

GPCOG Executive Committee AGENDA

Monday, November 9, 2020

Noon – 1:30 p.m.

Click below to join the meeting by Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83280526656?pwd=UVJ4T2xQbmJROFNlbnWFpNytNaHdXUT09>

Passcode: 376167

Or join by phone by calling: +13017158592

Webinar ID: 1 301 715 8592

Note: As of March 31st, 2020 PACTS and GPCOG is 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 – Nat Tupper, President**
- 2. Acceptance of 10/14/20 Minutes (Attachment A)**
- 3. Public Comment**

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

- 4. Executive Director’s Report (Attachment B) – 5 min.**
- 5. Spotlight: Economic Recovery Grants – 10 min.**

Chris Hall and Josh Kochis will present this month’s spotlight presentation on the CARES Act-funded economic recovery grants to businesses and non-profits in our region.

- 6. Addressing COVID – 30 min.**

Staff Report:

As Maine enters the winter season, COVID cases are climbing. We will discuss what municipalities and GPCOG are doing to prevent the spread of COVID and support families and businesses, and answer the question: is there more we should be doing?

Recommended Action:

For discussion and possible action.

7. Public Access to Information – 10 min.

Staff Report:

GPCOG has received complaints about compliance with open meeting and information access laws. To assess these complaints and ensure full compliance, GPCOG has engaged outside counsel.

Recommended Action: For information only.

8. Project Development Fund (Attachment C) - 15 min.

Staff Report:

In September, as part of the approved advocacy priorities, the Executive Committee approved support for legislation to create a state-level project development fund. This would pay to plan and permit top priority projects, making them ‘shovel ready’ when federal stimulus funding becomes available. A concept paper for a project development fund is included as Attachment C.

Recommended Action:

Discuss how Executive Committee members can help advance this proposal and how best to populate a list of potential projects needing development funding.

9. FY20 Dues Use - 15 min.

Staff Report:

In FY20, members contributed \$520,000 in dues to GPCOG. In FY21, dues were discounted by 20% and estimated to provide \$416,000 in dues to the agency. Dues are GPCOG’s most flexible source of funding.

In FY20, GPCOG expended about \$370,000 of the \$520,000 in dues revenue (see details below).

Project Name	Grant Amount Leveraged	Expended Dues
Federal Transit Administration - Mobility Grant	\$ 25,000	\$ 4,464
US Dpt of Transportation - 2018 - 2019 UPWP (6 mo.)	\$ 143,448	\$ 38,938
US Dpt of Transportation- 2020 - 2021 UPWP (6 mo.)	\$ 134,106	\$ 38,497
Maine Dpt. of Agriculture and Forestry - FY20	\$ 17,065	\$ 13,701
EPA - Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund	\$ 490,789	\$ 5,773
EPA - Brownfields Assessment	\$ 45,811	\$ 622
EPA - Brownfields Assessment FY19	\$ 38,538	\$ 1,596
US Dpt. of Agriculture - Local Food Production Program	\$ 20,000	\$ 1,450
US Economic Development Administration	\$ 70,000	\$ 70,000
General Member Services		\$ 87,545
Cooperative Purchasing		\$ -
Metro Regional Coalition		\$ 29,543
Member Services - COVID-19		\$ 71,527
Severance (Unreimbursable personnel expense)		\$ 6,058
TOTAL DUES EXPENDED for match or member services		\$ 369,714

Two significant member services were partly or wholly funded by non-dues sources. The HostHomes effort in the summer of 2019 was mostly funded through the Economic Development Administration grant. Cooperative purchasing, which, in past years, required significant dues, was wholly paid for by a combination of Department of Transportation funds and cooperative purchasing fees. Billing Host Homes and cooperative purchasing to these non-dues sources allowed for GPCOG to conserve dues to an extent unanticipated in the FY20 budget. When the pandemic hit, GPCOG made use of some of these conserved funds by providing about \$88,000 worth of service to municipalities over 3 months.

This leaves \$150,000 in FY20 dues unexpended. In the spring, staff anticipated about \$100,000 in dues would be needed to provide match for the Americorps Resilience Corps project, set to launch in the subsequent fiscal year. This amount was set-aside in anticipation of this new grant and because of anticipated lower revenues from FY21 dues. This leaves about \$50,000 in unexpended FY20 dues revenue. The Executive Committee will discuss options for how to allocate these funds, including allocating funds to a rainy day fund, to the reserve fund, or for other purposes.

Recommended Action:

Decide how to allocate \$50,000 in FY20 dues revenue.

10. Items for Next Agenda - 5 min.

Executive Committee members will share ideas for upcoming agenda items.

Upcoming Meetings

- January 13, 2021
- February 10
- March 10
- April 14
- May 12
- May 26, 2020 – General Assembly and Summit

Attachment A

**GPCOG Executive Committee
MINUTES**

October 14, 2020

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Claude Morgan	South Portland
Sandy Carder	Gray
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Kristina Egan, Andrew Butcher, Chris Hall, Tony Plante	GPCOG Staff

Welcome

Nat Tupper, President, opened the meeting, which was held via Zoom. He welcomed Carmen Lone of Bridgton as a new Executive Committee member.

Acceptance of 9/9/20 Minutes

Claude Morgan moved approval of the 9/9/20 meeting minutes. Matt seconded. The roll was called, and all were in favor.

Public Comment

Ken Capron, Microrail, said that 3 minutes of public comment time is limiting and asked the Executive Committee to consider inviting public comment of 3 minutes on all agenda items. Ken said that PACTS and GPCOG are not compliant with the Freedom of Access laws and the Maine Human Rights Act. He has made complaints before, but has seen not change in the way the agencies conduct business. Ken said that Microrail should be considered a part of PACTS, and said that his company has been wrongly excluded from receiving funding from PACTS and from being a member of PACTS.

Spotlight: Recovery Dashboard

Chris Hall presented data on the economic impacts of COVID on the region using the interactive MySidewalk software developed by GPCOG's Data Analyst, Abe Daily. The major takeaway is the uneven impact of the pandemic and recovery. GPCOG strategies need to be sensitive to this. Federal support is critical at every level.

The food preparation and service industry has been hit hardest economically. The unemployment rate by town is uneven, ranging from 3% to 11%. For example, Falmouth is 2% where Portland is 8% and South Portland is 10%.

The impact of the payroll protection program was notable as it supported 55% of businesses in the GPCOG region.

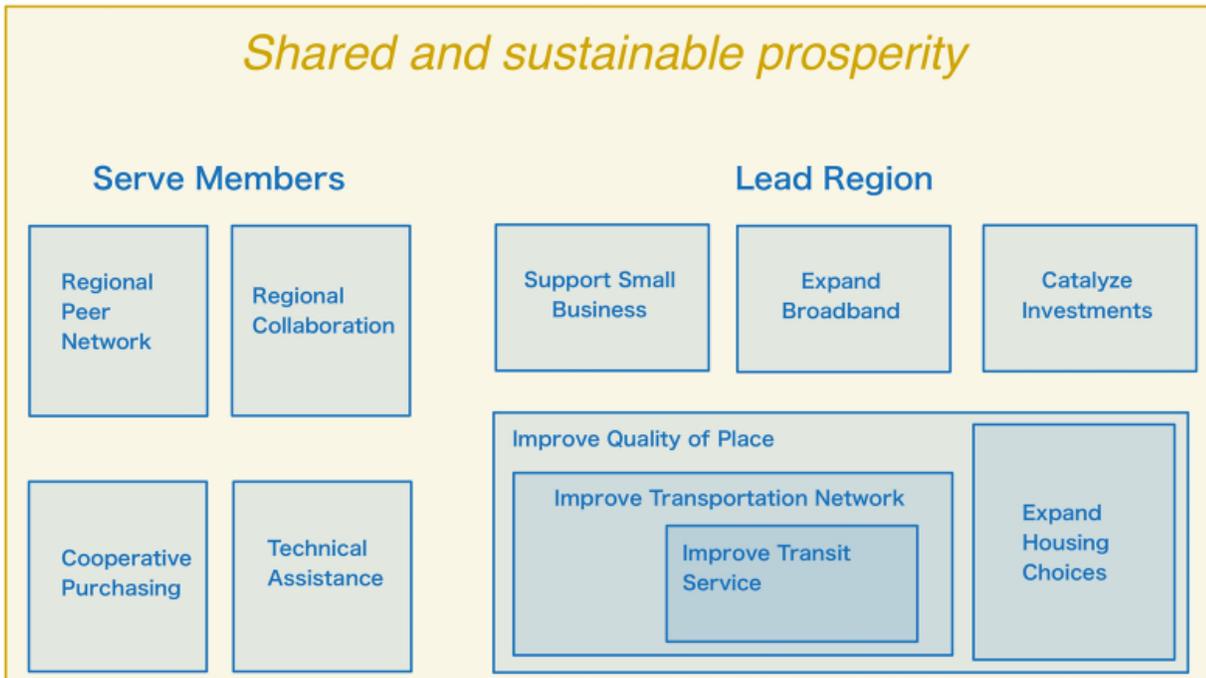
The next twelve months are extremely uncertain as there is an estimated 13% loss of revenue from the general fund. In the GPCOG region, transit ridership took a huge hit with an 87% reduction in April. Since then ridership has climbed back in line with national trends, but is still at 50% its normal level.

GPCOG is responding to the pandemic in different ways. PACTS is facilitating the allocation of \$53 million to the region's transit agencies to address net losses, and to fund adapted services and ridership recovery. EDA has provided \$400,000 to GPCOG to help with pandemic recovery and resiliency. Loan programs have increased with a focus on low and moderate business assistance. GPCOG is administering our region's portion of \$200 million the state has allocated for small business relief.

Claude Morgan asked if the science supported the transit agencies promoting ridership. Kristina offered the four best practices for increase in ridership: help agencies implement safety precautions, tell riders it is safe to ride with these safety precautions in place, attract people to get back on transit, and follow up the Transit Tomorrow study with a Transit Together study that will allocate \$380,000 for a fresh look at transit services across the region.

GPCOG's Role in the Region

Kristina briefed the group on GPCOG's strategic priorities and how these have shifted to handle the COVID-19 pandemic and response. Below is a summary of how GPCOG organizes its work, and here is the full slide deck she presented.



GPCOG serves its municipal members in many ways, and particularly by convening a regional table for public works, planners, elected officials, and managers.

With the pandemic and economic fall-out, GPCOG is more focused on economic development. GPCOG has expanded its work in supporting small businesses through loans and CARES grants. Other efforts include the Resilience Exchange, expanding broadband and the development of shovel ready projects, including transportation projects, to be prepared for potential federal stimulus funds. GPCOG is focused on improving housing affordability, and addressing the threats of a growing digital divide, retail/restaurant vacancy, and racial tensions and injustice.

GPCOG Executive Committee members offered the following comments:

- Claude noted that there is a lot on GPCOG’s plate, said that GPCOG has successfully morphed itself to deal with the current regional duress. He advised caution in taking on more projects in this unstable time. He added that he is not discouraging GPCOG from continuing to expand its impact.
- Sue agreed with Claude’s remarks and offered that GPCOG should continue to do well what it does now. She said the pandemic has made the future uncertain.
- Sandy said the pandemic is driving everything, and reinforced the need for GPCOG to advocate for funding for our cities and towns, and to help our municipalities save money as revenues decrease. She supported the creation of a project development fund and said it is expensive to plan and engineer projects to get them a shovel-ready.
- Carmen said there is opportunity in crisis. The pandemic puts into relief the projects and priorities that have been hard to describe in the past. She highlighted the need for short-term

support for our residents who need housing and health care. She urged GPCOG to focus on concrete projects like broadband and expanded transportation.

- Nat noted that it is hard to get his arms around all that is happening through GPCOG’s work. He wants to more clearly understand the pieces of the GPCOG puzzle and how they fit in together. He asked, ‘Is leading the region the goal? Or is it to develop the leadership that helps local government?’ GPCOG is an extension of local government, and functions as a tool for municipalities to work together to get things done. He urged GPCOG to retain its roots as a regional planning agency.

Others added that COG’s role is to help develop new community leaders, help elected officials perform their functions, and inspire and catalyze community leadership. Local government has been beat down, and there was a shared concern about the future of citizen-led government since so many people are disenfranchised or disillusioned right now. Municipalities are challenged to retain staff and attract quality talent. The leadership trainings for Chairs and Vice Chairs have provided valuable information, and Sandy encouraged GPCOG to educate more residents to encourage them to serve on appointed boards, like the planning board or zoning board of appeals.

The group embraced the idea of regular convenings amongst planners, and Claude said that there is not enough understanding on how our collective zoning is affecting housing choice. Providing data and tools to municipalities to help them make better decisions is an extremely valuable role for GPCOG to play.

The meeting adjourned at 1:43 p.m.

Attachment B

Executive Director's Report

Strategic Priority – Serve our Members

- **Resilience Corps Launch.** Fourteen Americorps Members will become the region's Resilience Corps. They start 11/6, and will be working on a variety of regional and municipal projects.
- **Welcome & Congrats!** Our annual reception at which current elected officials and municipal staff welcome newly elected Councilors and Selectmen will be December 17th at 6 p.m. This year, we'll celebrate virtually. Please mark your calendars!
- **Upcoming events:**
 - **11/10: Understanding Homelessness in the Region.** A Metro Region Coalition event for all GPCOG members. Tuesday, November 10th at noon.
 - **11/19: Coffee with COG – Resilience in Real Time.** Morning of November 19th.
 - **12/3 (tentative): Coffee with COG – Climate Action Planning.** Morning of December 3rd.

Strategic Priority – Lead the Region Toward Sustainable Prosperity

- **Broadband Speed Testing.** The Maine Broadband Coalition, which GPCOG staffs, has launched a new initiative to collect and map information about broadband speed throughout the state. To contribute information about your speed, [click here](#). To see the data collected so far, [click here](#). (You have to zoom in close to see the data points.)
- **PACTS Committee Restructuring.** At its October meeting, PACTS voted to consolidate committees, combining the Transit, Technical and Planning committees into a multi-modal, interdisciplinary Regional Transportation Advisory Committee. PACTS also added transportation customers to its committee membership, as well as environmental and active transportation experts, and private sector representation.
- **Prioritizing Transportation Funds.** PACTS has almost finished developing a new “funding framework”, which is a scoring process to award federal funds to transportation projects. The draft framework is intended to be more objective, transparent, and easier to understand than the existing process. Several transit providers objected to the framework. The next step is to work together to address concerns.

- **CARES Allocations for Transit.** The PACTS region received approximately \$53M in CARES funds to support public transportation. Approximately \$21.5M has been allocated to offset transit agency net losses, offset municipal contributions, support public health and ridership recovery, and innovate to improve transit. Two six-month allocations have been made, leaving \$31.5 million left to allocate. PACTS will be considering a third allocation to cover the next six months.

Strategic Priority – Operate with Excellence

- **Staffing updates.** Tony Plante has assumed new responsibilities, becoming our Chief Operating Officer. He will retain his portfolio of work as Director of Municipal Collaboration. Tori Pelletier has become our Special Projects Coordinator, focusing on managing our loan program and building our racial equity work. (Her previous position with GPCOG was Office Manager). We are currently recruiting for an Administrative Assistant to help Josh and Tony and to take over some of Tori’s responsibilities. We hired Julia Breul, Resilience Program Manager, to oversee the 14 Resilience Corps members, Carly Peruccio, Digital Media Specialist, to support Tom Bell in running the communications campaign to rebuild transit ridership, and Kat Violette, Outreach and Communications Associate. Kat interned with GPCOG last summer and was instrumental in ensuring the success of the Host Homes program.
- **Grants & Contracts development.** Below is an inventory of the grants received for FY21 and pending grants that have been submitted since the start of FY21.

FY21 Grants and Contracts Development

July 2020 through June 2021

Approved	Fiscal Agent	Amount
U.S. Economic Development Administration: To help fund pandemic recovery and resiliency work in the GPCOG region through expanding the loan programs, growing the new Greater Portland Resilience Exchange, and helping communities expand broadband	GPCOG	\$ 400,000
Cumberland County Community Development Block Grant Program: To fund a regional Covid-19 relief loan program.	Center for Regional Prosperity	\$ 300,000
City of South Portland MicroLoan Program: To facilitate the city's microloan programs	GPCOG	\$ 60,000
Town of Yarmouth MicroLoan Program: To facilitate the town's microloan program	GPCOG	\$ 100,000
CARES Act Transit Planning: To fund assessment to improve the efficiency of the transit network and to lead a regional communications campaign to recover transit ridership.	GPCOG	\$ 640,000
Corporation for National Service (AmeriCorps): To launch the Resilience Corps	GPCOG	\$ 217,000
Brownfields RLF Supplemental FY21-FY23: To provide loans and limited subgrants for cleanup of areas designated as brownfields.	GPCOG	\$ 200,000
Maine Technology Institute: To launch the Digital Infrastructure Frontiers Series with Maine Broadband Coalition	GPCOG	\$ 20,000
Department of Transportation- Rural TA: To provide transportation technical assistance to municipalities outside the PACTS region.	GPCOG	\$ 84,500
Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry- General: To provide land use planning technical assistance to inland municipalities.	GPCOG	\$ 15,130
Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry- Coastal: To provide land use planning technical assistance to coastal communities and to fulfill the tasks outlined in the Coastal Work Plan.	GPCOG	\$ 33,157
US Department of Energy Clean Cities: To support Maine Clean Communities program.	GPCOG	\$ 90,000
Submitted	Fiscal Agent	Amount
Brownfields Assessment: To assess contamination on two sites, one in Westbrook and one in South Portland.	GPCOG	\$ 300,000
National Endowment of the Arts Our Town Program: To support a second round of "Creative Shelters" installations celebrating diversity through original art on bus shelters in Greater Portland.	Creative Portland	\$ 100,000
Combined proposal to 4 funding sources (Connect Maine, Maine Community Foundation, Island Institute, Northern Forest Center) : To launch a statewide data collection initiative to assess broadband speeds	GPCOG	\$ 52,000
Mosaic Movement Infrastructure: To fund "Mainers Advocating for Racial and Environmental Equity".	Center for Regional Prosperity	\$ 152,500

Attachment C

Project Development Fund

Concept Proposal

Date: 10.29.20

Problem statement: Maine is poorly positioned to compete for one-time federal stimulus dollars due to the lack of planning and project development funding necessary to bring transformational investments to 'shovel ready' status.

Concept: Create a state funded 'project development fund' to pay for planning and project development costs.

Detail: Next year it is possible that the federal government will make economic recovery stimulus funding available in response to the recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

States and local governments will compete for federal stimulus funding by advancing transportation and other economic infrastructure projects. This competition will favor projects that are fully designed, engineered, and permitted – i.e. 'shovel ready' projects.

The costs associated with making projects shovel ready exceeds available local, regional, or state financial capacity. As a result, Maine is left with good ideas, but those good ideas are insufficiently developed to compete nationally with other states where project development is better funded.

In response, we recommend the creation of a 'Recovery Project Development Fund' to be jointly administered by Maine DOT and DECD. The fund would be focused on paying for the full project development costs of those projects judged by state government as the best positioned to:

- Create new good paying jobs,
- Preserve existing good paying jobs,
- Support the recovery of the Maine economy, and
- Improve Maine economic resilience in preparation for the next disruption facing the State.

We further recommend that this fund accept applications for individual project development through a regional structure that favors combined efficiencies, the leveraging of regional partnerships, and the deployment of regional assets in support of candidate projects.

We propose allocating \$10,000,000 of general operating revenues to the Recovery Project Development Fund in the Governor's FY 2020-21 budget, and also propose adding \$25,000,000 in new bond revenue to the fund once it is established.

Conclusion: In January 2021, the federal government will be facing the need to revive the U.S. economy, particularly during the summer construction season. Transportation and other economic recovery investments will become a priority strategy to get people back to work. Shovel ready projects will win the competition for funding.

Maine must be aggressively positioned to successfully compete for federal stimulus. The proposed project development fund will allow Maine to win a fair share of federal stimulus and use it to support economic recovery and greater resilience in our state.