

Attachment A

GPCOG Executive Committee

MINUTES

September 21, 2021

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Justin Poirier	Chebeague Island
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Sandy Carder	Gray
Jarrod Maxfield	Windham
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Kristina Egan, Tony Plante, Chris Hall, Vincent Edwards, Andrew Butcher	GPCOG Staff

Welcome

Sandy Carder, President, opened the meeting, which was held via Zoom.

Acceptance of 7/22/21 and 8/24/21 Minutes

Nat moved acceptance of the 7/22/21 and 8/24/21 minutes. Matt seconded. The roll was called and all were in favor.

Public Comment

Ken Capron requested a copy of the most recent audit report and management letter. He added that he received a request from staff on information on MicroRail. Ken stated that he cannot provide information that is proprietary but is willing to give a presentation on MicroRail.

George Rheault questioned the reasoning behind changing the job title of the Development Director to the Director of Strategic Partnerships. Additionally, he questioned the fairness of this title change on the applicants for the Development Director position and the hiring of the successful candidate.

Executive Director Report

Kristina Egan provided the Executive Director's report. Staff has been focusing on the "Operate with Excellence" strategy of the three strategic priorities this summer. GPCOG has grown with the addition of the Resilience Corps and the handling of more federal funds. GPCOG's "plumbing and wiring" has been strained. She and Tony Plante are working on the contacts management system, file storage and migration to the cloud, and team-based products.

Over the summer, PACTS has made several allocations of transportation funds, including collector roads, municipal partnership initiative funds, and CARES funding for transit. Additionally, PACTS complex projects went through a selection process. There were not enough funds available to fund all the projects.

Transit Together, which is the follow-up initiative to Transit Tomorrow, looks at the seven transit providers, routes, and ways to make transit more customer focused. Additionally, GPCOG will be issuing an RFP for the Rapid Transit corridor. This will investigate providing faster transit service between Portland, Westbrook, and Gorham. Smaller studies, such as the South Portland Waterfront, TOD Saco/Biddeford Mill District, Sebago sidewalks, and Falmouth watershed study, are coming to an end.

GPCOG is finishing a pilot project with the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. The work has been done with Bridgton and Windham to look at the resilience issues of both towns. There is \$28,000 that both towns can access to take steps to addressing those issues. The priority project will be looking at ordinances and capital investments programs and how resilience criteria can be implemented into those policies.

The Connectivity Authority has been set up and will be handling hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding for Broadband. Andrew Butcher was instrumental in shaping on the Authority. Additionally, he has raised over \$100,000 in philanthropic funds for broadband work with another \$200,000 coming from Connect Maine to deploy boosters to help do community planning for broadband.

Finally, our inaugural class of 14 resilience corps will be departing mid-October. GPCOG will be welcoming a new class in November, which staff is actively recruiting new talent. There will be fewer internal fellows and more external placements in municipalities and non-profits.

Spotlight: What's Your Transportation Question?

Rick Harbison and Zoe Miller presented the spotlight, which focused on Connect 2045. The key features of a long-range transportation plan are a long-term regional vision (20+ years), considers all users and modes, identifies needs, identifies policies, and projects that address those needs, and meet federal requirements (updating the plans every 5 years).

The GPCOG team is the project team and is responsible for managing the project and developing the plan. The advisory committee is a body of 30 people, which comprises of municipalities staff and

representatives from community groups, non-profits, large employers, Federal Highway and Maine DOT. Their role is to provide guidance and input to the project team and help with promotion and outreach. The plan's content involves public and stakeholder engagement, mapping and data analysis, recent plans and studies, and federal requirements. There will be a 30-day public review and comment period. Additionally, there will be a period of federal review and the PACTS Policy committee will vote to adopt the plan.

Connect 2045 will take 1.5 years to develop, which is standard for a plan of this scale.

The public engagement campaign centered around a "question campaign". Staff went out to over ten locations (outdoors) and asked different people of different backgrounds, ages, races, and ethnicities about the future of transportation. The prompt was, "What's your question about getting around Greater Portland in the future?"

In July – September staff went to different events, such as community concert in Standish, farmer markets, the Prosperity Maine block party, and other events. Additionally, staff made it possible for the public to ask their question over social media or text their question. As a result, over 400 questions were made by public. There are plans for a Youth Poster Contest when schools are up and running. In September – October, staff will hold vision labs, which are public workshops to categorize and prioritize questions. Advisory committee workshops will also be held to draft the vision and goals of this campaign.

Vision labs will be held from September 27th – October 4th. Themes will be presented on the "Idea" wall and individuals will share their ideas.

Executive Committee members got to experience the virtual idea wall through the Mentimeter app, where their responses were generated in a word cloud and a virtual board.

Kate Lewis commented that significant time was spent on Transit Tomorrow, and she was surprised that there was a new plan launched for transit. She asked what will be different about Connect 2045 and merit equal investment. Kristina Egan answered that Transit Tomorrow is the foundational component of Connect 2045. She explained that this is the long-range transportation plan, which includes all modes (bike, ped, roads, and transit), is required to be updated every four years by the federal government.

Rick Harbison added that part of their long-range transportation plan is reviewing recent studies and Transit Tomorrow is a comprehensive transit study that will enveloped within the plan.

Kate also asked if staff would hold individual meetings with local transit committees. Rick answered that there will be time set aside to hold those meetings and are currently working on coordinating them.

Maximizing the Impact and Value of Federal Funds

Matt Sturgis stated that the investments that are made in the region should be treated the same way towns/cities approach bonding. He adds that those investments have longer lives when funds are put in projects that benefit the region 30-40 years down the line. Matt explained that there should be the best benefit for the longest period to ensure a maximization of investment.

Kristina Egan expressed that one GPCOG's priorities is to assist the region make the most of the federal resources to maximize its long-term benefits. Over the summer, staff met with officers to discuss Broadband and other opportunities available from federal funds flowing into the region. CARES funding and ARPA funding have already come in, with the infrastructure bill and large budget proposal on the

horizon. These funds can greatly benefit the region, but GPCOG needs direction to figure out its role in bring municipalities together and potentially aggregating resources across different levels of the government.

Tony Plante recapped the meeting on ARPA, that had about 30 elected and appointed officials present. There were 3 main questions that were posed to the municipalities...

1. What has your jurisdiction done to put ARPA funds to use? How did you arrive at those decisions?
2. How are the balance of the funds being prioritized?
3. What do you hope to accomplish?

As a result of these questions, staff found that municipalities were using the funds to cover revenue losses due to the pandemic, providing premium pay to essential worker, and expenses related to responding to the pandemic (ex: retrofits to buildings). Individual communities addressed issues such as water/sewer infrastructure. For many of the communities, the funds received were not enough to put a dent into the price tag of an infrastructure project. Additionally, homelessness, housing choice and affordability, and mental health and substance abuse are all issues that demand regional solutions. There was a recognition that these funds represent generational opportunity to make a difference in the region. Smaller communities stated that they did not have the administrative capacity to handle the funds. Staff sees an opportunity to be of service to its members, like the Cable Franchise Renewal project. There are many needs that call for regional collaboration and it is important to ensure that these funds are used to its greatest benefit.

Sandy Carder stated that the rural communities have a short list of what qualifies for its funding. She mentioned that using the funds on social programs, like mental health, would be a drain on their resources and infrastructure is a better use of the funds. Sandy added that these funds are essentially a bond and because of that it is important to ensure that they are being maximized for the long-term. However, it does not preclude them from considering premium pay or other items that would be easy to administer.

Matthew Sturgis asked if there is the ability to expand the capacity of broadband to improve the quality of service, while still working on covering un- and under-served parts of the region. Andrew Butcher answered that the Greater Portland region is served more than other regions but there are shortcomings and gaps in that service. He also added that the state has redefined its level of service, which redefines many areas in the region as underserved. Andrew explained that the economy and way of life are evolving fast and to entice economic development in the region, digital infrastructure must be considered. Staff has taken the directive from the Executive Committee and facilitated targeted conversations around regional readiness regarding broadband. Kristina Egan added that there are still unserved and underserved areas in Cumberland County that still need to be addressed. GPCOG's role with the Maine Broadband Coalition may change and GPCOG's work in the Lakes Region has resulted in a group of six or seven communities working to become investment ready.

Sandy Carder stated that individual towns have individual activity. The speed test mapping is good but in some areas are not very detailed. Andrew Butcher replied that the mapping is a great tool when related to demand aggregation. He mentioned the need to look at the collective needs as a region because it will inform the decisions and investments from the private sector to help spark economic development.

Staff is beginning to find areas where broadband would be the greatest benefit, areas of inadequate service, and partnerships that should be pursued. He believes that GPCOG's role is articulating the goals of broadband in the region.

Kristina Egan mentioned GPCOG's work in the Lakes region in broadband, including providing Resilience Corps staffing, mapping assistance, and consulting assistance. She mentioned that the Executive Committee should think about how these funds are best used to address other regional concerns such as water, sewer, homelessness, and housing choice.

Nat Tupper stated that the recommendation for the funds that his municipality has received is mostly going toward wastewater treatment facility to keep people and rivers health and the area financial solvent. Additionally, part of the recommendation was for premium pay and a regional broadband improvement effort. Internet providers have offered to fiber to only a third of the area. He asked how he can use the opportunity to leverage an investment and can he use the money with others to get utilities to allow pole attachments. In addition, he asked if he could construct pole attachments using capital funds and lease to internet providers. He states he is waiting on an organization, like GPCOG, to figure out a solution for community. Kristina replied that staff has been tentative to propose anything due to these funds being municipal funds. If the Executive Committee wants staff to put together a menu of regional investment options, including for broadband, that is something GPCOG can do. She added that staff is always open to think of the way GPCOG can serve the municipalities when making these local and regional decisions.

Carmen Lone spoke about the need in her community and other small communities for administrative guidance on what funds are available, what it can be used for, how it can be leveraged, and timeline for certain projects.

Kate Lewis stated that if these funds are generational opportunity, then the size of the population in the next 5-20 years should be considered when funding infrastructure projects. Climate migration is forcing people to Maine, which has led to housing issues and demand on systems

Jarrod Maxfield said the role of GPCOG should be to organize and advocate. He stated that broadband differs in service from town to town and sometimes within areas of a town. However, he noted that changes in broadband to some of these rural areas will probably come from the federal and state level. Technology is changing and perhaps fiber is not that the only way individuals will be able to access the internet. Jarrod agreed the focus should be on generational issues such as wastewater and water quality.

Kristina Egan suggested a focused conversation on Broadband in the next meeting. Staff will put together a menu for leveraging investments in different areas. Sandy Carder stated that the administrative assistance for communities to request, administer, and compliance for funds should be included. Kristina replied by stating that like the Cable Franchise project, consultants can be hired temporarily to support communities in administering the funds.

FY22 Workplan

Kristina Egan briefly presented the FY22 Workplan and opened the floor for questions.

Kate Lewis asked if the FY22 Workplan needed adoption or if it is simply a guide of the work of GPCOG. Kristina stated that the workplan is an internal document that does not need to be adopted by the

Executive Committee. The leadership team reviews the workplan quarterly to track progress on goals for the fiscal year. Kate wanted clarification on Item 3.3.7 in the workplan, which is Transportation Request for Proposals (RFP). She notes that she is wary of not going through an RFP process each time because some creative proposal can be overlooked in an “umbrella” contract. Kristina answered by stating that GPCOG often gets small requests from members to do projects. Procurement is done for all bigger projects. However, she notes to be more responsive in a quicker time frame, this process was adopted to increase the turnaround of smaller projects. Kate mentions that diversity of ideas is important and should not be overlooked, even for smaller projects.

Matt Sturgis believed that the FY22 Workplan is both aspirational and operational and was happy to see that some items from the previous fiscal year have been accomplished. He added, like Kate, he thought it was a good idea to have a roster of contractors. However, he understood that staff should have the ability to move quickly on smaller projects, if necessary.

Nat Tupper expressed how impressed he was with the FY22 Workplan and how well it explained the breadth of work that GPCOG does. Kristina added that a directive from the Executive Committee is to be focused and as a result, there were items that were rejected from the workplan.

Sandy Carder liked the layout of the FY22 Workplan and appreciated the balance of detail. She added that this workplan was a great way to view everything that is going on at GPCOG.

Kristina Egan mentioned that next month is the Executive Committee retreat. However, the Committee will be meeting by Zoom, so it will be a shorter retreat than in past years. She will be working with Sandy on some retreat items for next month’s meeting. She stated that one of the items that they will be working on for the meeting is the 2-year strategic plan update. Additionally, Broadband is another topic that will be on table for next month’s meeting.

Nat moved adjournment; Matt seconded. The meeting ended at 1:30 PM.