

GPCOG Executive Committee

Tuesday, September 5, 2023

11:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Annual Retreat Agenda

In-Person	There will <i>not</i> be a remote participation option for the annual retreat
Location:	Merrill Memorial Library, Trustee Conference Room 215 Main Street, Yarmouth
Parking:	Please park on the street or at the Yarmouth Town Hall circular front parking lot. Merrill Memorial Library has limited access to parking.
Dress:	We recommend bringing a sweater, as the rooms may be cool.
Lunch:	Lunch will be served.

1. Welcome & Goals for the Retreat

The goals for the retreat are: to review the year’s upcoming priorities and kick-off the annual strategic planning process.

- To get to know one another and understand top issues in our communities
- Review what GPCOG seeks to accomplish this upcoming year
- Kick-off the strategic plan update

2. Round Robin **30 minutes**

Members will introduce themselves to one another, and identify up to top three issues your community is grappling with this year.

3. Approval of the 5/23/23 Meeting Minutes (Attachment A) **5 minutes**

4. Brownfields Grant (Attachment B) **10 minutes**

Staff Report

This past year, GPCOG received \$3.9 million for its brownfields program. The program is designed to help remediate environmental contamination on historically industrial properties and to encourage new

development that is aligned with the region's priorities. At present, GPCOG has committed \$666,000 of these funds to the Yard South project in South Portland.

This July, GPCOG received a request for a grant of \$500,000 from Avesta Housing. Avesta Housing has partnered with Jack Soley and Tim Hebert of New Ventures LLC on the redevelopment of a 3.27-acre lot on 35 Seavey Street in Downtown Westbrook. The site is currently forested with the foundation remnants from demolished structures on site and is bounded by an abandoned curved rail line. Avesta Housing and New Ventures are proposing to develop approximately 180 units of affordable 55+, workforce, and market rate housing on the site. The work will be completed over two phases (detailed in the application narrative). Avesta is responsible for clearing its portion of the land and remediation of problematic soils. The project intends to leverage funds from MaineHousing and is estimated to inject \$90 million into the local economy.

Recommended Action

Approve Avesta Housing's request for up to \$500,000 in Brownfields remediation grant funds to support the proposed affordable housing project in Westbrook located at 35 Seavey Street. Due to the limited nature of the arsenic contamination and unknown nature of VOCs contamination, staff requests the authority to develop a grant agreement with several drawdown thresholds as the entire \$500,000 may not be needed.

5. Executive Director Performance Goals (Attachments C & D)

30 minutes

Staff Report

See Attachment C for the agencywide goals the Executive Committee adopted for FY23 and FY24. We will quickly review these, then discuss proposed performance goals for Kristina for FY24, found in Attachment D.

Recommended Action

Review, modify as needed, and set the Executive Director's FY24 performance goals.

6. Strategic Plan Work Session (Attachments E & F)

75 minutes

Staff Report

GPCOG's 2017 [Strategic Plan](#) outlined an ambitious set of outcomes that defined the agency's work for five years. The Plan was extended for another two years, through June 2024. This year, we will update the strategic plan for another 5-year period.

We will kick off this work by reviewing two inputs to the plan: an assessment of GPCOG's performance on the 2017 strategic plan (Attachment E) and a look at the trends and disruptions our region can anticipate in coming years (Attachment F).

Recommended Action

Discussion and input.

7. Other Business

8. Adjourn

Upcoming Meetings All meetings held from 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. , except for General Assembly and Summit

October 17, 2023

November 14, 2023

January 16, 2024

February 27, 2024

March 19, 2024

April 23, 2024

May 14, 2024

May 30, 2024 – General Assembly and Summit at St. Joseph’s College in Standish

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 or 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 May 23, 2023

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Krista Chappell	Gray
Jarrold Maxfield	Windham
Mary Fernandes	Casco
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Mark Dion	Portland

Welcome

Jarrold opened the meeting at 12:05 p.m., confirmed quorum, and noted that today's meeting was a rescheduling of the 5/16/23 meeting at which the Executive Committee didn't reach quorum.

Public Comment

Mr. Willey, a Portland resident, mentioned that he attended GPCOG's gathering to gather input on the Regional Prosperity Plan in Yarmouth, provided his professional background, and explained the importance of water filtration plants.

Acceptance of 4/25/23 Minutes

Carmen moved approval of the 4/25/23 meeting minutes. Mark seconded. A roll call was conducted. All were in favor.

Spotlight: Radio Show

Teagan Betori, Communications Specialist, said that Let's Connect Greater Portland is GPCOG's radio show that airs live on WMPG, 90.9 FM, every Thursday at 11:30 a.m. There are 25 episodes to date and the radio broadcast reaches GPCOG's full geography. The show is an extension of all of GPCOG's work, providing a forum for educating Greater Portland residents about transportation, housing, broadband, sustainability, and also to celebrate and elevate the leaders in our region. Carmen suggested reaching out to Bridgton's local TV station to share content through that communications vehicle.

Executive Director's Report

GPCOG will convene "Greater Gray" and "Greater Bridgton" subregional meetings this fall. Kristina Egan thanked Jerre for testifying on behalf of a bill that would create a transitional housing campus for people newly arriving in Maine. She also thanked the region's mayors for their testimony on General Assistance reform. GPCOG has

received several new grants since the Executive Director's report was written for this agenda, including for marine electrification, Drive Electric Maine, village planning in Pownal, and for small business support through a "hub" program.

FY24 Executive Committee Members and Officers

Kate shared that she is not seeking re-election in November but is pleased to continue to serve with GPCOG through the end of the November. She recommends that the incoming Mayor replace her mid-year.

Jerre moved the nominating committee's slate for FY24. Mark seconded. All were in favor.

Regional Prosperity Plan

The draft Regional Prosperity Plan was developed with the input of many municipalities economic development staff and has been well-received by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The document is structured to be a framework for action, not a list of specific projects, in order to be flexible to roll with the rapidly changing economy. The themes are innovation, inclusion, and resilience.

Kate had several comments:

- Housing is a barrier to shared prosperity, and that needs more emphasis. Chris Hall will amplify that message in the document.
- The language around the lack of political will vilifies elected officials. There are many forces that have blocked housing, and elected officials are often the ones that are advancing housing choices. Chris noted that this concept came from the advisory committee, and he will soften the message to maintain the idea, but phrase it to say that our region needs municipalities to act more quickly to address the housing shortage.
- Items 1 – 6 are general, and we need to make sure there are specific strategies and timelines for taking action.

Kristina asked what the strategies are for getting the work done and for engaging elected leaders in supporting it. Chris said that the plan envisions municipal governments as the main agents of action, and that quarterly convenings will help keep focus on the plan's implementation.

Jarrold noted that the plan is a good roadmap, but, like Kate, is similarly concerned about how elected officials are characterized in the document. Public engagement and education is so important, and when cities and towns advance housing, the public may vilify elected bodies for this work unless better informed and engaged. All of us need to better get the word out about the pros and cons of housing. Chris agreed, and noted that GPCOG's regional housing strategy, adopted by the Executive Committee earlier in the year, embraces public engagement and education as a core activity.

Mary said that housing is a hot issue in Casco and said that casual meetings and discussions can help change minds, and that constant conversation is needed. The public should be our partners. If we don't provide information, misinformation will fill a vacuum, particularly on social media.

Carmen said that it's important to expand tools for businesses to grow, and asked if agriculture is included in the plan. Chris said it is; agriculture and the food economy is a big part of our region's economic base. Carmen suggested that, as the plan moves into implementation, that meetings with towns include both an elected official and the Town Manager. It is important not to exclude elected officials from this work.

The group agreed on three proposed changes to the plan before adoption:

- Emphasize the importance of housing
- Clarify the municipal role in implementing this plan
- Note the importance of public education to developing public and political support for new housing

Jerre moved to adopt the plan, incorporated the three suggestions of the group in the final version. Mark seconded. The roll was called. Kate opposed, and the remaining members supported, with the motion passing.

Impacts of Member Withdrawal from GPCOG

Tony Plante presented the impact on the region, GPCOG, and any member that withdraws from GPCOG. GPCOG exists to meet our members' needs when they have a need. GPCOG also offers all member access to resources and people. Together we have a larger voice, a more coordinated response to challenges, and an implementing tool for needed actions.

Carmen noted that Raymond pulled out some years back, and that our communities are so interconnected, that the amount each community spends on dues is not a significant amount compared to what communities receive. Tony noted that South Portland's proposal to withdraw would reduce GPCOG's budget by about 1%, but the impact on member services would be much greater since dues dollars leverage federal funds and provide direct and flexible member services on-demand.

This item was for discussion only.

Scope for Strategic Plan Update

Krista asked if there will be a need for a consultant, and Kristina believes the staff team can do this work in-house. The group suggested no changes to the proposed scope.

Advocacy Positions on New Bills

The group discussed [LD 1934](#), *Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine*, which directs the Office of Policy Innovation and the Future to review opportunities for structural changes in the organization of State Government and to make recommendations that will result in the improved coordination and implementation of planning grants and technical assistance programs for communities in this State and regional planning and development organizations. There is no controversy about this proposal.

The group also discussed [LD 404](#) *Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council, and its complement, LD 1450 An Act to Fund the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council*. Mark said that he needed more information about to assess the suitability of existing rail beds for future light rail. Others noted that the trade-off between future rail and trail uses is hard to understand as policymakers as articulated by planners and advocates. The group flagged this for future discussion.

Jerre moved GPCOG support LD 1934. Mark seconded. All were in favor.

FY24 Meeting Calendar

The group adopted the FY24 meeting calendar for the Executive Committee.

Jerre moved adjournment. Mark seconded. All were in favor and the meeting ended at 1:43 p.m.

Attachment B

Brownfields Grant Project Narrative



A – Project Narrative:

Avesta Housing has partnered with Jack Soley and Tim Hebert of New Ventures LLC on the redevelopment of a 3.27-acre lot on 35 Seavey Street in Downtown Westbrook. The site is currently forested with the foundation remnants from demolished structures on site and is bounded by an abandoned curved rail line, Seavey Street and Main Street (see submitted maps). The site, as part of the Downtown Overlay Zoning district, is an ideal location for infill development. To that end, Avesta Housing and New Ventures are proposing to develop approximately 180 units of affordable 55+, workforce, and market rate housing on the site. The work will be completed over two phases.

The first phase of the development has two stages: 1a and 1b. New Ventures has secured financing for their 62-unit workforce and market rate building. They plan to begin the clearing of the site for their construction later in the Summer of 2023 (stage 1a). Avesta's 61-unit 55+ affordable (60% AMI) building will follow the New Ventures building in the Summer of 2024, we are dependent on MaineHousing financing (stage 1b). As co-developers on the site, Avesta is responsible for clearing its portion of the land and remediation of problematic soils. We are therefore applying for brownfields funding to support the removal of compromised and unsuitable soils from the site and their transportation and deposit at a licensed DEP facility. All remediation work would be completed in stage 1a, as part of the New Ventures initial construction. The completion date for Stage 1a is Fall of 2024. The completion date for Stage 1b is estimated at spring of 2025. However, completion of remediation is expected to coincide with the completion of Stage 1a.

The second phase of the development at 35 Seavey would be a combined building with Avesta and New Ventures. At the completion of construction, the building would have 30 Avesta units and 30 New Ventures units. The income restrictions for this building are still in flux but it will likely be a combination of affordable, workforce, and market rate housing. The building would likely begin construction in 2026 but its construction is not relevant to this application. We anticipate that the Brownfields funding will allow us to transform the site into essentially a "greenfield" development by the time of the second phase start.

An investment 500,000 from GPCOG will help create 180 units of housing at a time of incredible need. In per unit terms, that an investment of \$2,775, which is markedly lower than the benchmarks set by other funding sources. For instance, the Cumberland County HOME Consortium has a current benchmark of 10,000 per unit. We are requesting 1/5 of that per unit total. In addition, this investment will help make our project viable and allow us to leverage MaineHousing resources. For an investment of 500k, we can construct three buildings, 180 units, and inject around 90 million into the local economy of Cumberland County.

Attachment C

GPCOG's FY23 & FY24 Priorities

Adopted by GPCOG Executive Committee 3/15/22

1. **Attract resources to the region.**

- Prioritize transportation projects and work with state and federal partners to fund these priorities.
- Organize regional support for up to three transportation projects for discretionary grant opportunities.
- Serve as the state's implementing partner for economic development, climate mitigation and resilience, housing choice, and broadband investments in the region.
- Ensure rural communities have tools and support they need to access new funding sources for community priorities.

2. **Provide value to members.**

- Catalyze regional response to up to two major regional challenges or opportunities.
- Build a resilient network of municipalities with regular gatherings of elected officials, municipal managers, transit managers, public works directors, sustainability professionals, economic development directors, and planners and by resuming subregional meetings as the pandemic subsides.

3. **Expand transportation and housing choices for our region's people.**

- Monitor and annually report on regional housing production, develop one transit-oriented development plan, and provide technical assistance to improve housing and zoning in as many municipalities as resources permit.
- Develop data and analysis to illustrate the impacts and benefits of smart growth strategies and communicate that information to members.
- Adopt Transit Together recommendations that will measurably improve customer experience and system performance.
- Track transit ridership, analyze industry trends and national best practices, and advance regional initiatives and investments to rebuild ridership in the wake of the pandemic.

4. **Do our region's part in meeting the goals of *Maine Won't Wait*.**
 - Establish vehicle miles travelled and emission reduction targets through *Connect 2045* and other regional initiatives and work to aligning policies and investments.
 - Support development and implementation of up to three climate action plans for communities.
 - Identify key areas of regional risk to climate hazards and support development of three priority resilience projects to be developed and designed by members.

5. **Support GPCOG's Diversity Equity and Inclusion working group in its efforts** to define agency goals and implement strategies to meet them.

6. **Identify priorities and implement improvements to GPCOG's internal systems** to reduce operational friction, enhance the staff team's wellbeing, and provide information to guide budget and staffing decisions.

Attachment D

DRAFT FY24 Performance Goals for Executive Director

Connect members to resources and decisionmakers. Connect municipalities to grant opportunities and technical assistance, particularly for infrastructure investments and new housing. Connect members to decisionmakers, with at least three opportunities per year to meet with federal and state partners.

Deliver more services to more communities. Launch new tracking system to identify communities that aren't fully utilizing GPCOG's member services, offer and deliver services to those communities, and provide a full accounting of GPCOG's value to every member at the end of the fiscal year.

Align agency's work to expand housing choices. With new resources coming online, align the work of GPCOG's planning, data, communications and engagement capacities to implement the adopted Regional Housing Strategy, which will help our member communities build more housing in the right places for all the people who need it and in ways each community wants.

Update the strategic plan. Engage members, partners and staff to chart the agency's work through 2030, clarifying GPCOG's role in a rapidly changing world, setting goals, and positioning the agency to meet the needs of our members and the regional opportunities ahead of us.

Attachment E

Agency Assessment

Working Document for GPCOG's Strategic Plan Update

DRAFT 8/28/23

In May of 2017, GPCOG's [Strategic Plan](#) outlined an ambitious set of outcomes that defined the agency's work for five years. The Plan was extended for another two years, through June 2024.

In the six year period since the plan's adoption, GPCOG greatly expanded its member services, helped the region respond to two major disruptions (the pandemic and the sudden arrival of hundreds of asylum seekers), proved it could quickly distribute tens of millions of relief dollars, merged with PACTS and improved transportation decisionmaking, expressed the region's voice in Augusta, and doubled its size to provide significant new capacity to its members and partners.

GPCOG was able to achieve much of what the 2017 Strategic Plan called for, but there remains more to do. The agency has the potential to deliver more services to its members by making sure all members know what's on offer. The region could become a stronger advocate for our fair share in Augusta and in DC for investments in shovel-ready and shovel-worthy projects. Cities and towns can more intentionally lock arms to pursue regional solutions to our most vexing challenges.

The combination of deeply engaged members, a growing roster of trusted community partners, and an exceptional professional staff at GPCOG made possible everything that's been accomplished so far, and promises more progress to come.

What follows is a summary of GPCOG's performance under the 2017 Strategic Plan. For a more in-depth analysis please review this [detailed agency assessment](#).

Three Strategic Priorities

1. [Provide responsive member services to strengthen cities and towns](#)

The Strategic Plan called on GPCOG to offer a higher level of service to its members, including offering brand new services and enhancing work to build municipal capacity.

New services

After the plan's adoption, GPCOG continued its decades-long tradition of cooperatively purchasing and providing planning and data services, while significantly growing its offerings.

New member services include sustainability, facilitation and trainings for councils and boards, and communications (video, web design, and media relations). For groups of municipalities, we provided shared services.

When municipalities needed help negotiating cable franchise agreements with national companies, Tony Plante organized a consortium of municipalities to fight back. As broadband needs were thrown into relief during the pandemic, Clara McCool convened municipalities to get the best deal at the best price. When newly arriving asylum seekers exceeded Portland's capacity to house them, Tom Bell helped organize Host Homes and Belinda Ray stood up the Safe in Maine Fund with Westbrook, Yarmouth, Cape Elizabeth, and Scarborough stepping to the plate with significant contributions and developed an innovative transitional housing campus proposal.

Enhanced municipal capacity

The plan called on GPCOG to build municipal capacity in three ways:

1. Help members and partners attract new grants and resources to the region. Belinda Ray led an agencywide effort to bring more state and federal resources to our region, especially in the wake of federal pandemic relief. Under Julia Breul's leadership, the Resilience Corps added capacity to members and partners by providing part and full time staff to host communities. Sara Mills-Knapp helped members access new state funding for climate work.
2. Build a strong peer network to spread best practices and innovations. Tom Bell and Dani Deason have brought energy and vision to new member networking opportunities, including Chairs in a Circle for elected officials and Coffees with COG. Regular staff roundtables for managers, planners, public works directors, economic development directors, communications officers, and sustainability professionals keep our region connected.
3. Explore municipal service consolidation or sharing. With some small exceptions, these opportunities have been led by Cumberland County or not requested by members. Tony Plante remains available to facilitate any desired initiatives in this area.

A continuing challenge is that the region does not have many shovel-ready projects ready for federal investment. An area for improvement is increasing the number of elected officials and municipal staff who understand GPCOG's role and all the agency has to offer to its members.

2. **Lead the region toward shared and sustainable prosperity**

Both before and during the pandemic, and into the changed post-pandemic economy, GPCOG has strengthened the region's economic resilience. Josh Kochis ensured that tens of millions of dollars were pumped to the region's businesses, providing timely economic relief. Paul Johnson has supercharged GPCOG's small business loan program, fully allocating available funds. Andrew Clark helped the region's seven public transportation agencies access an influx of federal relief funds to keep the buses, trains and ferries running.

The Strategic Plan called for three new initiatives to build regional prosperity.

1. Develop shared vision and a regional plan. GPCOG has been unable to create a single plan for the region that combines all aspects of greater prosperity. Driven by differing needs of member communities, unaligned federal funding, and an absence of member-wide consensus, GPCOG has instead generated a set of regional plans for long range transportation, transit improvements, transportation safety, economic development, and a coastal resilience plan in the works. These plans are built to support each other, and lay the foundation for new regional housing and climate action plans.
2. Establish a regional voice. Over the last six years, Chris Hall led our successful entry into the world of advocacy and policy engagement. GPCOG has provided increasingly impactful testimony at the State Legislature on budget, housing, climate action, and transportation policy issues. Member engagement has grown over time, including 2023 municipal collaboration through the Metro Regional Coalition to advance proposals on homelessness, General Assistance, and housing policy.

GPCOG's growing relationships with lawmakers and the Mills Administration have enabled the agency to become the regional implementing partner in major state policy initiatives including housing, broadband, climate action, and economic development.

3. Provide more robust and helpful data. Rick Harbison now leads an agency team capable of providing insightful data analysis and visualization on topics that range from land use and transportation to climate and economic development. Tom Bell provides communications expertise that makes data more useful and understandable.

When member communities need to make a data-informed decision, they can turn to GPCOG for insight and assistance.

3. Operate with excellence

The Strategic Plan called for GPCOG to streamline and improve internal systems. The agency has made a quantum leap forward in this area. Josh Kochis has flawlessly managed GPCOG finances across annual audits. Tony Plante has brought best municipal practices to human resource management and agency operations. GPCOG's finances are stable, its internal systems are continually improving, and it has become known as a place where talented people want to work.

Other highlights include:

- The organization doubled its capacity. Belinda Ray is GPCOG's new engine bringing new resources to the region and to the agency. Her success, supported by many others on the team, has helped GPCOG grow its annual budget and staff capacity dramatically.

When GPCOG gains resources, they are used to expand member services. New agency capacity to help communities address pandemic losses, the housing shortage, homelessness, climate action, transportation safety, broadband, and more represent substantial new municipal member benefits.

- We have new communications capacity. The plan asked GPCOG to communicate more clearly. GPCOG's experienced communications and engagement team tells our region's and our projects' stories in well-designed materials, through media coverage and on a weekly radio show that showcases the leaders and successes in our region.
- We merged. The plan asked for GPCOG and PACTS to explore a merger. In 2019, the two organizations merged and implemented a [series of reforms](#). As a result, under Chris Chop's leadership, the region now allocates funding with consistency, actively manages projects to move them forward more quickly, and better uses committee and member time. Kat Violette and Marcel Ntagora have been nationally recognized for bringing more voices to decision-making tables.
- We created a c3. A bonus development not anticipated in the plan, is GPCOG's creation of the Center for Regional Prosperity, a 501(c)(3). This new non-profit provided the runway for the launch of the Maine Broadband Coalition, hosts the Safe in Maine fund, and is the pass-through to construct a new shelter.

After experiencing rapid growth during the pandemic, the next 'operate with excellence' frontier is to stand-up a system for measuring and evaluating the agency's impact.

Attachment F

Trends & Disruptions

Working Document for GPCOG's Strategic Plan Update

DRAFT 8/21/23

This summary report identifies key trends in the region, nation, and globe that will impact our communities and the region's residents. It is based on a literature review, as well as the staff leadership team's catalog of signals and trends in our region, assembled over the last year. It identifies the disruptions, stresses and shocks our region should anticipate. For more information please review this [research](#).

Challenges

Climate change

Meta-trends include loss of life and property from heat, flooding, fire, and extreme weather. Agriculture and fisheries will continue to be stressed, threatening food security.

Local trends include climate change moving faster than climate action, limited resources to fund climate action, insufficient investments in community and infrastructure resilience, density of coastal development in vulnerable places and shrinking footprint of insurance, and limited public prioritization of climate action.

At risk people

Meta-trends include the expanding drug epidemic, unaddressed mental health needs, future pandemics, and in-migration of asylum seekers and climate refugees.

Local trends include people experiencing homelessness in encampments and shelters, insufficient response to growing drug misuse, insufficient resources to provide mental health services, and little public awareness or concern with future pandemics.

Shifting economy

Meta-trends include economic losses from domestic and foreign causes, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence displacing workers, and increasing concentration of wealth.

Local trends include the housing shortage, unaffordability of housing (particularly for young families), insufficient workforce to meet current and future economic needs, an aging population, and growing income inequality.

Governance

Meta-trends include loss of consensus on truth, pervasive and polarizing social media, loss of trust in government and the press, erosion of the rule of law, and the rise of extremism.

Local trends include rising incivility, burnout in local government, expanding extremism, and rising threats against local officials and local press.