



## DRAFT

# Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

April 13, 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
Jon Jennings	Portland
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
<b>Guest:</b>	Greg Payne, Avesta Housing and Maine Affordable Housing Coalition
<b>For GPCOG:</b>	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Vanessa Farr, Tom Bell, Julia Dubovsky

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Amy Kuhn called the meeting to order at 12:04 pm and welcomed everyone.

### 2. Acceptance of the March 9, 2021 meeting minutes

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

### 3. Public Comment.

No public comment was offered.

### 4. Federal and State Housing Developments.

Greg Payne is a Development Officer at Avesta Housing, and the Director of the [Maine Affordable Housing Coalition](#), a diverse coalition of more than 135 private and public sector organizations committed to ensuring that all Mainers are adequately and affordably housed.

He updated committee members on recent federal investments in housing, rental assistance, and homelessness, along with key state house initiatives that are combining to make 2021 a hopeful year for housing advocates and communities committed to expanded housing choice. His slides are attached to these minutes.

Payne shared information about Maine's housing deficits, especially for lower income households. Housing burden – the percentage of income used to pay for housing that exceeds 30% of income – remains a central and growing problem for our region and the state. For extremely low income people, there are far fewer housing units available than needed.

As of 12/31/20, Maine had 25,000 households waiting for HUD section 8 housing vouchers, a demand that is met with the construction of hundreds, not thousands, of new affordable housing units each year.

Payne noted that these numbers are compelling, and increasingly housing issues are becoming a bipartisan issue that touches every corner of Maine (and the country). He praised Governor Mills' strong commitment to expanding housing supply and choice and noted that Maine House Speaker Ryan Fecteau shares the strong commitment to finding housing solutions.

At the Maine State House, Payne reviewed the provisions of [LD 609](#), *Resolve, To Establish a Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions* (which GPCOG has testified in support of). He predicted the bill would be passed and signed after it received unanimous Committee support last week.

The Commission established by the bill will provide an opportunity to advance new state policies that encourage land use regulations that expand housing choices. GPCOG will be participating in the Commission's work.

At the federal level, Payne focused on the provisions of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) that address fundamental housing changes, including the creation of additional housing, rental supports, and foreclosure prevention.

Flexible ARPA funding distributed to states and local governments can provide the capacity to invest in landmark housing policy initiatives. For example, Vermont's Governor just recently announced his intention to devote \$200 million dollars of ARPA funding to increasing the state's affordable housing supply.

Finally, Payne discussed the Biden Administration's upcoming American Jobs Plan (AJP). With its focus on infrastructure, the AJP includes \$213 billion for production, preservation, and rehabilitation of new and existing housing stock. It also includes municipal incentives to remove

local barriers to housing growth, and it may include expansion of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program.

Payne reflected on his 30 years of housing work and remarked that 2021 was one of the most hopeful years he had experienced.

In Q&A the following points were made:

- Payne urged members to act locally to remove housing barriers, and to speak with the Governor and her staff about directing ARPA funds to expanded housing programs.
- Payne saw regional homeless shelters as one possible use of ARPA funds and noted the need for financial solutions to the problem of ongoing operational costs of supported living. He suggested Medicaid might be a vehicle for funding, as other states have already requested from the federal government.
- FedHome funds were discussed as a resource for the creation of additional housing for intellectually disabled persons.
- The most concerning bottleneck for use of federal funding was seen as the need for more construction workers – otherwise the price of labor might compromise the reach of federal funding.

## **5. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Funding**

ARPA is now law and US Treasury regulations providing additional detail on the allowable local, county, and state uses of ARPA funds are expected soon. ARPA broadly categorizes the allowable uses of county and local ARPA funding as:

- Replacement of lost government revenues (limited to revenue loss due to pandemic relative to fiscal year prior to the emergency),
- Reimbursement of pandemic related government expenses (including hazard pay),
- Responses to negative economic impacts of the pandemic, and
- Necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

Additionally, and separately from county and local aid, ARPA will provide the State with at least \$100 million dollars devoted to “[carrying] out critical capital projects directly enabling work, education, and health monitoring, including remote options, in response to the public health emergency with respect to the Coronavirus Disease (COVID–19).”

Chris Hall outlined GPCOG's partnership with Maine Municipal Association on an upcoming educational webinar focused on the US Treasury regulations, once they are announced. He also discussed GPCOG's readiness to convene regional discussions of member communities to discuss their ARPA priorities and explore any areas of consultation or collaboration.

Some members emphasized that municipalities want to make their own determinations about the use of ARPA funding without completing regional conversations.

Members discussed the distribution of APRA funding in the region and noted how South Portland will receive a much smaller ARPA allocation than other cities of similar size. Members were supportive of efforts to address this inequality.

Jim Gailey shared that the Cumberland County Commissioners are waiting to receive the US Treasury regulations before they open discussions about the use of County ARPA funds.

## **6. Introducing Vanessa Farr**

Vanessa Farr joined GPCOG last week as our second Senior Planner. Vanessa shared her background and experience as a municipal planner in our region and previewed some of the expertise and energy she brings to supporting the Metro Regional Coalition's land use work.

## **7. Other Updates**

- GPCOG submitted testimony on adult use marijuana sales tax sharing bills, in support of directing sales tax revenues to host communities.
- Jim Gailey confirmed an upcoming April 26<sup>th</sup> MRC meeting with County Commissioners on homelessness. Amy Kuhn, Nathan Poore, Matt Sturgis, and Jon Jennings all volunteered to help prepare for the meeting.

## **8. Adjourn**

At 1: 28 pm Amy Kuhn adjourned the meeting by unanimous roll call.