



Metro Regional Coalition Agenda

September 8, 2020
Noon to 1:30 pm
Via ZOOM Conferencing

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82571764292?pwd=anJ2L0wwYUdoYXBsdFFVYtXOEJ1UT09>

Meeting ID: 881 5252 6113 Passcode: 500116

Or Call: 312 626 6799

Note: As of March 31st, 2020 PACTS and GPCOG will be holding all committee meetings via [Zoom conferencing technology](#). We remain committed to full public access and participation in our meetings through remote access during the COVID-19 crisis. Remote meetings will be held in accordance with the requirements of [LD 2167, Public Law Chapter 618](#).

1. Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)

Chair Amy Kuhn will call the meeting to order.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the April 14, 2020 meeting (Attachment A)

3. Building the FY 2020-2021 MRC Work Plan (30 minutes) (Attachment B)

Staff report: Each year in September MRC members establish a work plan for the coming year. Last year's MRC work plan is attached as Attachment B as a starting point for conversation.

Members will review last year's plan, proposing new priorities and identifying continuing priorities. Staff will incorporate member feedback into an FY 2020-2021 work plan for final review and adoption at the October MRC meeting.

Action: identify priorities for inclusion in the 2020-2021 MRC Work Plan.

4. COVID-19 Response & Recovery (60 minutes total)

Staff report: Since the MRC last met in April 2020 every community has been managing a host of new challenges. Members will have the opportunity to discuss the issues that cross municipal boundaries, share information, and discuss any collective steps that emerge as high priorities, including:

- A. CARES Act funding for local government. FEMA and various state programs have provided some municipal support. Members will discuss the adequacy of state and federal support for local government to date, and specific additional proposals.
- B. Rental Relief. State funding provides up to 3 months rental assistance at up to \$1,000/month. Beyond that some individual municipalities have set up their own programs. However, resources are scarce, and the impact of the pandemic-induced recession will continue to hurt tenants and landlords alike. Members will have the chance to discuss what additional resources or next steps would be most helpful to their community.
- C. Racial Equity. MRC members have engaged in local discussions about racial inequality following the death of George Floyd. Members will have an opportunity to share next steps and community needs to address this continuing issue.
- D. Homelessness. People suffering homelessness remains a pressing regional issue. Members will have an opportunity to share local thoughts and initiatives and discuss how to best continue regional efforts in alignment with the Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency.

Action: Information sharing and identification of collective action steps.

5. Adjourn

Upcoming Meetings

Oct 13, 2020 12:00 PM
Nov 10, 2020 12:00 PM
Dec 8, 2020 12:00 PM
Jan 12, 2021 12:00 PM
Feb 9, 2021 12:00 PM
Mar 9, 2021 12:00 PM
Apr 13, 2021 12:00 PM
May 11, 2021 12:00 PM
Jun 8, 2021 12:00 PM

Attachment A

DRAFT

Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

April 14, 2020

Noon to 1:30 pm

Via ZOOM Conferencing

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Amy Kuhn, Chair	Falmouth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Kate Snyder	Portland
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Jeremy Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Ephrem Paraschak	Gorham
John Cloutier	Scarborough
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Peter Morin	Sen. Susan Collins Office
Public	Ken Capron
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan Chris Hall Victoria Pelletier

1. Welcome and introductions

Amy Kuhn called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm and welcomed everyone.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the February 11, 2020 and 3-26-20 meeting

Virginia Wilder-Cross moved acceptance of the minutes from the February 11, 2020 and March 26, 2020 MRC meetings, seconded by Matt Sturgis. A unanimous roll call vote passed the motion.

3. Regional COVID response

Chris Hall presented a summary of GPCOG's member services work to date in response to the Covid-19 crisis, including

- Regional Advocacy. Staff arranged a 3/27/20 meeting with the Governor, in which Westbrook, Portland, Scarborough, Naples, and Falmouth participated. Participants requested a regional stay-at-home order and described various conditions on the ground relative to short-term rentals, vacation homes, and gatherings of small crowds. The Governor issued a statewide stay-at-home order on 3/31/20.
- Public Transit Funding. With leadership from METRO, GPCOG staff worked with PACTS to communicate with our Congressional delegation about the need for emergency funding for public transit. The recent stimulus bill included \$25B for transit nationwide. Of this, PACTS transit agencies can be reimbursed up to \$53M for expenses related to COVID-19. PACTS is working this week to help determine how to use these funds.
- Support for Remote Public Meetings. With the passage of LD2167 (now [P.L. Chapter 617](#)), public meetings were allowed to be held remotely for the first time. On Thursday, April 2, GPCOG held a “Coffee with COG” to train our members. GPCOG also established an online meeting support “strike team” to assist members with setting up and running online public meetings on Zoom.
- Economic relief and innovation. GPCOG has deferred all payments for its small business borrowers in our revolving loan fund program and is also establishing a ‘rapid response’ loan offering of up to \$15,000 for small businesses. Additionally, staff is working to establish a Resiliency Exchange for the region, dedicated to matching available resources with public and private needs arising from the COVID crisis. Portland is partnering in the Exchange and the new loan offering.
- Information for our members. Almost immediately after the crisis took shape GPCOG created a [“COVID-19 Resources”](#) landing page containing many sources of information.

Members asked for more information about the new GPCOG loan offering for small employers – information will be shared as soon as the program is approved by our Revolving Loan Fund Committee later this week.

4. Regional COVID response – next advocacy priorities

Chris Hall summarized emerging advocacy priorities for local government in two broad categories:

- Municipal fiscal relief from federal and state government
- Additional municipal flexibility and clarity for the duration of the emergency

Please see the attached power point shared during the meeting for reference.

Members discussed each of the identified advocacy opportunities and made the following comments and observations:

- Regarding the CARES Act, members appreciated the chance to ask the Governor to use the state’s share of the Act’s \$150 billion dedicated to state and municipal Covid response costs to

provide municipal fiscal relief by directing federal funds into existing state-local distribution programs including revenue sharing, general purpose aid for education, etc.

- Regarding the new Federal Reserve Bank lending program for states, and large counties and municipalities, (the Municipality Liquidity Facility), members were cautious about using debt to cover cash flow needs at this point. The Facility allows state government to act as an intermediate borrower to make low cost funds available to municipalities, but this was not seen as a priority at this point.
- Regarding the prospects for a second CARES Act, members were forceful in stating the need for new federal emergency funding going directly to municipalities to offset existing and future revenue losses associated with the crisis.
- Regarding flexibility and clarity for municipal property tax commitments, lien filing timelines, due dates and interest, members agreed that the Governor should act by executive order to provide a uniform set of guidance and flexibility during the crisis that allows each municipality to exercise local judgement on all matters related to property tax issuance and collection.
- Regarding flexibility and clarity for municipal elections during the crisis, members supported absentee-only elections as urged by the Maine Town & Cities Clerks Association and MMA. They also asked that the Governor act to clarify timing and fiscal impacts of moving spring elections into July and offer support for protecting (or replacing) Covid-vulnerable election workers (especially senior volunteers). Finally, members agreed that budget validation elections should be waived for one year by the Governor.
- Regarding the use of TIF funds for Covid response, members in attendance did not see that as a priority or a viable option for their communities. Other communities may be able to work with DECD to convert unspent TIF funds to a revolving loan to support Covid-impacted businesses.

In addition to the advocacy topics identified above, members also discussed other issues including:

- Jim Gailey shared that the County Commissioners are in discussions around postponing their shift of fiscal years – members were grateful for the consideration. Jim also shared that the County will receive additional Community Development Block Grant funding as a part of the CARES Act and will be working with communities to determine how to best deploy those funds.
- Food insecurity was identified as a worsening problem that may require regional action. Jim Gailey said that the County Commissioners are in the process of making additional financial allocations in support of existing response efforts.
- Regional action as the economy re-opens was discussed. Members agreed to highlight further discussion in the May MRC meeting agenda.

5. Regional COVID response – next steps

Members asked GPCOG staff to draft a letter to Governor Mills making the following points:

- Municipalities are asking for an Executive Order granting them flexibility and clarity on all issues related to local property tax commitments, due dates, lien filing deadlines and interest charged on late payments. Because the interplay of state law, individual municipal charters and local timing can produce a wide array of specific barriers to local leaders giving residents property tax relief a broad executive order is requested giving municipalities maximum flexibility during the Covid crisis.
- Municipalities are asking for an Executive Order permitting absentee-only elections during the Covid crisis, as well as a one-year suspension of budget validation elections. Absentee-only elections will promote public health and avoid risks to vulnerable election workers. Suspension of budget validation elections will eliminate mandatory public meetings and accommodate the shifting timing of municipal and school budget approvals.
- Municipalities are asking for distribution of federal CARES Act emergency relief funding dedicated to state and local governments be used to preserve existing state commitments to funding levels in revenue sharing, general purpose aid and other state-municipal transfer programs.

Members agreed that this letter should be sent by the Metro Regional Coalition and signed by MRC Chair Amy Kuhn. Members will have a chance to review the letter on a very tight time frame.

Members also agreed to send a letter to Maine's Congressional delegation urging passage of a second CARES Act with an emphasis on the urgent need for new federal emergency relief funding directly to municipalities designed to replace existing and future revenue losses suffered by municipalities as a result of the Covid crisis.

6. Adjourn

At 1: 38 pm Amy Kuhn adjourned the meeting by unanimous roll call vote on a motion by Matt Sturgis, seconded by Tom Hall.

Attachment B

Metro Regional Coalition FY 2020 WORKPLAN

Below is a summary of the Coalition's goals for FY20 and its planned actions to achieve those goals.

Homelessness

Goals:

- To house more of the homeless in the Greater Portland area
- To more equitably distribute the responsibility of caring for the homeless across municipalities

FY20 Deliverables:

- A widely-supported and specific proposal to encourage Housing First developments outside of Portland
- A coordinated regional plan for responding to the next homeless shelter crisis that builds upon and improves the 2019 Expo Crisis response.
- Re-educate members on Housing First and related strategies to address homelessness

Actions:

- 1) Support policy proposals that a) increase operations funding for Housing First development and b) encourage communities outside Portland to host the developments
- 2) Advocate for additional homelessness resources and supportive policy in Augusta

Opioid Misuse

Goal:

- To prevent opioid misuse among our region's residents
- To improve the language we and our colleagues use about the epidemic to destigmatize the people who suffer from the disorder
- To expand the successful pilot program to more municipalities in our region, and beyond, as funding permits.

FY20 Deliverables:

- A third pilot project to reduce stigma and galvanize support for effective community-wide strategies.

Actions:

- 1) Complete a third pilot project and explore funding options for additional program expansion.

Integrating MRC work with State Economic Development Plan and Transit Tomorrow

Goal:

- To better coordinate local land use, transportation and economic development decisions with state and regional efforts to promote workforce, economic, transportation and housing growth to create a more prosperous future for our region.

FY20 Deliverables:

- MRC will become an implementing partner with the Mills Administration's statewide economic development plan.
- MRC members will become active participants in shaping and implementing PACTS' Transit Tomorrow.

Actions:

- 1) Continue to meet with state economic development officials to define specific local and regional implementation opportunities;
- 2) Expand Transit Tomorrow engagement opportunities to ensure 'corridor' participation as growth opportunities are identified; and
- 3) Facilitate public engagement designed to educate and support new approaches to growth and development.

Expanding Housing Choices

Goal:

- To diversify housing options and increase the supply of workforce housing in MRC communities by expanding housing choices for low- and middle-income households in the region by 10% by 2025.

FY20 Deliverables:

- MRC members and the public are educated on the issue
- The joint commitment of MRC communities to diversify housing options is implemented

- Housing, economic development and public transportation decisions are more closely integrated, and made in a regional context when possible

Actions:

- 1) Publish an annual report on expanded housing choices based on the individual reports of MRC member communities,
- 2) Work with individual MRC members to implement their municipal resolutions on expanded housing choices, and
- 3) Work with partners in the region, including the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce and the United Way of Greater Portland, to expand public acceptance of well-planned housing and transportation growth.

MRC's Effectiveness

Goals:

- To increase the consistent participation in MRC activities by all seven communities
- To increase the consistent participation in MRC activities by the chief elected official, chief administrative official, and other Councilors

FY20 Deliverables:

- High level officials from all communities engaged

Actions:

- 1) Focus meetings on decision-making