



Metro Regional Coalition Agenda

June 20, 2023
Noon to 1:30 pm

Note Different Location – One City Center, Portland

This meeting will be conducted in person only, starting at the Food Court in One City Center, then walking to 83 Middle Street. A light lunch will be served. RSVPs are requested.

1. Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)

Chair Michael Foley will call the meeting to order and ask attendees to briefly introduce themselves.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the May 9, 2023 meeting (Attachment A)

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. Update on Systemic Reforms to Address Homelessness (15 minutes)

Staff report: Belinda Ray will provide an update on GPCOG efforts to help restructure housing options for people suffering homelessness, including changes to the Blueberry Road proposal, a new transitional housing opportunity in Portland, a larger transitional housing campus opportunity in Unity Maine, and the status of Senator Duson’s LD 1721 in the legislature.

Action: Information and discussion regarding strategies to provide transitional housing.

5. Introduction to Phoenix Flats ([link](#)) (15 minutes)

Staff report: Cullen Ryan, Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine (CHOM), will give members a brief orientation and overview of the Phoenix Flats development’s purpose, design, and place in the community.

Action: Preparation for walking tour of the project.

6. Walking Tour of Phoenix Flats - 83 Middle Street Portland Maine (60 minutes)

Staff report: Members will have a walking tour of the project led by Cullen Ryan.

Action: In person visit to the project.

7. Adjourn

Upcoming Meetings

TBD for September 2023 through June 2024.

Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

May 9, 2023

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Jon Anderson	Scarborough
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Ephrem Paraschak	Gorham
Kate Snyder	Portland
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Patti Smith	Cumberland County
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Guest	Emily Prescott, Saco
For GPCOG	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Dani Deason

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 April 11, 2023 meeting

Jerre Bryant moved acceptance of the minutes of the April 11, 2023 MRC meeting seconded by Mat Sturgis. The motion was passed without objection.

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Legislative Updates.

Chris Hall updated 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.

Hall introduced [LD 1739](#), *An Act to Extend Development District Tax Increment Financing Districts* sponsored by former MRC Chair 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.

Nathan Poore shared his work on this legislation and urged MRC support for the bill. Many communities in Maine have substantial TIFs which will expire in the next few years, and approximately two dozen will expire by 2030.

Extending tax increment districts that are ready to expire provides a municipality with substantial fiscal advantages and focusing 51% of an existing TIF on affordable housing or transit TIFs gives a boost to expanding well-located housing choices.

Members were supportive of LD 1739 and on a motion by Tom Hall, seconded by Jerre Bryant and unanimously approved by roll call, they asked GPCOG to testify in support of the legislation and Chair Foley to submit a letter on behalf of the MRC also supporting the bill.

Kristina Egan discussed how the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has provided the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) with new funding to support expanded housing choice related to expanded transportation services.

This new funding has been designated by PACTS for work at GPCOG focused on the [Priority Centers](#) identified in [Connect 2045](#) (PACTS' long-range transportation plan) in support of more intensive use of transit TIFs in support of well-located growth.

Egan outlined how GPCOG staff will begin analyzing Priority Centers in the MRC communities and exploring with municipal staff where and how federal funding and state transit TIFs can be leveraged to enhance existing or future housing plans in our communities. Since this work is already funded by PACTS it will be no cost to members, and she invited MRC members to contact Chris Hall if they are interested in learning more.

Next Hall summarized the 5/5/23 public hearings before the legislature's Health & Human Services Committee on several bills to reform General Assistance. Several bills were heard, and there was substantial bipartisan support for increasing state reimbursement of municipal General Assistance costs from 70% to 90%. Other reforms concerning GA administration at the local and state level were also supported.

Chair Foley submitted testimony in support of [LD 1426](#) and [LD 1664](#) on behalf of MRC as previously discussed. Members also testified and will have staff available at upcoming work sessions as the bills move through the legislative process.

Members then discussed Senator Duson's [LD 1721](#) proposing a statewide strategy for building and supporting permanent shelter facilities across the state which will have a public hearing on Friday May 12th. This bill is a product of MRC meeting with the Senator and exploring various ways to increase state funding and support for people needing transitional housing.

Members remained very supportive of the legislation, and Matt Sturgis moved that MRC should submit testimony in support of the bill at its hearing. Ginny Wilder-Cross seconded the motion which passed by

unanimous roll call. Hall urged members to testify themselves at the hearing as well, noting that many municipal voices will be most powerful in moving the bill forward.

5. Regional Prosperity Plan Update

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

Chris Hall reviewed the report's content and the directions it sets for further collaborative work in the region. Members were supportive of the strategic vision, goals, and action steps contained in the draft.

6. MRC Member Roundtable

Members shared the following during the roundtable:

- Cape Elizabeth municipal government is instituting a 4-day work week starting July 1st, modeled in part of Scarborough's existing system. The move was motivated by the need to attract new employees and retain existing ones.
- Cape Elizabeth is working again on a school bond proposal, likely for the November 2024 ballot.
- Gorham is also discussing moving to a 4-day work week.
- Gorham's school budget is very high, and some other members noted the same in their communities.
- Westbrook's Council will consider an additional funding request for Safe in Maine (Westbrook was the first community to contribute).
- Scarborough is also in the process of revisiting its school construction plans. A location at he Downs is possible, but funding levels are preliminary.
- Tom Hall noted [commentary](#) in the PPH in support of the Gorham Connector project and gave a brief update on how things are moving slowly, but still moving.

7. Adjourn

Mayor Foley adjourned the meeting by acclamation at 1:04 pm.