



Metro Regional Coalition Agenda

May 9, 2023

Noon to 1:30 pm

Hybrid meeting – In Person at GPCOG and Via ZOOM Conferencing

If attending via Zoom, please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85676857436>

Webinar ID: 856 7685 7436, or call 646.558.8656

This meeting will be conducted in person and remotely in accordance with the requirements of GPCOG Executive Committee policy, [LD 1772, PL 2022 Ch. 666](#), and [1 MRSA Chapter 13, Subchapter 1](#).

Participants are reminded that this meeting will be recorded and posted on the GPCOG website.

1. Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)

Chair Michael Foley will call the meeting to order, remind attendees that the meeting is being recorded, and ask attendees to briefly introduce themselves.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the April 11, 2023 meeting (Attachment A)

The minutes from the April 11, 2023 MRC meeting are found below as Attachment A. A motion for acceptance is in order.

3. Public Comment (3 minutes per person)

Residents of the region are invited to share up to 3 minutes of comment on any topic, including items on the agenda.

4. Legislative Updates (45 minutes)

Staff report: Chris Hall will update members on several legislative issues related to housing and General Assistance reform, including opportunities for members to participate in important legislative hearings and debates in the final weeks of the legislative session.

In particular, we will discuss the many proposals to reform General Assistance, including the Maine Municipal Associations two bills ([LD 1426](#) and [LD 1732](#)) (both scheduled for hearing on 5/5/23), as well as Senator Duson's [LD 1721](#) proposing a statewide strategy for building and supporting permanent shelter facilities across the state (not yet scheduled for a hearing).

We will also discuss [LD 1739](#), *An Act to Extend Development District Tax Increment Financing Districts* sponsored by our own Amy Kuhn. The printed bill allows a tax increment financing district to be extended an additional 30 years if the district uses at least 51% of state tax increment revenue for affordable housing or transit-oriented development.

We'll take some time to do a roundtable discussion of TIFs in our region and explore the current use of transit TIFs and affordable housing TIFs. We'll also begin a discussion of how the [Priority Centers](#) identified in [Connect 2045](#) (PACTS' long-range transportation plan) can be the focus of more intensive use of transit TIFs in support of well-located growth.

Action: Information and discussion regarding legislative priorities and testimony on legislative priorities. Agreement on taking a position on LD 1739. Exploration of expanded use of transit TIFs in Priority Centers.

5. Regional Prosperity Plan Updates (15 minutes) (Attachments B and C)

Staff report. Every 5 years GPCOG, serving as the U.S. Economic Development Administration's Economic Development District for Greater Portland, produces a framework for regional economic growth and resilience. A draft report for 2023-2028 is being finalized for publication at the end of June (see Attachments C and D). Chris Hall will briefly review the report's content and the directions it sets for further collaborative work in the region.

Action: Information and discussion about the regional innovation, inclusion, and resiliency.

6. MRC Member Roundtable (15 minutes)

Staff report: This standing agenda item gives MRC members a chance to share updates with each other, and to discuss common issues outside the regular meeting agenda.

7. Adjourn

Upcoming Meetings (all Noon to 1:30 pm both in person and remote via Zoom)

June 20, 2023

Attachment A



DRAFT Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

April 11, 2023

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Jeremey Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Danielle West	Portland
Travis Kennedy	Cumberland County
Sarah Lawrence	Office of Representative Pingree
Gail Kezer	Office of Senator King
Guests	Fatima Saidi, Jacqueline Mugwaneza, and Ruben Torres (Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition)
For GPCOG	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Belinda Ray, Matt Panfil, Tom Bell

1. Welcome and introductions

Chair Michael Foley called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm and welcomed everyone. Attendees gave brief introductions.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the February 14, 2023 meeting

Jerre Bryant moved acceptance of the minutes of the February 14, 2023 MRC meeting. Virginia Wilder-Cross seconded the motion. A roll call was conducted, and the motion passed unanimously among all members voting.

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Legislative Updates

Chris Hall provided a brief legislative update. Staff has continued to work Senator Jill Duson on her legislation to address General Assistance, now printed as [LD 1721](#). The Senator has submitted a bill that both directs state funding toward the creation of new temporary shelter housing in locations across Maine and directs Maine state government to support services to unhoused people at these new temporary shelter facilities.

The [Special Select Committee on Housing](#) is expected to schedule a public hearing soon on the bill, and members were encouraged to testify in support, and to share the bill with their networks. Hall noted that testimony from members would be essential to advancing Senator Duson's bill.

5. Temporary Shelter Updates

Belinda Ray updated members on recent progress on two projects – Safe in Maine and the Blueberry Road Shelter, both seeking to provide additional shelter space for unhoused people.

Municipal contributions to Safe in Maine have now come from 4 communities totaling \$130,000, and the work to advance this long-term permanent transitional housing initiative continues to move forward.

Blueberry Road is a new project, led by Kevin Bunker of the Developers Collaborative, which looks to convert existing commercial space in Portland to temporary shelter in time to provide an alternative when the Expo is no longer available later this year. The Center for Regional Prosperity, GPCOG's affiliated 501c3, will act as the fiscal agent for the project, managing \$4 million dollars awarded by MaineHousing to finance the project.

6. Roundtable discussion with asylum community leaders

Jacqueline "Jacky" Mugwaneza (an immigrant from Rwanda), Fatima Saidi (an immigrant from Afghanistan), and Ruben Torres, all working at the Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition, joined us to discuss the asylum system in the U.S.

Members had an opportunity to learn first-hand about asylum seekers and their experiences from people who work with asylum seekers. In the presentations from our guests, and in follow-up Q&A the following points were made:

- Asylum seekers are not refugees – asylum is a separate system with narrowly defined requirements.
- Often asylum seekers come to our community after years or decades of travel and difficulties – seeking asylum is never a straight line.

- There are many pathways to the U.S., and to Maine. People come here with unique experiences.
- Many asylum seekers do not understand the U.S. asylum system, which is extremely complex and filled with barriers even for well-informed people.
- U.S. law prohibits asylum seekers from applying for a work permit until 6 months after their arrival. This creates extreme hardship and places heavy burdens on host communities and frustrates people who want to work to support themselves and their families. Even after 6 months, obtaining a work permit can be a long, difficult process.
- U.S. asylum laws are unique in the world and have become increasingly complex and difficult to navigate. Success rates are low, and everyone needs help to understand what the law requires. Often required paperwork is unavailable from someone's home country.
- Many U.S. employers don't understand the rules around work permits, and that becomes a barrier to self-sufficiency too.
- For unsuccessful asylum seekers, deportation orders can become a state of permanent limbo since many home countries refuse to accept U.S. deportation law. That can trap an asylum seeker in the U.S. without legal status.

Mayor Foley and the members all thanked our guests for the information they shared.

7. Adjourn

Mayor Foley adjourned the meeting by acclamation at 1:22 pm.

Attachment B

Summary Version

Greater Portland's Regional Prosperity Plan 2023-2028

Summary version

Introduction

This document, called *Greater Portland's Regional Prosperity Plan 2023-2028*, is the Greater Portland Council of Government's (GPCOG) 5-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) document, produced as part of GPCOG's work serving as the Economic Development District (EDD) for the Greater Portland region. This Plan reflects broad and varied input from the public, the region's public and private economic development interests, GPCOG members, and the contributions of many public, private, and nonprofit partners.

In plain terms, this Plan is a tool for everyone in our region to use as they work toward greater prosperity, a more inclusive economy, and more durable economic resilience in the face of an ever-changing future. It is a framework for progress, not a silver bullet. To succeed, it challenges us all to collaborate, coordinate, and cooperate to make our region stronger.

It's a collaborative framework because most of the challenges and opportunities facing our region require greater coordination and combined effort from all corners of our community.

It's a framework for resilience because our region needs to be better prepared to work together to understand our economic vulnerabilities, to assess our economic risks, to prepare to avoid those risks where possible, and to recover quickly from those risks when they strike.

Over the next 5 years, GPCOG will work with our entire region to implement this Plan, either acting as the lead agency for some key initiatives, or as the coordinating backbone organization when other partners are taking the lead. In all cases, GPCOG's role as convenor and catalyst will support implementation of this Plan and GPCOG will be responsible for the evaluation of its progress.

Ultimately, this Plan will be successful if it serves as a valuable tool for economic decision making in our region, encouraging diverse partners to work more closely together toward shared economic growth, greater inclusion and equity, and more effective economic resilience.

We hope you find this Plan useful as a way to connect to our region's network of economic development efforts and to the resources and priorities that define our region's future. We also hope it serves as a gateway for you to add your own contributions to the future of our economy.

Three Strategic Priorities - *Where are we going?*

Our community has articulated three strategic priorities that this Plan reflects as their vision for every part of our region, and for everyone in it:

- A. **An economy that welcomes innovation and the future, and by doing so, supports our existing employers and their workers, as well as new jobs and investment.**
- B. **An economy that is intentionally more equitable and seeks to actively promote the inclusion of previously excluded people.**
- C. **An economy that is more resilient through everyone's continuing commitment to prepare for economic disruptions, and for recovery from disruption.**

Since recovering from structural weakness in the 1970's, our region's economy has grown and proven durable over several decades. But it has also been slow to change, resistant to including everyone, and unprepared to plan for the unexpected. And not every part of our region has been as fortunate as the most prosperous parts of our region.

Our three strategic priorities of innovation, inclusion, and resilience work together to build on our strengths and address our weaknesses. They extend over the next 5 years, and into the decade ahead, and they are immediately actionable. Most importantly, they reinforce each other and support each of the six key initiatives outlined below.

For example, a more inclusive economy not only expands equity, but it also increases available, qualified workforce, adds entrepreneurial energy to emerging economic growth, and demonstrates the application of resilience and development strategies in the context of newly empowered people in our regional economy.

In the current post-pandemic environment, change is upon us, sometimes in unexpected ways. As we prepared this Plan, we heard loud and clear that our opportunities depend on embracing change together, and on building a more collaborative, inclusive, and nimble approach to today's economy, and tomorrow's.

So how do we turn these strategic priorities into reality?

Six Key Initiatives – *How do we get there?*

This part of our Plan explicitly describes how our region will work together to achieve our strategic priorities through six specific, measurable key initiatives which include a wide range of activities and partners and envision long term commitment to outcomes that extend over the next 5 years and beyond.

1. Expanding the economy through innovation.

This initiative aims to bring jobs and investment to the region, focusing on emerging technologies coupled with the region's natural resources, traditional industries, and existing economic sectors that can benefit from accelerated adoption of emerging technology. Working through GPCOG's Regional Prosperity Advisory Committee:

Action Steps:

- A. Convene the region’s economic development actors with emerging technology leaders and assess growth opportunities for new and established employers.
- B. Establish targets for job growth and investment based on assessment. Track progress annually.
- C. Successfully identify and pursue state and federal funding support for private sector investments and job creation in targeted economic sectors.
- D. Promote existing and establish new technology education offerings for existing employers to increase uptake of technology and innovation in traditional economic sectors.

2. Expanding the region’s workforce.

This initiative responds to the priority needs of our region’s economy today – workers and housing. The two deficits are linked, and this initiative addresses both with action steps that focus on worker attraction, worker housing, worker education and skills training, and tracking results.

Action Steps:

- A. Connect the existing Live & Work in Maine programming with regional partners working through GPCOG staff and the GPCOG Regional Prosperity Advisory Committee. Establish an existing worker attraction baseline for the region and measure effectiveness of linking regional economic development networks with existing programming.
- B. Advance existing GPCOG Housing Strategy (see Appendix A) through coordination with regional economic networks, emphasizing identification of well-located development opportunities and leveraging all resources and technical support to accelerate housing construction. Also coordinate and leverage existing federal housing programs with new regional initiatives and coordinate infrastructure expansion with housing growth wherever possible (see Initiative #4).
- C. Extend connections to existing workforce training programs into underserved or unconnected economic sectors through regional economic development networks, working intentionally to promote economic inclusion (see Initiative #3).
- D. Advance a regional Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program for communities and sectors without an active BRE and use it to support employee attraction and retention.

3. Expanding economic inclusion.

This initiative focuses on bringing previously excluded people into full participation in our region’s economy. It addresses historic discrimination, and leverages opportunities to expand jobs, investments, and entrepreneurial energy that is already present in our region.

Action Steps:

- A. Create educational programming for excluded populations that closes gaps in their understanding of and access to traditional economic development resources, including lending and small business technical assistance. Working with partners with lived experience, and

partner organizations serving excluded populations, GPCOG staff will provide backbone support to this ongoing effort.

- B. Create new defined pathways for excluded people to start or expand their own businesses, and to gain employment opportunities in existing or newly emerging economic sectors. Working with existing small business technical support providers, higher education, and state agencies, GPCOG's staff will provide convening and organizational support, including expanded Disadvantaged Business Enterprises programming at GPCOG.
- C. Expand existing economic networks to include previously excluded people and utilize their inclusion to better understand economic resilience from their perspectives. GPCOG will act as regional network convenor and catalyst for regular focused discussions on inclusion. GPCOG will initiate programming to give excluded people information about, access to, and voice within regional economic networks.

4. Expanding Critical Infrastructure.

This initiative identifies and closes gaps in our region's existing infrastructure needed to support growth, leveraging, and coordinating new investments to best reduce those deficits in ways that advance our strategic priorities. Innovation-driven growth, an expanded workforce, and a more inclusive economy all rely on efficient, effective investments in infrastructure which enable well-located development that supports every community, and everyone, in our region.

Action Steps:

- A. Map deficits in sewer, water, transportation, and broadband infrastructure needed to support development and existing employers throughout our region.
- B. Assemble and maintain a list of shovel-ready and shovel-worthy infrastructure investments.
- C. Align new infrastructure investments with other infrastructure needs, and with existing and emerging economic development opportunities including workforce housing investments.

5. Expanding development tools and collaboration.

Our region, and state, have not deployed economic development policies as much as we could. Existing tools could be more flexible and are not fully understood in all quarters. New tools could be added to local, regional, county, and state development strategies. Additionally, existing local, regional, county, state, and federal programs and funding opportunities are not as well integrated and leveraged as they could be.

This initiative seeks to expand understanding and use of the existing economic development toolkit, identify opportunities to expand the toolkit and make it more flexible, and increase collaborative use of existing and future development policies and programs.

Action Steps:

- A. Educate the region's economic development community about existing programs and policies.

- B. Identify best practices in programs and policies that would expand flexibility of existing tools or meet a defined deficit or gap in existing local, regional, or state economic development policies and practices.
- C. Provide an ongoing forum and clearinghouse for coordinating and leveraging existing local, regional, county, state, and federal development programs and funding.

6. Expanding regional resilience.

This initiative advances regional resiliency in two ways. First, it seeks to expand resilience planning by creating a diverse forum for ongoing evaluation and discussion of foreseeable economic disruptions so that future disruptions can be avoided or mitigated. Second, it seeks to advance emergency preparedness by convening and supporting ongoing emergency disaster readiness.

Action Steps:

- A. Convene public, nonprofit, and private sector representatives to establish a permanent roundtable for the purpose of assessing regional economic risks, evaluating regional response strategies for potential disruptions, and communicating their findings to the entire region.
- B. Convene an annual emergency preparedness effort, based on existing work by partners, designed to expand their reach to all employers and employees in the region, thereby improving their emergency response readiness.

Conclusion – *What happens next?*

This Plan is the combination of many voices and many perspectives. By examining our strengths and weaknesses, by looking at the opportunities and threats facing our region, and by distilling all of that into strategic priorities advanced through key initiatives with specific action steps this Plan creates a framework for action that the entire community can engage.

And that is the intent of the exercise – “*Where are we going?*” and “*How do we get there?*” aren’t rhetorical questions. They are a pathway forward in an uncertain world, designed to be explored together.

With the adoption of this Plan by GPCOG, in July of 2023 we will begin convening and catalyzing – the things GPCOG does best – around the priorities and initiatives outlined above. We will track community engagement and successes and monitor the need for updates and changes in direction.

Most importantly we will be cheerleaders for working together and pressing on, even if the going gets tough.

In 5 years, we hope and expect this Plan will have contributed energy and vision to your efforts to make our region’s economy more innovation-driven and prosperous, more inclusive and equitable, and more resilient to the next disruption, no matter which direction it comes from.

If so, that success will be yours, and ours, together. We look forward to the journey.

Attachment C

Full Version

Greater Portland's Regional Prosperity Plan 2023-2028

Summary version

I. Introduction

This document, called *Greater Portland's Regional Prosperity Plan 2023-2028*, is the Greater Portland Council of Government's (GPCOG) 5-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) document, produced as part of GPCOG's work serving as the Economic Development District (EDD) for the Greater Portland region.

In plain terms, this Plan is a tool for everyone in our region to use as they work toward greater prosperity a more inclusive economy, and more durable economic resilience in the face of an ever-changing future. This plan is a framework for progress, not a silver bullet. To succeed, it challenges us all to collaborate, coordinate, and cooperate to make our region stronger.

GPCOG wears many hats, and all the agency's roles are relevant to this Plan:

- As a Council of Governments, GPCOG serves 25 member municipalities in Cumberland County, and the County itself, providing a range planning, economic development, and crisis response services.
- As staff to the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (PACTS – Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System) GPCOG serves 18 municipalities in Cumberland and York Counties, helping to program over \$30 million dollars annually in federal transportation funding.
- And as Greater Portland's EDD, appointed by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, GPCOG provides our region with a range of economic development services, from site development support to small business lending and technical assistance.

This *Regional Prosperity Plan* follows the CEDS requirements outlined by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. It also reflects broad and varied input from the public, the region's public and private economic development interests, GPCOG members, and the contributions of many public, private, and nonprofit partners.

This Plan begins by summarizing where our regional economy stands today, where it has been, and where it is headed. It looks at the foundations of our region's economy, and discusses our economic strengths and opportunities, as well as our economic threats and weaknesses.

Building on those understandings, this Plan looks ahead to define our region's strategic priorities for the next 5 years and details the key initiatives needed to turn goals into accomplishments. In addition to clearly identifying what we intend do in the next 5 years, the Plan also contains metrics to measure our progress and success.

This Plan is a framework for regional economic collaboration and resilience.

It's a collaborative framework because most of the challenges and opportunities facing our region require greater coordination and combined effort from all corners of our community.

It's a framework for resilience because our region needs to be better prepared to work together to understand our economic vulnerabilities, to assess our economic risks, to prepare to avoid those risks where possible, and to recover quickly from those risks when they strike.

Over the next 5 years, GPCOG will work with our entire region to implement this Plan, either acting as the lead agency for some key initiatives, or as the coordinating backbone organization when other partners are taking the lead. In all cases, GPCOG's role as convenor and catalyst will support implementation of this Plan and GPCOG will be responsible for the evaluation of its progress.

Working with our Regional Prosperity Advisory Committee, and sometimes with other groups of partners, GPCOG will convene the region when updates to this Plan are appropriate and will also identify opportunities to go beyond this Plan when circumstances are right to further advance our region's economic prosperity, inclusiveness, and resilience.

Ultimately, this Plan will be successful if it serves as a valuable tool for economic decision making in our region, encouraging diverse partners to work more closely together toward shared economic growth, greater inclusion and equity, and more effective economic resilience.

We hope you find this Plan useful as a way to connect to our region's network of economic development efforts and to the resources and priorities that define our region's future. We also hope it serves as a gateway for you to add your own contributions to the future of our economy.

II. Executive Summary

Our region's economy has been at the center of the state's economy for decades. It has been durable. But times are changing.

The economic environment today is different than it was before the pandemic. The next economic disruption may come from several different sources – will we be more prepared than we were for the pandemic?

And what will our economic future look like? With a critical housing shortage, an aging workforce, and legacy discrimination unresolved, we have many challenges.

This Plan suggests three strategic priorities:

- An innovation-driven economy, meaning one that embraces emerging technology for existing and new employers;
- An inclusive economy, meaning one that intentionally includes people who have been historically excluded from full economic participation; and
- A more resilient economy, meaning one that is mindful of the disruptions to come, and planful about meeting them successfully.

We propose six key initiatives to achieve these priorities. Below we address housing as an economic issue, and discrimination. We propose a more focused, collective approach to expanding critical infrastructure and attracting new workers – both essential to our economic prosperity. And we suggest gathering together to expand and improve our ability to grow the economy, and to prepare for the future.

Gathering together is the essence of this Plan. It is a framework for collective success, not a workplan for one agency or one group of people. It hopes to draw on the strengths and insight of our entire community to make things happen together that we cannot accomplish alone.

We hope this Plan inspires you to get engaged, and stay engaged, as we work together to meet an uncertain but promising future.

III. **Regional Economic Conditions** – *Where have we been?*

This section summarizes our region’s economic history and current conditions. To maintain focus on our strategic priorities and key initiatives our citations are intended to be illustrative, not comprehensive. Additional economic data can be found at our website.

Five years ago, the Greater Portland economy was strong. In 2018 our region was fully recovered from the lingering effects of the 2010-2012 recession, economic investments and employment were stable and growing, and no major economic disruptions were in sight. (1)

Two years later our region, along with the entire globe, was suffering through the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic disruption in our region was substantial (2), but thanks to extraordinary efforts in every part of our community, our region has made a fast recovery from the pandemic. (3)

Today, the post-pandemic economic landscape has shifted in significant ways. While our region continues to enjoy economic sector diversity (4) and high levels of workforce educational attainment (5), workforce availability has become a major barrier to sustaining and growing employment and investment. (6)

Regionally, housing affordability has reached crisis dimensions for low-, moderate-, and middle-income people. (7) In turn, workforce housing shortages have exacerbated the unavailability of workers. (8)

Our region’s demographics (9) have also contributed to the workforce shortage, along with the rise of remote working (10), the decline of workforce participation rates (11), and changing skillsets needed by existing and emerging employers.

Demographics in our region have been long identified as an economic weakness, but as retirement age workers leave the workforce in greater numbers, demographic impacts on the economy have become even more pronounced. (12)

With deaths exceeding births, our region has become dependent on in-migration to boost overall population. (13) And as families arrive in our region, housing demand continues to rise, pushing a cycle of scarcity and higher housing prices.

Our region continues to possess many important economic advantages. As the center of the Maine economy, Greater Portland and southern Maine provide vital economic energy to the entire state. (14)

Our region continues to host a vibrant hospitality sector, with world-class restaurants, accommodations, and amenities located in the midst of spectacular natural resources. (15)(16) And our region's start-up and entrepreneurial ecology continues to welcome and support innovation, technology, and natural resource-based economic investments. (17)

State Economist Amanda Rector summarizes the challenges facing our economy in her recent report entitled _____. In addition to her overall assessment, in our region several specific economic concerns must be noted.

The economic impacts of racism and exclusion are profound and remain unresolved. (18) As our region becomes more diverse (19) the issues of economic equity, inclusion, and remediation must be addressed for Black, Indigenous, immigrant, disabled, and other excluded segments of our community.

Our region's infrastructure is frequently deficient, especially in ways that could otherwise enable better located investments in jobs and housing. (20) Infrastructure deficits vary across our region, from urgently needed dredging to more robust transportation options, from missing sewer and water capacity to lagging broadband connectivity and access gaps in urban and rural locations. All these deficits limit growth and investment potential in many of our communities.

Climate change continues to impact our region, increasing risks of economic loss and disruption, and imposing significant costs of adaptation and mitigation on all parts of our economy. (21) Climate action highlights the need for greater economic innovation and resiliency in our region, as does our heavy reliance on fossil fuels (22)

On balance, the Greater Portland region is fortunate to possess several economic strengths that form the foundation for relative economic prosperity. However, workforce availability, housing shortages, aging demographics, unresolved racism and exclusion, and climate change all present significant challenges that demand attention and action.

In 2019 our region did not anticipate the severe disruptions that the pandemic caused. Our resilience was tested, and our resiliency was less than it could have been. As we look at where our region has been over the last five years, we can see that a more prosperous, more equitable, and more resilient region will require additional effort from all of us.

[Footnotes under development]

IV. **Foundations for the Future** – *Where are we now?*

This section outlines our region's competitive advantages and sets them side by side with the factors that can hold our region back from achieving our goals.

By identifying and understanding our strengths and opportunities, and addressing our weaknesses and threats, we have the best chance of successfully building on our economic foundation, implementing the key initiatives that flow from our analysis, and achieving the strategic priorities that most effectively meet our goals of greater prosperity, equitable inclusion, and resilience.

Strengths – *competitive advantages*

So, what are our region's most relevant strengths and opportunities? And how are they impacted by our most significant internal weaknesses and external threats?

Let's start with our most notable strengths. Based on our research and on input from our partners and the public, our region is:

- Economically diverse, with many sectors contributing to the overall regional economy.
- Well educated, with a workforce that possesses above-average levels of formal education.
- Natural resource based, with economic and recreational assets from Casco Bay to the lakes and mountains of the Sebago Lakes region.
- Welcoming to innovation, with a strong start-up and entrepreneurial ecology, supported by many higher education institutions, nonprofit research organizations, and state and local business programs.
- Hospitality oriented, with a world-class restaurant and tourism economy that continues to rebound from the pandemic.
- An attractive destination with low crime rates, good schools, great amenities, and a high quality of life, all combining to make our region an attractive relocation destination.
- Increasingly diverse, as people from across the nation and across the globe arrive in our region to find their economic future.

Each of these strengths points toward opportunities for economic growth, increased equity, and greater resiliency. As you'll see, this Plan builds its strategic priorities and key initiatives on the foundation of these strengths.

Limitations – *barriers to success*

But before we explore our opportunities, let's look at our region's most notable internal weaknesses and external threats, again based on our research and input from our partners and the public.

These factors are most likely to hold us back from achieving our strategic goals:

- Workforce shortages. Our region needs more well trained, available workers. Every part of our regional economy faces a shortage of workers.
- Workforce housing in our region is dramatically unavailable, leading to loss of jobs and economic opportunities because workers and employers cannot locate housing that workers can afford in proximity to their employment.
- Childcare in our region is scarce and unaffordable to too many working families, reducing labor participation rates.
- Aging demographics in our region clearly indicate a pressing need for younger workers to replace retiring workers, and to supply labor to existing and future employers.
- Racism and exclusion are unresolved barriers to full economic and social equity for Black, Indigenous, disabled, and immigrant people, and to other marginalized people in our community.

- Inflation and recession, accompanied by rising interest rates, pose a notable risk to the region's economy that may slow development and hiring, compromise supply chains, slow down construction of housing and infrastructure, and reduce export opportunities.
- Political will is too often lacking to advance disruptive but necessary policy solutions to many of the region's economic weaknesses and threats.
- Fossil fuel dependency in our region is above average, presenting an economic risk if state or federal policies raise the price of carbon-based fuels and industrial inputs, and a climate risk if these fuels continue in use unabated.
- Insufficient infrastructure, particularly in the less developed parts of our region, presents significant limitations to growth. Sewer, water, transportation, transit, and broadband infrastructure are all lacking in parts of our region.
- Underdeveloped networks. Effective resiliency and expanded equitable inclusion require robust networks of interconnected economic actors. Our region lags in creating and maintaining robust networks that promote resiliency and inclusivity.

Over the next 5 years our region must work together to understand and overcome these limitations whenever we have the power to do so, and where factors are outside our control, we must work together to compensate for, mitigate, and remediate the impacts of external disruptions.

Opportunities – *Where can we go from here?*

With our strengths and limitations in mind, let's look at our region's opportunities over the next five years. As before, the following have been identified through a broad range of inputs from staff research to partner and public engagement.

You will see that all these opportunities tie back to our region's economic journey. They build on the foundations we've identified above, and they are directly connected to the strategic priorities and key initiatives detailed in the next sections of this Plan.

You'll also see that some of our limitations are recast as opportunities. This is intentional and intended to underscore that our internal weaknesses can be turned into foundational strengths for resilient growth if we work together to do so.

1. Opportunity: Innovation driven growth.

Our region's economic diversity and openness to innovative entrepreneurs creates a foundation for adding jobs and investment in targeted economic sectors. The Roux Institute, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, our public and private higher education institutions, and our robust start-up community all serve as catalysts and supports to growing a diverse small business economy. Some sectors with particular growth potential include:

- the ocean-based economy,
- the climate action economy,
- the expansion of commercialized innovation in the technology and computer sciences sectors, and

- the delivery of the full range of innovation economics to new and established employers in the region.

Innovation will define economic opportunity for both established and emerging economic sectors. Welcoming the innovation economy, and integrating it into our region's existing economy, represents a crucial opportunity for future prosperity.

Barriers: Inadequate access to funding. Insufficient workforce with aligned innovation skills, and insufficient innovation literacy within some economic sectors.

Key partners: The Roux Institute, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, the University of Southern Maine, Southern Maine Community College, St. Joseph's College, nonprofit entrepreneurial support organizations, start-up, and scale-up funding organizations.

Resilience: Additional network development is needed to assess, mitigate, and avoid risk in the innovation economy, and to better utilize innovation to facilitate recovery from disruption.

2. Opportunity: An expanded workforce.

Our region needs more workers. Turning this weakness into an opportunity will require:

- additional workers relocating to our region,
- additional workforce education aligning workforce skills, training, and learnings with what's needed by employers, and
- additional construction of workforce housing well-located in proximity to employment opportunities.

With immediate workforce shortages and deteriorating demographics setting our timeframe for quick action, regional workforce attraction, training, and housing efforts should be scaled together to convert this weakness into a successful opportunity.

Barriers: Difficult policy choices by local and state officials. Greater regional collaboration around workforce attraction, job creation, and housing growth.

Key partners: Workforce attraction organizations including Live & Work in Maine. Workforce training agencies and institutions, including Southern Maine Community College and the Maine Community College System, other higher education entities, private sector training initiatives, and our local workforce board. Housing creation allies including the private sector development community, MaineHousing, and local planning boards and Select Boards/Councils.

Resilience: Given a highly mobile workforce, as well as the volatile housing market and its vulnerability to external threats like interest rate increases, supply chain disruptions, and the population dynamics of immigration, this opportunity requires much greater organization for understanding and preparing for disruption.

3. Opportunity: A more inclusive economy.

From every perspective our region can and should become fully inclusive of people who have been historically excluded from our economy and our society. To do so, new efforts to provide economic inclusion should:

- Education and training specifically designed for excluded employers and workers;
- Defined pathways for excluded populations to access jobs and business creation/expansion opportunities; and
- Expanded networks for excluded populations that connect them to established economic networks.

If accomplished, this opportunity can provide our region new economic energy and diversity, and can begin to correct historic wrongs. Over time, and with humility, this opportunity can strengthen our regional economy in every way.

Barriers: Racism and implicit bias. Scarce resources for necessary investments.

Key partners: People with lived experience of economic exclusion and racism. Welcoming members of existing networks.

Resilience: Assessment of economic vulnerabilities and risks from the perspective of excluded people is lacking and requires remedial work, incorporating those perspectives into our overall resilience strategies.

4. Opportunity: Expanded essential infrastructure to support growth.

Economic growth and job creation require sound, sufficient infrastructure. Both underinvestment and climate disruptions threaten the sustainability of existing infrastructure. In many parts of our region, essential sewer, water, public transportation, and broadband infrastructure is either entirely lacking, insufficiently hardened for expanding climate impacts, or insufficient to support the growth our communities desire.

However, turning these deficits into opportunity can be accomplished by:

- Mapping existing and future infrastructure deficits;
- identifying climate mitigation investment needs; and
- aligning new infrastructure investments with desired economic growth opportunities and expanded resilience.

Doing this will enable growth of well-located economic activities together with needed infrastructure expansions in all parts of our region.

Barriers: Infrastructure expansions are expensive, and funding is limited. Decision making around infrastructure investments is complex and lengthy.

Key partners: The Metropolitan Planning Organization, PACTS. Municipal, county, and state decision makers. Private sector investors and utility operators and owners (where applicable). Federal and state funding sources and regulators.

Resilience: Infrastructure administrators focus well on the security and stability of their assets, but the resilience of regional infrastructure as it relates to the economy is less well understood or monitored.

5. Opportunity: Expanded and more coordinated development tools and resources.

Our region has room to pursue three related opportunities to better support economic prosperity, equitable inclusion, and greater resilience:

- Expand the understanding and utilization of existing economic development programs and resources;
- Educate the community about the potential to expand the number and flexibility of state and local economic development programs, including tax incentives, planning resources, and related policies; and
- Increase the awareness, coordination, leveraging, and integration of existing local, county, regional, state, and federal economic development programs and funding sources.

Stronger economic development networks within the region will better enable awareness, coordination, leveraging, and integration of funding and programmatic supports, and more effective coordination will reinforce the need to expand the utilization and flexibility of existing tools, and to fill policy and development tool gaps.

Barriers: The logistics of coordination are lacking. Elected officials are not fully aligned with the need for expanded development resources.

Key partners: All local, county, regional, state, and federal economic development administrators. Elected officials with influence over resource allocation to economic development programs and policies. Private sector partners in the development space.

Resilience: This initiative will combine with the next opportunity to enhance resilience awareness, planning, and response.

6. Opportunity: A more resilient region.

As noted in Section III, our region emerged from the pandemic faster, and in better economic condition, than might have been expected. We can't count on being so lucky the next time.

We can strengthen our regional resilience through better collective understanding of economic risks and potential disruptions, and by planning today for mitigation, avoidance, and recovery before disruptions occur. To do so we can:

- Create a dedicated roundtable designed to address resilience on an ongoing basis;
- Create monitoring systems that collect data and trends to anticipate future and emerging disruptions, and
- Create communication vehicles to promote readiness for and response to disruptions throughout the region's economy.

Adopting a structured approach to economic resilience in our region will benefit everyone by avoiding some economic disruptions before they hit us, making other ones less impactful, and managing faster, more complete recovery from disruptions when necessary.

Barriers: Lack of an existing coordinating forum. Low rates of participation and sustained engagement on resilience planning. Difficulties with outreach and connection to busy employers who lack the time to implement preparedness and recovery strategies and may not have the understanding of their importance. Limited resources.

Key partners: Local, county, state, and federal emergency management agencies. All chambers of commerce and business organizations in the region. Local, county, and regional economic development partners.

Resilience: High impact opportunity to make substantial resilience gains.

V. Strategic Priorities – *Where will our vision take us?*

This Plan uses a 5-year timeframe to outline where we want to go, and how to get there. But in reality, this Plan extends well beyond 5 years into the next decade and beyond because our partners, our members, and the public have told us that they have a long-term vision that looks to accomplish more than limited outcomes.

Our community has articulated three strategic priorities that this Plan reflects as their vision for every part of our region, and for everyone in it:

- D. An economy that welcomes innovation and the future, and by doing so, supports our existing employers and their workers, as well as new jobs and investment.**
- E. An economy that is intentionally more equitable and seeks to actively promote the inclusion of previously excluded people.**
- F. An economy that is more resilient through everyone’s continuing commitment to prepare for economic disruptions, and for recovery from disruption.**

Since recovering from structural weakness in the 1970’s, our region’s economy has grown and proven durable over several decades. But it has also been slow to change, resistant to including everyone, and unprepared to plan for the unexpected. And not every part of our region has been as fortunate as the most prosperous parts of our region.

Our three strategic priorities of innovation, inclusion, and resilience work together to build on our strengths and address our weaknesses. They extend over the next 5 years, and into the decade ahead, and they are immediately actionable. Most importantly, they reinforce each other and support each of the high-value opportunities outlined above.

For example, a more inclusive economy not only expands equity, but it also increases available, qualified workforce, adds entrepreneurial energy to emerging economic growth, and demonstrates the

application of resilience and development strategies in the context of newly empowered people in our regional economy.

In the current post-pandemic environment, change is upon us, sometimes in unexpected ways. As we prepared this Plan, we heard loud and clear that our opportunities depend on embracing change together, and on building a more collaborative, inclusive, and nimble approach to today's economy, and tomorrow's.

These three strategic priorities for our region's economy reflect today's realities, and frame tomorrow's best opportunities.

So how do we turn these strategic priorities into reality?

VI. **Key Initiatives** – *How do we get there?*

This part of our Plan explicitly describes how our region will work together to achieve our strategic priorities through six specific, measurable key initiatives which include a wide range of activities and partners and envision long term commitment to outcomes that extend over the next 5 years and beyond.

Each key initiative is presented in a framework that answers several questions designed to fully articulate its parameters. Note that every key initiative contains more than one action step, many of which serve multiple purposes in support of our strategic priorities and other key initiatives.

Every key initiative description contains answers to the following questions, or, when an answer is unknown, identifies resolution of that question as an immediate action step:

- **Activities with action steps, benchmarks, and time frames** – What are we doing overall, and what specific steps will be taken? What time frames are assigned to the work, and to critical benchmarks?
- **Strategic connections and benefits** – How will this initiative advance our vision and what do we expect it to accomplish?
- **Implementing Leads and Partners** – Who's primarily responsible for doing the work needed to implement this initiative? Who else is helping implement this initiative?
- **Costs & sources** – What will it cost to implement this initiative, and who's paying for it?
- **Metrics** – How are we measuring the success of this initiative?
- **Resilience** – How will this initiative make our region more resilient?

Each key initiative is linked directly to our three strategic priorities, and aligned with our analysis of our region's strengths, barriers, and resultant opportunities which are most likely to advance our vision for a more prosperous, more equitable, and more resilient region.

Six Key Initiatives

1. **Expanding the economy through innovation.** Please refer to Section IV (1) – Opportunity: Innovation driven growth.

- Activities with action steps, benchmarks, and time frames. This initiative aims to bring jobs and investment to the region, focusing on emerging technologies coupled with the region’s natural resources, traditional industries, and existing economic sectors that can benefit from accelerated adoption of emerging technology. Working through GPCOG’s Regional Prosperity Advisory Committee:

Action Steps:

- A. Convene the region’s economic development actors with emerging technology leaders and assess growth opportunities for new and established employers.
 - B. Establish targets for job growth and investment based on assessment. Track progress annually.
 - C. Successfully identify and pursue state and federal funding support for private sector investments and job creation in targeted economic sectors.
 - D. Promote existing and establish new technology education offerings for existing employers to increase uptake of technology and innovation in traditional economic sectors.
- Timeframes & Benchmarks: Steps A and B to be completed by 7.01.24 and implementation from 7.1.24 on. Step C to be completed as opportunities are identified. Step D to be scoped by 7.1.24 and implemented on an ongoing basis as funding allows.
 - Strategic connections and benefits. Welcoming the innovation economy as a source of new jobs and investment and adapting existing business sectors to emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence directly advances our strategic priority. It also supports an inclusive economy by creating new opportunities for previously excluded people, and it creates new perspectives on resilience for the regional economy.

By successfully participating in the innovation economy, we expect to sustain economic competitiveness, expand economic opportunity, and make our region’s economy more diverse, and therefore more resilient.

- Implementing Leads and Partners. With GPCOG staff providing backbone support as convenor, we will gather partners including innovation leaders in the private, nonprofit, and educational spheres, as well as private sector employers and business community support organizations as we reach out to the established economy.
- Costs & sources. Initial costs of opportunity analysis (Step A) and job and investment goal setting (Step B) will be met with GPCOG staff and partner resources. Grant writing (Step C) will be implemented by applicants, as appropriate. Promotion of technology adoption, and workforce education, will require additional scoping and budgeting by GPCOG and partners.

- Metrics. GPCOG will track annual job creation and investments using state and federal data sources, as well as technology uptake by established employers through survey data collected through our partners' communications networks, including chambers of commerce and similar business organizations.
- Resilience. This initiative will expand the region's economic sector diversity and strengthen existing economic sectors. Both outcomes will increase the region's ability to withstand economic disruptions. The deployment of emerging technologies will also open new avenues to assessing and addressing risks of economic disruption.

2. Expanding the region's workforce. Please refer to Section IV (2) – Opportunity: An expanded workforce.

- Activities with action steps, benchmarks, and time frames. This initiative responds to the priority needs of our region's economy today – workers and housing. The two deficits are linked, and this initiative addresses both with action steps that focus on worker attraction, worker housing, worker education and skills training, and tracking results.

Action Steps:

- A. Connect the existing Live & Work in Maine programming with regional partners working through GPCOG staff and the GPCOG Regional Prosperity Advisory Committee. Establish an existing worker attraction baseline for the region and measure effectiveness of linking regional economic development networks with existing programming.
 - B. Advance existing GPCOG Housing Strategy (see Appendix A) through coordination with regional economic networks, emphasizing identification of well-located development opportunities and leveraging all resources and technical support to accelerate housing construction. Also coordinate and leverage existing federal housing programs with new regional initiatives and coordinate infrastructure expansion with housing growth wherever possible (see Initiative #4).
 - C. Extend connections to existing workforce training programs into underserved or unconnected economic sectors through regional economic development networks, working intentionally to promote economic inclusion (see Initiative #3).
 - D. Advance a regional Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program for communities and sectors without an active BRE and use it to support employee attraction and retention.
- Timeframes & Benchmarks: Steps A and B implemented and ongoing by 12.31.23. Step C scoped by 6.30.24 and implemented by 1.1.25. Step D designed and offered by 12.31.23 and deployed in 2024 and thereafter as desired.
 - Strategic connections and benefits. This initiative will help our region attract new workers, house them, and give them access to training where necessary. It builds on existing programming and

extends its reach and impact in our region. Without solving the twin shortages of workers and housing, our region will not be able to achieve expanded prosperity, inclusion, or resilience.

- Implementing Leads and Partners. GPCOG staff will facilitate step A and execute steps B and D. Step C will require active partner engagement from both the private sector and the education community, convened and catalyzed by GPCOG and its partners.
- Costs & sources. Implementing GPCOG's Housing Strategy will draw on existing municipal, state, and federal resources and programming. Establishing a BRE program will be accomplished with GPCOG resources, augmented by contracts with served communities. Extending worker attraction programming will require additional resources to be evaluated and pursued by GPCOG staff in partnership with Live & Work in Maine and other private sector partners. Expansion of workforce training programs will require state and federal funding in partnership with higher education and state agencies.
- Metrics. GPCOG staff will track regional workforce numbers, workforce housing availability and affordability, and BRE program impact metrics on an annual basis. Workforce attraction and training metrics will be developed with partners and regularly reported.
- Resilience. This initiative's success is critically important to the region's economic resilience. Without more skilled workers, and places for them to live affordably, existing employers will lose ground, and new economic growth will be compromised. In turn, opportunities for economic inclusion will be lost. Adding workforce will expand our region's ability to withstand economic shocks, expand economic diversity, and lay the foundation for a healthier, more robust economy.

3. Expanding economic inclusion. Please refer to Section IV (3) – Opportunity: A more inclusive economy.

- Activities with action steps, benchmarks, and time frames. This initiative focuses on bringing previously excluded people into full participation in our region's economy. It addresses historic discrimination, and leverages opportunities to expand jobs, investments, and entrepreneurial energy that is already present in our region.

Action Steps:

- A. Create educational programming for excluded populations that closes gaps in their understanding of and access to traditional economic development resources, including lending and small business technical assistance. Working with partners with lived experience, and partner organizations serving excluded populations, GPCOG staff will provide backbone support to this ongoing effort.
- B. Create new defined pathways for excluded people to start or expand their own businesses, and to gain employment opportunities in existing or newly emerging economic sectors. Working with existing small business technical support providers, higher education, and state agencies, GPCOG's staff will provide convening and organizational support, including expanded Disadvantaged Business Enterprises programming at GPCOG.

C. Expand existing economic networks to include previously excluded people and utilize their inclusion to better understand economic resilience from their perspectives. GPCOG will act as regional network convenor and catalyst for regular focused discussions on inclusion. GPCOG will initiate programming to give excluded people information about, access to, and voice within regional economic networks.

- Timeframes & Benchmarks: Step A designed by 12.31.23 and implemented on an ongoing basis thereafter. Step B scoped by 6.30.24 and implemented thereafter. Step C implemented immediately and over the next 5 years.
- Strategic connections and benefits. With aging demographics threatening economic stability in the region, greater inclusion of previously excluded people offers the opportunity to expand skilled workforce, create new jobs and investment, and redress historic discrimination. By doing so, this initiative advances all three of our strategic priorities.
- Implementing Leads and Partners. Step A builds on work already done for GPCOG to identify gaps and will require dedicated consultants and partners with expertise to complete. Step B will be convened by GPCOG and will require ongoing collective engagement from existing economic development agencies. GPCOG will convene around Step C and also implement its own empowerment programming.
- Costs & sources. Funding for Step A is needed and will require private sector contributions and federal grant funding. Convening Step B will be done with GPCOG resources, while implementing Step B will require economic development partner resources in conjunction with expanded funding from existing state, federal, and philanthropic funding sources. GPCOG will seek required funding for Step C.
- Metrics. GPCOG staff will annually track minority median incomes, the number of minority-owned businesses, and the tangible impacts of increased inclusion efforts.
- Resilience. As already noted, the success of the initiative will make our region's economy stronger and more resilient by expanding economic opportunity for excluded people, and by adding their perspectives to ongoing resilience planning and preparedness.

4. Expanding Critical Infrastructure. Please refer to Section IV (4) – Opportunity: Expanded essential infrastructure to support growth.

- Activities with action steps, benchmarks, and time frames. This initiative identifies and closes gaps in our region's existing infrastructure needed to support growth, leveraging and coordinating new investments to best reduce those deficits in ways that advance our strategic priorities. Innovation-driven growth, an expanded workforce, and a more inclusive economy all rely on efficient, effective investments in infrastructure which enable well-located development that supports every community, and everyone, in our region.

Action Steps:

- A. Map deficits in sewer, water, transportation, and broadband infrastructure needed to support development and existing employers throughout our region.
 - B. Assemble and maintain a list of shovel-ready and shovel-worthy infrastructure investments.
 - C. Align new infrastructure investments with other infrastructure needs, and with existing and emerging economic development opportunities including workforce housing investments.
- Timeframes & Benchmarks: Step A, drawing from existing partner data, completed by 12.31.24 and maintained annually thereafter. Step B completed by 6.20.25 by GPCOG staff and maintained annually thereafter. Step C implemented as opportunities arise, ongoing through the next 5 years.
 - Strategic connections and benefits. Many parts of our region welcome growth but face limits because they lack the necessary infrastructure. In other parts of our region infrastructure deficits like public transportation or broadband reduce opportunities for employers and residents alike.

This initiative addresses those limitations by identifying deficits and opportunities for new infrastructure, then aligning emerging infrastructure investments to the needs of the community and the region. By doing this, new growth and inclusion is facilitated, and economic resilience is strengthened.

- Implementing Leads and Partners. Using GPCOG staff support to catalyze and convene discussions and data sharing, public and private sector partners, and infrastructure providers and operators, will be key partners providing data and project analysis. PACTS will be a key clearinghouse of local and state transportation information. Municipal, state, and federal partners will be key funding resources.
- Costs & sources. GPCOG staff will provide support to gather and present information and staff regional discussions. Other partners will contribute resources to data gathering and engagement.
- Metrics. GPCOG staff will report annually on Steps A and B. Step C will be measured annually on the basis on successful instances of alignment.
- Resilience. Expanded infrastructure diversifies our region's economy, adding to its resilience. Integrating transportation, broadband, sewer, and water infrastructure investments with emerging development opportunities opens new avenues to resilience planning and awareness.

5. Expanding development tools and collaboration. Please refer to Section IV (5) – Opportunity: Expanded and more coordinated development tools and resources.

- Activities with action steps, benchmarks, and time frames. Our region, and state, have not deployed economic development policies as much as we could. Existing tools could be more flexible and are not fully understood in all quarters. New tools could be added to local, regional, county, and state development strategies.

Additionally, existing local, regional, county, state, and federal programs and funding opportunities are not as well integrated and leveraged as they could be.

This initiative seeks to expand understanding and use of the existing economic development toolkit, identify opportunities to expand the toolkit and make it more flexible, and increase collaborative use of existing and future development policies and programs.

Action Steps:

- A. Educate the region’s economic development community about existing programs and policies.
 - B. Identify best practices in programs and policies that would expand flexibility of existing tools or meet a defined deficit or gap in existing local, regional, or state economic development policies and practices.
 - C. Provide an ongoing forum and clearinghouse for coordinating and leveraging existing local, regional, county, state, and federal development programs and funding.
- Timeframes & Benchmarks: Step A scoped by 12.31.23 and implemented in 2024 and thereafter. Step B completed by 7.1.24 and updated annually thereafter. Step C implemented immediately and throughout the next 5 years.
 - Strategic connections and benefits. Economic development practice is dynamic and changing. This initiative will ensure that regional practitioners are fully informed and using all available development tools and strategies. Similarly, this work will increase coordination and leveraging of existing programs and funding, expanding economic opportunities and more fully utilizing available resources.
 - Implementing Leads and Partners. GPCOG staff will support implementation of this initiative. Experience, information, and support from partners drawn from all corners of the economic development world will be needed for insight and expertise.
 - Costs & sources. GPCOG staff will provide backbone support, funded through GPCOG.
 - Metrics. GPCOG will annually track the audience of economic development practitioners reached, the information shared, policy and program gaps identified, and coordination and/or leveraging achieved with existing development resources.
 - Resilience. An informed and interconnected development community supports greater growth and resiliency, and sets the stage for intentional resilience planning and preparation outlined in Initiative 6.
6. Expanding regional resilience. Please refer to Section IV (6) – Opportunity: A more resilient region.

- Activities with action steps, benchmarks, and time frames. This initiative advances regional resiliency in two ways. First, it seeks to expand resilience planning by creating a diverse forum for ongoing evaluation and discussion of foreseeable economic disruptions so that future disruptions can be avoided or mitigated. Second, it seeks to advance emergency preparedness by convening and supporting ongoing emergency disaster readiness.

Action Steps:

- A. Convene public, nonprofit, and private sector representatives to establish a permanent roundtable for the purpose of assessing regional economic risks, evaluating regional response strategies for potential disruptions, and communicating their findings to the entire region.
 - B. Convene an annual emergency preparedness effort, based on existing work by partners, designed to expand their reach to all employers and employees in the region, thereby improving their emergency response readiness.
- Timeframes & Benchmarks: Step A implemented by 12.31.23 and maintained at least quarterly throughout the next 5 years. Step B initiated by 6.30.24 with annual effort starting by 12.31.24.
 - Strategic connections and benefits. The region's resilience planning is atomized among individual employers and agencies, while our region's existing level of disaster preparedness deserves greater support. Drawing the region together for a continuing, global discussion of future disruptions, and for more widespread adoption of emergency preparation, will allow our region to avoid some future economic disruptions, reduce the impact of others, and recover more effectively from those that hurt our region.
 - Implementing Leads and Partners. GPCOG will staff the implementation of Step A, acting as host and catalyst. Implementing Step B partners include the Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency, Maine Emergency Management Agency, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, as well as working with all chambers of commerce and similar business organizations in our region, together with nonprofit and public sector implementors. GPCOG staff will provide backbone support for this effort to boost existing programs.
 - Costs & sources. GPCOG will seek new funding to support both steps of this initiative to ensure it has the resources to be robustly implemented.
 - Metrics. GPCOG will annually report on resilience planning outcomes, and on emergency preparedness levels.
 - Resilience. This initiative speaks to the need to expand economic resilience in our region. Its implementation will significantly improve the region's ability to address future economic disruptions.

VII. Conclusion – What happens next?

This Plan is the combination of many voices and many perspectives.

By examining our strengths and weaknesses, by looking at the opportunities and threats facing our region, and by distilling all of that into strategic priorities advanced through key initiatives with specific action steps this Plan creates a framework for action that the entire community can engage.

And that is the intent of the exercise – “*Where do we go from here?*” and “*How do we get there?*” aren’t rhetorical questions. They are a pathway forward in an uncertain world, designed to be explored together.

With the adoption of this Plan by GPCOG, in July of 2023 we will begin convening and catalyzing – the things GPCOG does best – around the priorities and initiatives outlined above. We will track community engagement and successes and monitor the need for updates and changes in direction.

Most importantly we will be cheerleaders for working together and pressing on, even if the going gets tough.

In 5 years, we hope and expect this Plan will have contributed energy and vision to your efforts to make our region’s economy more innovation-driven and prosperous, more inclusive and equitable, and more resilient to the next disruption, no matter which direction it comes from.

If so, that success will be yours, and ours, together. We look forward to the journey.

Acknowledgements

RPAC members
GPCOG ExComm members
Staff
Public

Public engagement notes

Appendix A – Housing Strategy

Appendix B – Connect 45