



Emergency Shelter Regional Response Agenda

January 10, 2020

Noon to 1:30 pm

GPCOG, 970 Baxter Boulevard, Portland

1. Welcome and introductions (10 minutes)

We will take time to introduce ourselves and share our roles in our community.

2. Review meeting purposes (10 minutes)

The Metro Regional Coalition's (MRC) December 10th, 2019 meeting included a detailed discussion of the region's capacity to respond to situations where emergency shelter capacity in Portland is exceeded. The MRC looked at last summer's Expo crisis and discussed how the region might plan for a similar problem in the future. The meeting minutes are attached for further background (Attachment A).

The Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency (CCEMA) was identified as a key partner in any discussion of regional emergency shelter planning. Additionally, CCEMA is already working on expanding local emergency shelter capacity.

Today's meeting is intended to bring together municipal and county partners to discuss how we can best design and implement supplementary emergency shelter capacity at the local level and use that expanded local capacity as the basis for a mutual aid agreement throughout the region.

3. Presentation on expanding local emergency shelter capacity (30 minutes)

CCEMA's Director Joe Chappell and Deputy Director Emily Kaster will discuss the need for additional local emergency shelter capacity, as well as the planning process for expanding shelter capacity.

4. Discussion of member resource capacity and resource gaps (30 minutes)

Members will have the opportunity to react to Joe and Emily's presentation, and to discuss their own existing community resources, along with resource gaps.

Discussion will be focused on what is needed to advance local emergency shelter capacity and how that expanded capacity can serve as a foundation for regional mutual aid when Portland, or any other municipality in the region, faces an emergency shelter crisis.

5. Next steps (10 minutes)

Staff will summarize the discussion and detail the next steps needed to advance local emergency shelter capacity, as well as the creation of a regional mutual aid agreement.

6. Adjourn

Attachment A



Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

December 10, 2019

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Virginia Wilder Cross	Gorham
Jeremy Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Amy Kuhn	Falmouth
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Belinda Ray	Portland
Ephrem Paraschak	Gorham
John Cloutier	Scarborough
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Claude Rwaganje	Westbrook
Tae Chong	Portland
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan Chris Hall

1. Welcome and introductions

Belinda Ray called the meeting to order at 12:09 pm and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

2. Election of a new Chair for the MRC

With the departure of Bill Donovan from the MRC a new Chair is needed. Belinda Ray opened the floor to nominations. Belinda Ray nominated Amy Kuhn to serve as Chair of the MRC for 2019-2020. Matt Sturgis seconded the motion.

There being no further nominations Belinda Ray closed nominations. After discussion members voted unanimously to approve the motion and Amy Kuhn took over as Chair of the meeting.

3. Acceptance of minutes from November 12, 2019 meeting

Jeremy Gabrielson moved to accept the minutes of the November 12, 2019 Metro Regional Coalition meeting. Belinda Ray seconded the motion. Members voted unanimously in support of the motion.

4. Regional support for emergency shelter

Chris Hall provided background for this agenda item: The FY 20 MRC work plan sets a goal of more equitably distributing the responsibility for caring for the homeless across municipalities in our region. Among other deliverables, the plan calls for development of a coordinated regional plan for responding to the next homeless shelter crisis that builds upon and improves the 2019 Expo Crisis response.

In September 2019 the MRC established a working group to develop a regional plan. Unfortunately, scheduling conflicts prevented the group from meeting. Recently new arrivals in Portland have strained the emergency shelter system again, setting the stage for this agenda item.

Kristina Egan facilitated discussion. She began by asking members to reflect on the summer Expo crisis and identify what worked. Members said:

- Rapid action by Portland officials to engage the region through the existing emergency response system was very effective.
- MRC response through Bill Donovan and Tom Hall was immediate. That response made it clear we faced a regional problem not confined to Portland.
- The Governor's decision to unlock General Assistance for reimbursement of municipal GA expenses was critical, enabling a much broader municipal response.
- The centrality of the Expo made focusing support services easier.
- The collaboration of non-profit organizations was notably successful.
- GPCOG's work as a convener of the regional community was essential, especially through the host homes program.
- Timely and effective communications allowed municipalities to make informed decisions about how to engage.
- The crisis called out the community's welcoming, compassionate character.

Next Kristina asked why these positives were possible. Members responded:

- The issue was framed early and often by strong stakeholder support for helping alleviate the crisis. The public focus was kept on compassion, not fiscal impacts or other negative factors.
- Good press work kept the story positive.

- The crisis was time limited. It did not continue into the fall and closing the Expo provided closure and resolution.
- The faith-based community provided crucial housing and support services.

Kristina asked members what could be improved? Responses included:

- Where public debate focused on who pays for what there was negativity.
- Where volunteers were helping to find housing, they were often asked to also be cultural brokers. Those two functions would have been better separated.
- Some community resources – like Catholic Charities – were underutilized.
- An inventory of available options for overflow emergency shelter needs should be assembled and kept current.
- The process of vetting host home families and matching them with families in need of temporary housing was difficult and under-resourced. Having a more planned out process in advance with a central support organization would be a better approach.
- Privacy concerns created bottlenecks for the vetting and placement process.
- Interpreters were in short supply, or unavailable.
- It was hard for municipal Councils, and others, to understand exactly how best to make financial contributions to support the relief work. More direction, or a pre-established fund, would be welcome.
- Better defining the role of surrounding communities will help structure public support and engagement in the future. To that end members discussed the pros and cons of a regional support fund.

Regular annual contributions by municipalities to a regional fund for a broadly defined purpose (such as events causing the need for emergency shelter where state and federal money is unavailable) were supported by several members. However other members noted that competing funds would be a negative, so care was urged.

Kristina asked members what would an agreement among municipalities in the region to support Portland look like? And what could communities offer as support – money, staff, shelter spaces?

Member discussion outlined a menu of options, including:

- Money in a fund, as discussed above.
- Shelter beds located in public buildings

- Staffing to help support overflow shelter locations.
- Transportation assets to move people in shelters. School busses were recommended as an unused resource.

Members saw significant barriers in the creation of alternative shelter spaces. For instance, most warming centers are schools which are not suitable for emergency shelter operations. Transportation was also identified as a challenge outside Portland.

Lists of landlords, building managers and developers were suggested – organizations in the region are likely sources. Churches were also identified as potential shelter providers.

Members discussed how new staff might be needed and noted that Brunswick did hire a new cultural broker in response to the arrival of new Americans in their community.

Members noted that General Assistance guidelines are not uniformly implemented in every municipality – something that would help – and that many municipalities do not have a GA budget enough to support the arrival of many newcomers in need of GA.

Finally, Kristina asked members what would a contract or written policy of mutual support look like? Members replied:

- Build on the existing regional emergency management plan and add an appendix for emergency shelter that is detailed and specific about what resources are available and how they will be shared.
- Work with Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency to utilize their expertise in planning and logistics.

Chris Hall will follow up with Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency to further discuss this approach.

Before the conversation ended Claude Rwaganje made everyone aware of the current overflow shelter problems in Portland and asked members to consider how they might help. Chris Hall followed up with an email to all MRC members.

5. Joint resolution update

Kristina Egan reported that the Scarborough Housing Alliance will be reviewing the MRC joint resolution on expanding regional housing choices and evaluating it for the Town. She shared that the Resolution will be part of GPCOG's State of the Region event on January 23rd, 2020 and asked members to save the date (5 to 7 pm at Ocean Gateway in Portland).

6. Adjourn

Amy Kuhn adjourned the meeting at 1:37 pm.