

Joint GPCOG Executive Committee and Metro Regional Coalition Meeting

Tuesday, November 15, 2022

12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Meeting Agenda

In-Person:

*Greater Portland Council of Governments
970 Baxter Boulevard, Room 201
Portland, Maine
(Lunch provided)*

Remote:

Webinar link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86844969864>

Phone: 1 301 715 8592

Webinar ID: 868 4496 9864

*Participating by phone? Use *9 to raise your hand and *6 to unmute.*

As of April 26, 2022 GPCOG and PACTS are holding committee meetings in hybrid format, both in person at GPCOG's offices and via webinar. The remote portions of all meetings are conducted in accordance with the requirements of GPCOG Executive Committee policy, [LD 1772, PL 2022 Ch. 666](#), and [1 MRSA Chapter 13, Subchapter 1](#).

1. Welcome

The Chair will welcome members of the Metro Regional Coalition who are joining today's meeting due to the overlapping content of the agenda that focuses on MRC priorities as well as Executive Committee priorities. This meeting is being recorded and will be made available at gpcog.org/AgendaCenter.

2. Public Comment

Members of the public are welcome to provide up to three minutes of public comment on any topic, including items on the agenda.

3. Approval of 9/20/22 & 10/18/22 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes (Attachments A and B) 5 minutes

4. Spotlight: Member Services 15 minutes

Matt Panfil, GPCOG’s Director of Planning, will share how GPCOG is expanding its planning services and taking on custom work upon request for municipalities. Matt will also discuss GPCOG’s efforts to turn plans into actions in the areas of land use, housing, and economic development.

5. Safe in Maine Discussion 30 minutes

Staff Report: At the direction of the Metro Regional Coalition, and in partnership with GPCOG’s members, GPCOG staff is convening the Safe in Maine initiative. Cities and towns in the region, the state, community-based organizations and developers are working together to support the creation of new transitional housing for New Mainers. Belinda Ray, GPCOG’s Director of Strategic Partnerships, will provide an update on this work to welcome and retain asylum seekers in our region. Members hosting New Mainers in shelters and hotels will also share information. The group will explore the progress that’s been made and the challenges that remain as we continue to advance the Safe in Maine initiative.

Recommended Action: Information and discussion.

6. Advocacy Priorities for 2022-2023 (Attachment C) 15 minutes

Staff Report: Chris Hall, GPCOG’s Director of Regional Initiatives, will outline staff recommendations for setting GPCOG’s 2022-2023 state and federal advocacy priorities.

Recommended Action: Discuss, amend as desired, and approve advocacy priorities.

7. Member visits and regional events 5 minutes

Staff Report: Kristina Egan will summarize how GPCOG will respond to member feedback requesting more GPCOG visits to our member communities, including several regional engagement meetings that are already planned, and others that will be announced soon.

Recommended Action: Provide input on plan for community visits and regional events.

8. Round Robin: Your Community 20 minutes

Each Executive Committee and Metro Region Coalition member is invited to answer the question: What significant thing is happening in your community? What is top of mind in your local government?

9. Other Business

10. Adjourn

Upcoming Executive Committee Meetings

- January 17, 2023
- February 28, 2023
- March 21, 2023
- April 25, 2023
- May 16, 2023

Board and committee members, the public, and other stakeholders are encouraged to subscribe to the GPCOG Executive Committee calendar at gpcog.org/Calendar.

If you require accommodations to review materials or participate in this meeting (such as captioning or interpreting—at no cost to you), please contact:

(207) 774-9891

transportation@gpcog.org

Notification 72 hours prior to the meeting will help us to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting.

Attachment A

GPCOG Executive Committee

MINUTES

September 20, 2022

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Krista Chappell	Gray
Jarrold Maxfield	Windham
Mark Dion	Portland
John Hawley	Naples
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Teagan Betori, Vincent Edwards, Tony Plante, Belinda Ray, Tom Bell, Julia Breul, Paul Johnson	GPCOG Staff

Welcome

Jarrold Maxfield opened the hybrid meeting and welcomed Krista to her first Executive Committee meeting.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Acceptance of 5/17/22 Minutes

Jerre moved approval of the May meeting’s minutes. Kate seconded. A roll call was conducted. All were in favor.

Spotlight: Resilience Corps Fellows

Julia Breul, Resilience Program Manager, delivered a [slide deck](#) sharing that the region hosted 10 Fellows this year. She reported that seven of last year's cohort of Fellows are now working at jobs in the region. Julia introduced three of this year's Fellows: Mia Ambroiggio, City of South Portland Sustainability Fellow; Haley Castle-Miller, City of Portland Economic Opportunity Fellow; and Claire Luning, GPCOG Land Use and Transportation Fellow. Each Fellow summarized their work and experience building community resilience in our region. Kate Lew is asked the Fellows whether they had faced challenges securing housing in the area, and all replied that the cost and availability of housing is challenging, but the Fellows got on a group chat and shared resources and found housing.

Executive Director's Report

GPCOG has an updated membership services brochure, which was distributed. Chebeague Island and Brunswick have recently decided to work with GPCOG on climate action planning. An oral update on GPCOG's efforts to welcome and retain New Mainers was provided by Belinda Ray. The Safe in Maine fund now has over \$60,000 from contributions from the City of Westbrook, the Town of Cape Elizabeth and private donors. A new website to attract donations will be launched soon. GPCOG has also applied for American Rescue Plan Act funds held by the City of Portland to support a transitional housing campus development. Kristina highlighted this past week's Sunday Telegram article about the importance of New Mainers to addressing the state's workforce shortages.

Loan Committee Appointments

Paul Johnson shared the goal of GPCOG's loan program: to bridge financing gaps for small businesses. The loan committee will be meeting regularly and needs to increase its membership. He invited city and town officials to spread the word to businesses about the availability of the financing GPCOG can provide.

Kate moved to appoint Tina Bonney as Chair of the Revolving Loan Committee and appoint John Cloutier, William Mann, Joshua Brister and Jennifer Allen to the Committee. Mark seconded. The roll was called, and all voted in favor.

Round Robin: Your Community

Each member community answered the question: "What significant thing is happening in your community?"

Yarmouth: Nat said that Yarmouth is starting comprehensive planning, which will be more complex to do in the context of LD2003. The Army Corps is reviewing a proposal to remove the Royal River dam. He is seeing disengagement in local government and volunteer clubs. This has implications for boards,

committees, and municipal staffing, like volunteer firefighters. It's a struggle to keep Yarmouth from becoming polarized.

Naples: John noted that it's the time of year that Naples is "rolling up its sidewalks for the season." The town concluded a 2 year revaluation which resulted in a lower mil rate. In November, residents will consider a \$12M proposal to invest in the town office, post office, and community center. The town is short election volunteers, and the Town Hall will need to close on election day so that town staff can serve as the election workers. At the polls, there has been inappropriate behavior and verbal abuse of election workers. Naples' clerk is fielding lots of Freedom of Information requests.

Portland: Portland is experiencing a moment of great uncertainty. Mark said the City is a sailboat that has no wind and is headed into a fog bank. The upcoming election will be significant for the City's future. Ballot questions propose re-engineering city government. In practice, this uncertainty means a lot of decisions can't be made now, such as the hiring of a permanent City Manager. Portland is also facing big challenges with lack of affordable housing, homelessness, and opioid misuse, but the majority of department heads are interim and the police department is understaffed. Portland, like Naples, is fielding a lot of Freedom of Information requests, the public trust level in government is low, and conspiracy theories are circulating.

South Portland: Kate said the City has many of the same issues as others. There's unrest, conspiracy theories, and lots of Freedom of Information requests. The level of distrust in local government is unprecedented. The school department is serving the most asylum seekers as a percentage of their overall school population in the whole state. The kids are terrific and it's a heavy lift to obtain the needed resources. The City is also facing severe housing challenges, with 400 – 500 families at risk of rent increases. At one point in time according to MLS listings, only 10 units were available in the whole City last month. The City also has a lot of ongoing planning work, including a comprehensive plan and master planning for neighborhoods.

Gray: Gray is doing visioning work for its village center, with GPCOG's and Principle Group's support. Krista reported there's been a positive public response, and she noted that visuals have been particularly helpful. The next step is to work with MaineDOT on changes to the street network to support the village vision. Gray is also experiencing a lot of staff transitions. The Town struggles to find the time and resources to do ordinance development, and Krista is particularly concerned about how LD2003 will affect Gray's plans.

Westbrook: Downtown Westbrook has four simultaneous construction projects happening right now. Jerre said the projects are great; the disruption is not. A medical campus is breaking ground at Rock Row, which is exciting since it is the first non-retail use in Rock Row. The City, like others, is struggling with workforce attraction and retention. Also there is an unprecedented lack of competition for elected positions. Only 2 races of 8 are contested the November.

Windham: Jarrod said that Windham has 3 uncontested Council seats in the upcoming election. There is more polarization at the school board level than in Council chambers. Conspiracy theories are circulating. Some positive developments include the sewer bond passing 70:30 percent in the summer referendum. Access roads to support that project were funded with 90% federal and state funds. The Town is also conserving 700 acres of land to help counter the rapid housing growth in Windham. Trash disposal and recycling are also big issues in town.

Sabbatical Highlight: Community Resiliency

Kristina shared that she learned a lot about mobility and land use on her time away, but decided to focus on the most surprising element of her travels: the very visible climate damage Europe is experiencing. She shared visuals and data on heat and drought, falling water levels on rivers, and shrinking glaciers. While Maine is experiencing damage from climate change, Europe provided her a preview of potential impacts for our region to expect and prepare for. Kristina thanked the Executive Committee for making the sabbatical possible.

The group did not discuss retreat planning due to lack of time. The group adjourned by a show of hands.

Attachment B

GPCOG Executive Committee

**MINUTES
October 18, 2022**

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Krista Chappell	Gray
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
John Hawley	Naples
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Tony Plante, Belinda Ray, Tom Bell, Julia Breul, Paul Johnson, Matt Panfil, Sara Mills-Knapp	GPCOG Staff

Welcome

John Hawley opened the in-person retreat. Kristina reviewed the goals for the annual retreat. People paired together, and then each person introduced their partner.

2-Year Goals

The group reviewed the agency’s goals for FY23 and FY24, then broke into three small groups. Below are key takeaways that each group reported back to the larger group:

- Tools and supports for attracting resources: A regional grantwriter or service could support smaller municipalities in applying for federal funds. One suggestion was for GPCOG to do a ‘roadshow’ to share grant opportunities. Some communities also need data to support their own grants development.

- Expanding housing choices through technical assistance to cities and towns: Members noted that LD 2003 ignores municipalities that want to do the right thing and are interested in providing affordable housing but do not have, or at least have not yet found, the means to get projects built. There's a different context for affordable housing in different parts of the Greater Portland area, and short term rentals are reducing housing availability. Two suggestions are to hold sub-regional events and/or create a "rural coalition" within GPCOG.
- Connecting GPCOG members to the larger network of decisionmakers and stakeholders: GPCOG is confident in its ability to leverage connections, but communities may not know that staff can help with this. A suggestion was to promote GPCOG's ability to give members access to state and federal officials.

The larger group supplemented these reports with additional observations:

- Our region needs to better understand that we have problems together, and that there are opportunities to pursue funding and share best practices together.
- People are drowning in data, information, and emails. What we lack are opportunities for relationship building. Subregional meetings are a great mechanism to help members know each other and work together. Of course, everyone is busier than ever, so it's hard to make time to be part of a group. But, if we don't, we'll continue to be isolated from one another.
- GPCOG staff can help convene regional meetings with electeds and staff. The agenda will need to have substance, of course, but there should also be time to share information about what's happening in the communities and for people to get to know one another.

Attachment C

MEMO

To: GPCOG Executive Committee
From: Kristina Egan & Chris Hall
Date: 11/08/22
RE: GPCOG Advocacy Priorities for 2023

Background

Since 2017, GPCOG has engaged in advocacy for our region. The work we've done at the Statehouse and with our Federal delegation has followed these guidelines that were established by the Executive Committee to ensure successful, non-divisive policy efforts:

- Give our region a voice that decision makers hear and respond to – especially when our members have interests that require special focus from policymakers.
- Provide members with access to state and federal policymakers – and the staff support needed to make those meetings productive.
- Remain solution oriented and nonpartisan at all times – GPCOG represents members with the widest spectrum of political beliefs.
- Remain aligned with Maine Municipal Association whenever possible, and let MMA handle statewide municipal issues that do not have a unique regional aspect.

In the last three years, GPCOG's advocacy has had some notable successes, including:

- Gathering elected municipal member leaders and managers to meet with the Governor in 2020 to help her shape COVID-19 response policy
- Testifying at the State House on the establishment of the Maine Climate Council and on implementation of Maine Won't Wait (the state's climate action plan) to successfully suggest that transportation be added as a key strategy to reach climate goals
- Testifying in 2022 before the Housing Commission to successfully urge adoption of regional and state housing goals, and before the Appropriations Committee to successfully support state funding of regional and local technical assistance for housing policy implementation.

Process

Each fall, after gathering input from members, staff present proposed advocacy priorities to the Executive Committee for their review and approval.

Then staff implement the approved priorities in a variety of ways, including member and staff meetings with lawmakers and their staffs, research and education on policy issues, and testimony before legislative bodies when appropriate.

If new policy issues come up later in the year, staff will bring those issues to the Executive Committee with an advocacy recommendation for their review and approval.

2023 Proposed Advocacy Priorities

1. **Build on current successes as a regional implementation partner.** In the last three years GPCOG has positioned itself as a trusted regional implementing partner for several state and federal policy initiatives, including the Governor's 10-Year Economic Development Plan, Maine Won't Wait, last year's housing expansion policies, and federal pandemic recovery and response programs. GPCOG will advocate for the continued regional implementation of these and related state and federal programs.
2. **Ensure our region gets its fair share of state and federal resources.** As new federal funding programs become available, particularly the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, GPCOG will advocate for our region receiving equitable allocations of new federal funding. Recent transportation funding proposals by MaineDOT highlight the need to remain active in advancing the region's call for a fair share of new funding opportunities.
3. **New Housing Initiatives.** This Fall a second Housing Commission has been meeting and collecting a wide range of new housing policy proposals, from short term rental laws to sweeping new state legislation governing housing. The Commission's policy recommendations are not yet finalized. As it did in 2022, GPCOG will continue to advocate for state housing policies that respect local government, create flexibility and innovation at the local level for housing policy, and provide sufficient state funding to support local implementation of new housing policies.
4. **Office of Resettlement.** Maine is facing an unprecedented expansion of newly arriving people from foreign countries. Our region welcomes their arrival and hopes they will stay in our region to support diversity and fuel growth and innovation. But managing the financial expenses and social service needs associated with welcoming new Mainers must be transferred from local to state government. GPCOG will advocate for the state establishing an Office of Resettlement to support newly arriving Mainers, relieving municipalities from the burdens of financially supporting this welcome new population.
5. **General Assistance Reform.** Maine Municipal Association is working with municipal GA administrators on a GA reform bill. At the same time, many GPCOG member communities are anxious to see the GA system fundamentally reformed. GPCOG will work with MMA and our member communities to advance GA changes that reduce disproportionate local burdens on larger communities, and create more effective, efficient administration of GA.

Summary

In 2023 GPCOG will focus its advocacy work on these five priorities, acting in the role of convener of our members and their elected representatives, conduit of ideas and information, and catalyst for finding nonpartisan solutions. GPCOG will work as a regional advocate for our members within the guidelines outlined above, and with the understanding that the successful resolution of many issues will require partnerships between regions, between different levels of government, and between people with different perspectives.