

Attachment A

GPCOG Executive Committee

**MINUTES
October 19, 2021**

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Mark Dion	Portland
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Justin Poirier	Chebeague Island
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Sandy Carder	Gray
Jarrod Maxfield	Windham
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Cathy Conlow (guest)	Maine Municipal Association
Kristina Egan, Tony Plante, Chris Hall, Vincent Edwards, Andrew Butcher, Vanessa Farr	GPCOG Staff

Welcome

Sandy Carder, President, called the Zoom meeting to order at 12:03 pm.

Acceptance of 9/21/21 Minutes

Mark Dion moved acceptance of 9/21/21 minutes. The motion was seconded by Sandy Carder. The roll was called, and all were in favor.

Public Comment

None received.

Executive Director Report

Kristina Egan said that Maine has received CARES and ARPA funds, which includes transportation and broadband funding. The infrastructure bill and President Biden's Build Back Better budget have an uncertain path forward, but could prove hugely beneficial. Funding from these sources could help address the chronic transportation maintenance backlog, and could provide a boost to our workforce with funding for childcare and early education. GPCOG staff remain focused on how we can help the region maximize the funds we've already received, and prepare for the funds we may receive.

Internally, GPCOG is bidding farewell to our inaugural group of Resilience Corps Fellows, and will welcome our second year Fellows in November.

Recently GPCOG has identified multiple projects and funding opportunities for the agency to pursue. Staff is preparing climate, housing, and economic development grants. Some of these funding opportunities would provide short-term support, and others would provide more sustainable funding for the agency.

Because of the growing demands on the agency, and the need to focus as much as possible within the region, staff has set the table for a discussion today about transitioning out of our statewide work, particularly broadband.

Spotlight: A conversation with Cathy Conlow

Cathy is the new Executive Director of the Maine Municipal Association. She shared that municipalities had a good year in the legislature, winning more K-12 education funding and seeing revenue sharing restoring.

Cathy said there are two issues that are coming down the road, and would benefit from regional agency participation. The first is in implementing Maine's climate action plan and the second is to support regional broadband planning.

She described MMA's work with the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions ("zoning commission"), and said that her members recognize that the state wants and needs to do something to address the rising costs of housing all across the state. MMA is working to ensure municipalities take meaningful action, while preserving choice and flexibility in land use.

Kate noted that some of the changes the zoning commission is considering include making it easier to build accessory dwelling units. She said that not all places are good places for more housing, and that we should be cautious about turning our communities into too many Airbnb's. Matt agreed that short-term rentals are a big challenge because they are taking units off the market.

Cathy said that some feel that zoning is used as a tool to prevent affordable housing, and an MMA working group is looking at these issues, recognizing that municipalities will face some new requirements, and that being at the table is important in shaping the decisions.

Housing and Zoning Policy

Chris Hall provided background on how GPCOG has participated in the MMA working group which Cathy described during the spotlight agenda item. He also shared the elements of GPCOG's testimony, which are in line with the MMA working group's input. Sandy asked about the timeline for the zoning commission's work, and Chris said that the commission is expected to complete its work in the next four weeks. Legislation that includes the commission's recommendations will be introduced in the short legislative session, which runs from January to April. If legislation passes, it will become effective in June.

Nat noted that GPCOG's proposed \$200,000 investment in technical assistance in each region is a bargain. At the heart of the housing issue is community attitudes and values, as well as the perceived and/or real impacts on traffic and schools. Another challenge is to ensure that new housing is not transformed into short-term rentals. Providing flexibility to municipalities is key. Sandy noted that Gray doesn't want to increase its village traffic levels, and to welcome more housing, Gray needs transit.

Chris said that staff will stay the course, participating in the MMA working group, tracking the commission's work, advocating for regional technical assistance and for flexible approaches that recognize the differing needs of cities and towns.

Menu of Regional Investment Options for ARPA Funds

At the direction of the GPCOG Executive Committee, members were surveyed to understand how cities and towns in our region may want to work together to invest in regional solutions with American Rescue Plan Act funds. The survey closes this coming Friday, and polls GPCOG members on their interest in ARPA compliance support, housing, homelessness, broadband, and water and sewer.

Mark described Portland's struggle to find housing for the newest asylum seeker arrivals. There are about five hundred people that have recently arrived, fleeing political and climate disasters. He invited other communities to join with Portland in a regional approach to homelessness, and said the City needs help.

Kate shared that South Portland is housing a lot of people, mostly in hotels. The volume of public safety and other service calls to the sites is staggering. Housing and services are strained.

Matt added that there are different populations that need different safety net services. The challenges demand state and federal help, and cannot be solved by the host city or the region.

Future Direction of GPCOG's Broadband Work

Andrew Butcher, GPCOG's Director of Resilience and Innovation and the Director of the Maine Broadband Coalition, announced that he will be leaving GPCOG to become the new Director of the Maine Connectivity Authority. He was nominated by Governor Mills earlier today.

Sandy and others congratulated Andrew, saying that he's the exact right person for this important job.

Kristina explained that GPCOG's broadband portfolio has two parts. The first is regional organizing, which is mostly in the Lakes region communities. The second is serving as the host and providing staff capacity for the Maine Broadband Coalition. With Andrew's departure, this is a good moment to help the Coalition establish itself as an independent entity.

Nat said that GPCOG's statewide work through the Coalition has been a slam dunk victory. It's now best for GPCOG to focus on concrete things we can do within the region, and play a support role in state level advocacy. Yarmouth may be interested in potentially investing some ARPA funds in regional broadband efforts.



Sandy agreed with the change in direction – providing a runway for the Coalition to become independent and continuing GPCOG’s commitment to regional broadband organizing within our geography of membership.

Nat moved adjournment; Justin seconded. The meeting ended at 1:32 PM.