

GPCOG Executive Committee

MINUTES February 28, 2023

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Jarrold Maxfield	Windham
John Hawley	Naples
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Krista Chappell	Gray
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Mark Dion	Portland

Welcome

Due to a winter storm, the meeting was remote. Jarrold opened the meeting on Zoom.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Acceptance of 1/17/23 Minutes

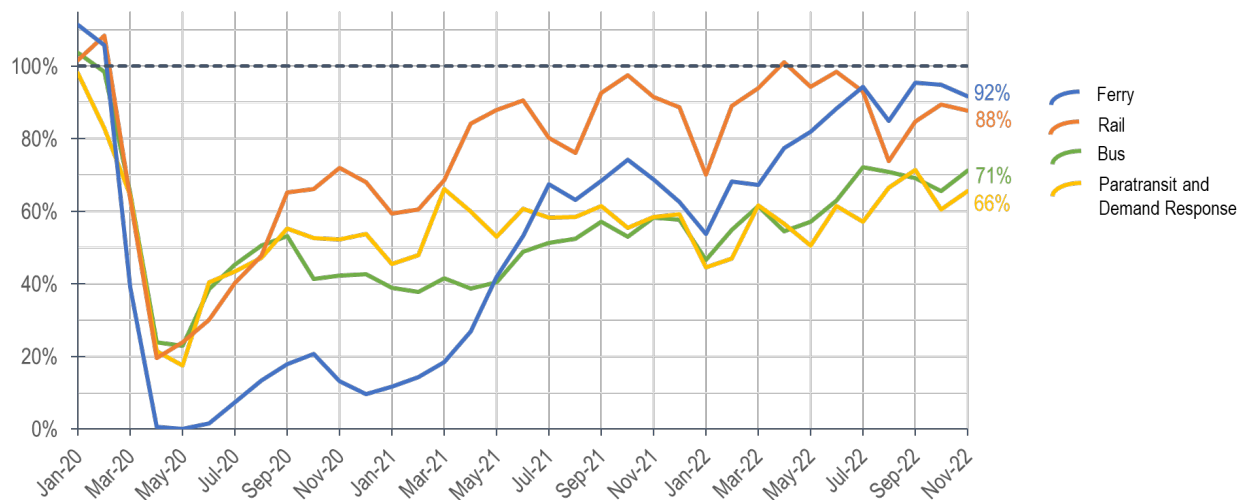
John moved approval of the January 17 meeting minutes. Nat seconded. Nat noted that the year date on the draft minutes is 2003 and should be changed to 2023. A roll call to accept the minutes as amended was conducted. All were in favor.

Spotlight: Ridership Recovery

Andrew Clark, GPCOG's Transit Program Manager, described pre-pandemic transit system ridership, post-pandemic ridership recovery for the region and by mode, and steps the region is taking to help rebuild ridership.

Referring to the slide deck found [here](#), Andrew discussed how ridership plummeted in March 2020. CARES federal relief funds enabled agencies to restore service levels to about 80% of pre-pandemic levels, but today ridership continues to lag behind service levels, particularly for our bus agencies. Systemwide, bus ridership ranges between 60% and 80% of pre-pandemic levels. The ferry rebounded quickly, with summer numbers exceeding baseline numbers. The rail has been slower to recover, but is looking good now. For our bus services, there is a need for targeted investments to increase ridership, serving new people and markets. Nat thanked Andrew for a helpful summary of a tremendous amount of work.

Staff caught an error in the slide deck and are providing correct ridership recovery levels as part of these minutes. See graph below:



Executive Director’s Report

John Hawley said that the recent convening of Naples, Bridgton, Casco, and Cumberland County leaders was an impactful meeting. The towns share similar issues and are on a path to having GPCOG help. The group asked GPCOG to reconvene them in the fall. Josh reported that GPCOG has raised more funding that was anticipated in the FY23 budget. Emily Ham, GPCOG’s new Community Engagement Manager introduced herself to the group.

Regional Strategy to Expand Housing Choices

Kristina recapped last month’s feedback on the draft housing strategy, noting that the group wanted a more bottom-up approach through a clearinghouse and focused more on meeting the needs of individual cities and towns. The group emphasized that municipalities can’t stop growth; we can only shape it.

Kate said the strategy is good and asked whether GPCOG has the resources to implement it. Kristina said, no – the strategy will require GPCOG to raise resources. Krista appreciated the emphasis on guiding housing to good locations, which will help combat sprawl. Nat said that the revamp of the strategy was

very responsive to last month's feedback.

He noted that ensuring long-term affordability is a challenge, and municipalities don't have the capacity to manage covenants and other tracking of units or tenants. He suggested GPCOG explore whether there is a regional mechanism to help municipalities address this issue. Kate agreed with Nat and noted that South Portland is experiencing an explosion of short-term rentals. She said it is critical to ensure new housing is serving those who need it, not second home owners. Information from other regions could be helpful, and it would also be good to know what's happening locally in Maine and is working (or not working). Mark built on Nat's point and suggested cooperative housing is a good model to control costs and build equity for people. Kristina said that staff would look to address this issue of best practices, models and tools that can ensure affordability over time.

The group reaffirmed that we need more analysis and data from a trusted, third party group, like GPCOG. Examples of needed data include: average income of people moving into new housing; impact of new housing on taxes; and models that will help control costs.

Jarrod said that LD2003 is flawed in that it's just encouraging more volume of housing places that already have housing. More rural communities can benefit from housing growth. He emphasized that we have to work together as a region because Portland and South Portland cannot solve the housing shortage on their own. More housing should go to the northern part of the state. Kate expressed concern that developers will be making too much profit.

Nat moved endorsement of the proposal as presented. Krista seconded. A roll call was conducted and all were in favor.

Revolving Loan Committee Appointment

Nat moved to appoint Demetria Pellegrino to GPCOG's Revolving Loan Committee. John seconded. A roll call was conducted and all were in favor.

Scoping the Strategic Plan

The group provided guidance on how to focus the scoping effort for the next strategic plan. Themes include:

- Focus even more on our traditional role of planning, working to link transportation and land-use to make a big impact in this area
- Obligation to work on climate and sustainability
- Help the region collectively commit to social equity and racial inclusion, understanding this is part of our regional identity
- Pursue more collective action and regional solutions. While GPCOG may not implement all the solutions, facilitate municipalities learning from each other and lifting one another up. Examples include EMS/ fire service, back-office HR support, sharing staff during this workforce shortage. Do more convenings of towns that can work on issues together.
- Municipalities are struggling with daily operations due to staff constraints. GPCOG can be the expanded capacity that municipalities need to get the work done.

Other Business

Jarrold said that he would be emailing a survey to collect input on Kristina's annual performance in preparation for her annual review.

Nat moved adjournment, and the group agreed. The meeting adjourned at 1:37 p.m.