

GPCOG Executive Committee

ANNUAL RETREAT MINUTES September 5, 2023

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Krista Chappell	Gray
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth

Welcome

Krista opened the meeting and reviewed the goals for the annual retreat.

Round Robin

Executive Committee members and staff relayed the top-of-mind issues for the communities in which they live:

- Town Manager transitions
- Municipal and county workforce vacancies
- Fear about next year's municipal budgets
- Changing demographics with newer arrivals wanting more services from municipal government
- Need for additional municipal infrastructure and upgrades
- New schools needed, being voted on, and coming online
- Improving walkability and bikeability of road infrastructure
- Redevelopment and highest use of waterfront areas, particularly given sea level rise
- Flooding, particularly given climate change
- Water quality
- Dam removals
- Shortage of affordable housing

- Adjusting to LD2003
- Services and housing for asylum seekers
- Homelessness and encampments
- Revaluation
- Citizen referendum for recalls, overall polarization, and more 'cause' candidates

Acceptance of 5/23/23 Minutes

Kate moved approval of the 5/23/23 meeting minutes. Matt seconded. A roll call was conducted. All were in favor.

Brownfields Grant

Paul Johnson presented Avesta Housing's grant proposal for \$500,000 to remediate 35 Seavey Street to ready it for a 180-unit housing development. Paul noted that the contamination is expected to be light, so the staff recommendation is to develop a drawdown schedule in case all the funds are not needed. Krista asked whether there would be time within the grant period to use any unused funds for other grants, and Paul said that the grant period is sufficient to ensure we could reprogram the funding. Jerre asked whether there was a conflict if he voted on the proposal, and Kristina confirmed there was no conflict.

Nat moved to approve Avesta Housing's request for up to \$500,000 in Brownfields remediation grant funds to support the proposed affordable housing project in Westbrook located at 35 Seavey Street. Due to the limited nature of the arsenic contamination and unknown nature of VOCs contamination, staff has the authority to develop a grant agreement with several drawdown thresholds. Matt seconded. The roll was called. All were in favor.

Executive Director's Performance Goals

The group discussed the second goal of delivering more services to more communities, with Kate suggesting that GPCOG do more to quantify the amount of funding attracted to the region and the benefits each member receives. Nat said that the regional nature of the work is the value he hopes members see – GPCOG creates a rising tide for all communities by fostering collaboration within the region. He advised measuring the impact on the overall Greater Portland community. Krista noted a missing goal around supporting Maine Won't Wait's climate goals. The group agreed. Kristina will add a goal that calls on her to better integrate GPCOG's transportation and climate work to support the state's climate goals.

Strategic Plan Work Session

Kristina reviewed staff's perspective on GPCOG's performance over the past 6 years. The group then identified strengths and weaknesses of the organization and provided input into the trends and disruptions on the horizon.

Strengths:

- Financial position is strong. Funding is more diverse.

- Ability to step in and take a leadership role on emerging issues that don't have a home in every municipality (e.g. new Americans arriving in the region, housing, homelessness, climate) and to mobilize a quick response
- Ability to fill the talent gap, supplementing the staff in strapped municipal government and adding capacity through the Resilience Corps
- Regular and clear communications with municipalities that are easy to respond to
- Convening of countywide and subregional topic discussions
- Mission-driven focus, directed by members. GPCOG no longer is chasing dollars that define our work, but is chasing dollars to support the mission.
- Advocacy – This was noted as a challenge (see below) but it was also noted that GPCOG does a pretty good job in aligning its advocacy with member positions

Weaknesses:

- Advocacy – Is GPCOG finding the common ground between all members, or is it out of alignment sometimes? Is it worth the money? Many rural towns don't support the legislation advanced by the cities.
- Diversity of members – Is the region too diverse or does GPCOG have too many members to serve everyone? Do urban areas get less than rural towns?
- Unclear who to contact on staff – It's hard to know the appropriate person to contact on a given issue
- Current data – Are the Community Profiles up to date?
- More member contact – regular communications, outside of budget season, is needed with elected bodies
- So many meetings! This isn't a weakness of COG operations, but rather a general weakness of all COG's members who are 'meeting'ed to death'.

Trends and Disruptions:

There was general agreement that the region faces the challenges outlined in the presented document. On climate, the group clarified that the challenge isn't just about resilience, but also to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For at-risk people, if the economy goes in a bad direction, there will be even more at-risk people in our region. If there is a lot of in-migration, our road, housing, and broadband infrastructure, which is old, is not prepared to handle growth. The group saw a void in the public understanding of how local government functions, and no good way to teach or educate people. This impacts zoning as well as the willingness to serve in local government.

GPCOG's role:

The group advised that as GPCOG updates its strategic plan, the agency should focus on what it can really have an impact on. It should be consistent, competent, and present. It should continue to do the things that matter. Two possible new lines of work emerged for consideration:

- Helping fill municipal capacity needs, including training volunteers to staff municipal committees and/or a Fellows program, like the Resilience Corps, to train the next generation for key jobs
- Providing civics education to residents, through schools or to the more general population on how local government works and how to engage productively and civilly

Nat moved adjournment. Kate seconded. All were in favor and the meeting ended at 2:00 p.m.