



DRAFT

Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

March 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
Kate Snyder	Portland
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Ephrem Paraschak	Gorham
Kevin Jensen	Gorham
Kate Simson	Office of Senator Collins
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Tom Bell, Julia Dubovsky

1. Welcome and introductions

Amy Kuhn called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm and welcomed everyone.

2. Acceptance of the February 9, 2021 meeting minutes

Misha Pride moved acceptance of the minutes from the February 9, 2021 MRC meeting, seconded by Virginia Wilder-Cross. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

3. Public Comment.

Ken Capron asked about the composition of different GPCOG committees and was referred to the website.

4. Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Planning.

At the February Metro Regional Coalition meeting MRC members voted to request the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) to expand the availability of TOD planning throughout the region. PACTS has that request before them and will be considering it soon.

Because additional TOD planning may become available in our region, Kristina Egan provided members with an overview of what TOD planning is, and how it has been used by MRC members to further their own land use and transit efforts.

Kristina used a slide deck during her presentation which is attached separately to these minutes. Please refer to the slides for additional detail about TOD definitions, history in our region, process, and key considerations.

Egan focused on how a municipality can think about TOD planning for their own community. She began by emphasizing that each community is different, and each planning project faces unique circumstances. No two TOD plans are the same, and there is no 'recipe' that each TOD must follow.

However, she noted that all successful TOD's do have common characteristics, including an evaluation process that includes assessing:

- Density of development
- Diversity of uses
- Distance to Transit
- Demand management in the planning area
- Design amenities in the planning area

These evaluation steps are further detailed in the slides.

Egan concluded by observing that final TOD plans are a starting point, not a conclusion. They provide a community with the visioning framework needed to ensure a robust public engagement process, and to shape the built environment in whatever ways meet community needs and expectations.

TOD planning gives a municipal council or select board the opportunity to think proactively about housing, transit, economic growth, and green space. In the end it's up to every Council to decide if a TOD plan would be valuable to their community.

5. 2020 MRC Housing Choice Progress Report

MRC's FY 21 Workplan included publishing a report on expanded housing choices based on the individual progress reports of MRC member communities.

GPCOG ResilienceCorps member Juliana Dubovsky has written our first annual progress report on regional housing choice which is attached separately to these minutes.

Chris Hall and Juliana presented the report. Hall made the following points:

- Before the pandemic MRC prioritized closing the housing affordability gap in our region. MRC set a regional goal of building 10% more housing units that low and moderate income households could afford so that those families could live and work inside our region.
- Then pandemic hit, but the housing market didn't stop growing and changing.
- If today's report has a headline it's this: As a region we're making some progress, but more needs to be done to meet the MRC goal.
- With the support of Jeff Levine's work, together with this report and the implementation of Transit Tomorrow, MRC communities can keep moving toward the goal.

Juliana discussed the report and its contents, making these points:

- Report structure. The report quantifies the yearly growth of new housing development. Figure 3 on page 6 shows individual community numbers. Keep in mind that not all MRC communities were able to submit information for this report.
- Market realities. The report reflects that regional housing development is not keeping up with demand, so more housing units for low and moderate income households are still needed.
- Next Steps. The report was written we identified a need for more information on local building data. We also want to incorporate new US Census data coming out this summer into our baseline calculations. And we'd like to track some of the policy innovations that are happening in the region as they play out in the market.

During Q&A members had a rich conversation that touched on many points and individual community perspectives, including:

Westbrook. Jerre Bryant shared that there's been progress in Westbrook supporting greater housing density in parts of the City, especially the expansion of rentals at prices that low and moderate income households can afford. Use of the term 'housing choice' has resonated better with voters. The Council has had success steering the multi-unit housing market toward acceptable parts of the City. There's also been a noticeable dynamic involving older residents moving from single family houses to rental units, freeing the houses for purchase by middle

income families. This has added units to the market by building rental units, not single family houses.

South Portland. Misha Pride reported that the South Portland Council has elevated housing to a high priority and has taken a number of steps to address housing choice and homelessness. Housing developments have been advancing without undue pushback. A [recent report](#) from Councilor Henderson and Assistant City Manager Joshua Reny documents homelessness challenges in the community, and suggests a number of steps for the Council to consider. New housing pressures may arise from the upcoming revaluation process.

Portland. Kate Snyder echoed concerns about revaluation in Portland where the Council is working to educate residents and property owners about the revaluation process and its implications, which may include negative impacts on housing choices and affordability in some areas of the City.

Cape Elizabeth. Jeremy Gabrielson and Matt Sturgis discussed the proposed large housing development that is being shaped by developers in discussions with the community and the Council. There are many community concerns about the proposed development, including questions about impacts and the process.

Scarborough. Kate Simson, wearing her Scarborough resident's hat, noted that Manager Tom Hall and the Council are doing a great job managing The Downs project, which includes significant housing.

Falmouth. Amy Kuhn and Nathan Poore shared that Falmouth is at the start of a community discussion about the Town's vision for a revised comprehensive plan. A well regarded national firm is assisting the Council and making good progress working with the community to understand and include all viewpoints.

Chris Hall closed this agenda item with a reminder that GPCOG stands ready to support all our member communities as they continue to work to expand housing choices for their residents.

6. Advocacy Update

Members were briefed on GPCOG's support for [LD 609](#), Resolve, To Establish a Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions, Speaker Fecteau's bill to address zoning impacts on housing choice. The bill is identical to one that GPCOG supported last year. The public hearing for LD 609 is set for March 22nd – for more information use the link above.

Members focused discussion on the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Kate Simson gave members a brief overview based on yet-to-be finalized details.

Members focused on the amount of state and local aid that the bill will provide, as well as the permitted uses of the federal funds. Members were cautious awaiting final language and analysis of the bill, expected in the coming days.

Members also discussed possible Maine state bonding proposals. They noted that voters may be increasingly reluctant to vote to take on more state debt when the federal government is driving extraordinary amounts of money into the state. As a result, there was caution about engaging specific state bond proposals at this time.

7. Other Updates

Jim Gailey shared that the County Commissioners will be setting up a workshop discussion next month on homelessness and possible regional solutions. More information will be available soon.

8. Adjourn

At 1: 21 pm Amy Kuhn adjourned the meeting by unanimous roll call.