohort for a proposal to qualify these municipalities for climate resilience project funding. Kristina announced that GPCOG and our sister agency in York County, the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission, will co-host a webinar for municipalities on how cities and towns can get ready for and encourage electric vehicles.

Brownfields Grant

Tony described the Front Street development being built by the Portland Housing Authority. The Authority's requested \$200,000 in brownfields grant funds from GPCOG to help clean up the site. If this grant is approved, GPCOG will still have \$800,000 in funds to lend for brownfields clean-up. Up to half of GPCOG's brownfields remediation funding can be used for grants. The remainder must be used for loans.

Nat moved approval of \$200,000 in grant funding for the Authority's project. Mark seconded.

Resettlement of Asylum Seekers

Mark Dion provided recent data [\[insert link\]](#) on the number of people experiencing homelessness, including asylum seekers, in temporary shelter in the municipalities of Portland, South Portland, Old Orchard Beach, Freeport and Westbrook. On the night before this meeting, this was 1,197 people. About one-third of the people are residents of Portland, one-third from other places in Maine and one-third from out of state. Mark compared this number of people to the number in Boston. Boston is ten times Portland's size, but is hosting approximately the same number of people (1151).

Mark explained the City's requests to the state and to the federal government. Of immediate importance is supporting the coordination of resettlement services and ensuring federal reimbursement for General Assistance costs.

Kristina explained the scope of work that GPCOG has proposed to the City and the Metro Region Coalition. This includes supporting advocacy to the state to adopt a regional and statewide approach to homelessness and to coordinate and support resettlement.

This group agreed that GPCOG should advocate for state funding and state coordination for asylum seeker resettlement. The group agreed that GPCOG should approach municipalities outside of the Metro Region Coalition to engage them in conversations about housing solutions and locations for asylum seekers.

Future of Loan Program

This item was postponed to a future meeting.

Strategic Plan Update

Nat suggested that if GPCOG extends the existing strategic plan, the Executive Committee should add some amending comment to acknowledge the broader portfolio of work that GPCOG is engaged in, and adjustments in GPCOG's direction. Matt suggested extending the current strategic plan for two years. The group was in agreement, and staff were directed to bring back a draft statement to adopt when the Executive Committee takes action on extending the Strategic Plan.

Sue moved adjournment of the meeting. Matt seconded. All were in favor and the meeting ended at 1:40 p.m.