



DRAFT

Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

June 23, 2022

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Amy Kuhn, Chair	Falmouth
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Pete LaFond	Falmouth
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Kevin Jensen	Gorham
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Susan Gillis	Cape Elizabeth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Kate Snyder	Portland
Danielle West	Portland
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Sarah Lawrence	Office of Representative Pingree
Guest presenter	
Rep. Teresa Pierce	Co-Chair, Appropriations & Financial Affairs Comm.
For GPCOG	Belinda Ray, Chris Hall, Tom Bell

1. Welcome and introductions

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

2. Acceptance of minutes from the May 10, 2022 meeting

Mike Foley moved acceptance of the minutes of the May 10, 2022 MRC meeting. Matt Sturgis seconded. A roll call vote was held. The motion passed with all voting in favor (West and Morelli abstained).

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Legislative Update – Guest Representative Teresa Pierce

Representative Pierce is the House Chair of the Legislature’s Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee. She began by noting what an extraordinary session it had been, navigating the pandemic and remote meetings, and still accomplishing a great deal.

From her perspective on the Appropriations Committee, she shared a summary of the just-concluded legislative session which included:

- A bipartisan 2-year budget, and a bipartisan supplemental budget, both demonstrating the ability of the two major parties to work together at the State House.
- Successful allocation of unexpected federal funding (ARPA), and state revenue surpluses (in both budgets). She noted that lawmakers were prudent, allocating funding to capital investments and one-time pilot programs, and staying away from long-term programmatic spending increases.
- The state budget fully funded municipal revenue sharing at 5% and general purpose aid to K-12 education at 55% - both major municipal priorities. It also included a new Education Stabilization Fund, designed to keep GPA at 55% if there is a downturn. The state’s Rainy Day Fund is also at its highest level ever, again designed to fill the gap if an unexpected budget shortfall appears.
- Other budget accomplishments included \$850 dollar checks for Maine residents, free community college for 3 years, state funding for school lunch programs for all children irrespective of status, a substantial increase to the K-12 school renovation fund, new housing funding, and \$100 million focused on PFAS contamination and remediation.

Reflecting on the state’s economic performance, Rep. Pierce said that state revenues continued to outperform expectations through this spring (March/April 2022). Corporate income tax has been a notable source of unanticipated state revenue, but personal income and sales taxes are also running strong.

She described the state procedures for forecasting state revenues and shared that lawmakers continue to take a guarded posture toward the future of state finances, given the unknown impacts of inflation and continued pandemic disruptions to the economy.

For 2023, Rep. Pierce focused on maintaining current progress and continuing to evaluate the effectiveness of the investments made by the last legislature. In response to a question about communicating with busy lawmakers, she emphasized the importance of personal relationships, and suggested email might not be the best way to reach legislators at the end of a busy session when things get hectic.

5. Asylum Housing Crisis Progress Report

Belinda Ray gave an update on progress being made toward finding innovative solutions to the region’s asylum seeker housing crisis. Belinda noted the following:

- Good discussions continue between state, regional, and local officials regarding temporary and permanent shelter solutions, and the services needed to support them.
- GPCOG will launch its Safe in Maine fund on June 30th, and several MRC members will be present. The fund will provide gap funding for building temporary shelter facilities in the region.
- Belinda plans on finalizing a white paper on shelter resources and options in the near future.

During Q&A Scott Morelli thanked Belinda for all her work, which he said was very valuable.

Scott also shared that the South Portland Council followed Portland lead and passed a resolution ([link](#)) urging greater state action on this crisis. Kate Snyder shared a copy of the Portland Resolution (copied below), and said that Biddeford had passed a similar resolution earlier in the week. Michael Foley said that he would be bringing a similar resolution before the Westbrook Council on July 11th.

If other MRC members are interested in doing something similar, Mayor Snyder said she would be happy to consult.

6. Metro Regional Coalition Priorities for 2022-23

Members had a first opportunity to look ahead to the next year's MRC workplan. [LD 2003](#) was identified as an emerging priority as every GPCOG community assesses the law and the zoning and land use changes it requires, including the development and implementation of regional housing goals.

Members also urged keeping the new format of the workplan, separating action/advocacy items from educational priorities. Staff will bring a draft workplan forward at the September MRC meeting for further discussion and finalization.

7. Next Metro Regional Coalition Chair

Amy Kuhn announced her intention to step down as MRC Chair for next year and thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve as chair for the last two and a half years. She also shared that Mayor Foley was happy to step up as the next MRC Chair. She invited others to express interest, but seeing none she invited a motion. Matt Sturgis moved to elect Michael Foley as MRC Chair, and Scott Morelli seconded the motion. A roll call was conducted, and all members voted in support of the motion (Lawrence abstaining).

8. Metro Regional Coalition schedule for 2022-2023

Chris Hall offered members an opportunity to discuss changing the standing MRC meeting date which is currently the second Tuesday of the month from September through June from noon to 1:30 pm. Members were happy to keep the same schedule. Hall noted that the June meeting always conflicts with Election Day, and he would make an adjustment to avoid the conflict.

9. COVID-19 Roundtable

No updates.

10. Adjourn

At 1:02 pm Nathan Poore moved to adjourn, seconded by Mike Foley. A roll call vote was held, and all voted in favor of the motion.

Resolve 14-21/22

Passage: 9-0 on 6/6/2022

Effective 6/16/2022

KATE SNYDER (MAYOR)
ANNA TREVORROW (1)
VICTORIA L. PELLETIER (2)
TAE Y. CHONG (3)
ANDREW ZARRO (4)

CITY OF PORTLAND IN THE CITY COUNCIL

MARK DION (5)
APRIL D. FOURNIER(A/L)
PIOUS ALI (A/L)
ROBERTO RODRÍGUEZ (A/L)

RESOLUTION CALLING ON THE STATE TO ESTABLISH A HOMELESSNESS MANAGEMENT TASK FORCE

WHEREAS, the number of individuals and families seeking Emergency Shelter in Portland and in Maine has increased dramatically since the Summer of 2020 and has reached unprecedented levels; and

WHEREAS, the City of Portland is currently providing emergency shelter for approximately 1,700 people, 1,200 of whom are Asylum Seekers; and

WHEREAS, Asylum Seekers continue to arrive on a daily basis in Portland and the State of Maine; and

WHEREAS, Asylum Seekers enter the United States legally through a process established by the federal government, but have no federal resources following them in order to assist with their entry into the United States; and

WHEREAS, federal law limits the ability of newly arrived Asylum Seekers to work for at least 365 days; and

WHEREAS, legal principles relating to preemption prohibit states or local governments from enacting laws that would allow Asylum Seekers to work any sooner than federal law allows; and

WHEREAS, despite local restrictions on work authorizations, the State of Maine has made General Assistance and other public benefits available for Asylum Seekers “pursuing a lawful process,” for immigration relief; and

WHEREAS, the emergency assistance required to support newly arrived Asylum Seekers includes services and supports beyond the financial benefits contemplated by State law; and

WHEREAS, in September, 2021, the City of Portland began communicating the urgent need for additional help and coordination regarding funding for, management of, and shelter locations for all people in need of emergency shelter, including Asylum Seekers; and

WHEREAS, beginning in March 2019, Covid-19 physical distancing protocols presented significant challenges in the City’s ability to provide emergency shelter in congregate settings to individuals and families experiencing homelessness; and

WHEREAS, during the height of Covid-19 infection rates, the City utilized local hotel rooms to expand its capacity to provide emergency shelter during a time when its congregate shelters were operating at reduced capacities; and

WHEREAS, City staff resources are limited both in terms of municipal funding and human resources capacity; and

WHEREAS, operating multiple emergency shelter sites, including area hotels as well as the City’s Oxford Street Shelter and Family shelter, has long exceeded available City resources and is no longer sustainable; and

WHEREAS, the ability to choose where one resides is a choice that should be left to an individual based on each individual or family’s unique preferences rather than on the singular availability of food, shelter, and other basic necessities in a single municipality or state; and

WHEREAS, funding, the availability of temporary emergency shelter, and access to resettlement and permanent housing services are solutions that require coordination at every level of government, federal, state, regional and local alike; and

WHEREAS, all Maine municipalities, as well as county government, the Maine Legislature, the Governor’s office, state agencies such as Health and Human Services, Maine Emergency Management Agency, Maine State Housing, the Office of Policy Innovation and Future, Maine Department of Education, Maine Economic Development, and the Federal government must be involved in problem solving; and

WHEREAS, this problem solving should include, but not be limited to, review and revision of Maine's General Assistance law in order to address inequities and lack of clarity regarding municipal responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, 79 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with expertise in immigration services delivery and policy in Maine, also communicated a request for immediate action on May 20, 2022, and specifically agree that a state-level task force must be created to quickly identify and coordinate emergency and temporary housing and other services, identify and distribute additional state funding in support of emergency, temporary and long-term housing, ensure that resources distributed across municipalities are used effectively, and serve as a central location to gather information and data for next steps;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we, the City Council and the Mayor of the City of Portland, call on the Governor of the State of Maine to immediately establish a Task Force engaging a broad stakeholder group, including but not limited to elected and professional staff representatives from federal, state, county and municipal governments, state and local health and human services departments, emergency management teams, non-governmental organizations including those that work with immigrant clients and homeless populations, the legal community, and real estate developers and managers to review, address, and make improvements to state and local responses to homelessness by:

- 1) revising the State's General Assistance law to, among other things, either regionalize the administration of public benefits, or set a threshold minimum level of assistance that each individual municipality must provide;
- 2) establishing a State resettlement office to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness to locate emergency shelter and long-term housing;
- 3) establishing a statewide emergency shelter system that will serve individuals and communities throughout the State of Maine; and
- 4) addressing issues impacting people experiencing homelessness including, but not limited to, access to mental health services, education, workforce training, and permanent housing.