



## Metro Regional Coalition Agenda

**October 10, 2023**

**Noon to 1:30 pm**

**Hybrid meeting – In Person at GPCOG and Via ZOOM Conferencing**

If attending via Zoom, please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85676857436>

Webinar ID: 856 7685 7436, or call 646.558.8656

*This meeting will be conducted in person and remotely in accordance with the requirements of GPCOG Executive Committee policy, [LD 1772, PL 2022 Ch. 666](#), and [1 MRSA Chapter 13, Subchapter 1](#).*

**Participants are reminded that this meeting will be recorded and posted on the GPCOG website.**

### **1. Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)**

Chair Michael Foley will call the meeting to order, remind attendees that the meeting is being recorded, and ask attendees to briefly introduce themselves.

### **2. Acceptance of minutes from the September 12, 2023 meeting (Attachment A)**

The minutes from the September 12, 2023 MRC meeting are found below as Attachment A. A motion for acceptance is in order.

### **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. MRC Work Plan 2023-2024 (15 minutes) (Attachment B)**

**Staff report:** Each year in September the Metro Regional Coalition establishes its work plan for the coming year. Staff revised the attached draft plan per member input at the September MRC meeting. The revised draft is ready for further discussion, edits, and adoption.

**Action:** Review, amendment, and approval of the 2023-24 MRC work plan.

### **5. Legislative Update (20 minutes)**

**Staff report:** Chris Hall will review several important pieces of legislation that were carried over into the upcoming legislative session, including:

- Transitional housing policies. [LD 1721](#), *An Act to Create Transitional Housing Communities for Homeless Populations in the State*
- General Assistance reform. [LD 1426](#), *An Act to Secure Housing for the Most Vulnerable Maine Residents by Amending the Laws Governing Municipal General Assistance*, [LD 1732](#), *An Act to Expand the General Assistance Program*, [LD 1664](#), *An Act to Increase Reimbursement Under the General Assistance Program.*
- Regional planning support. [LD 602](#), *An Act to Provide Regional Support to Deliver State and Federal Programs to Cities and Towns in the State.*

**Action:** Information and an opportunity to re-engage efforts to support legislative progress on key policy issues.

## 6. MRC Member Roundtable (15 minutes)

**Staff report:** This standing agenda item gives MRC members a chance to share updates with each other, and to discuss common issues outside the regular meeting agenda.

## 7. Office of New Americans Update (30 minutes starting at 1 pm)

**Staff report:** Hannah Pingree, Director of the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF), will join members to update them on her Office’s work developing proposals in response to Governor’s [Executive Order](#) establishing a state Office of New Americans (ONA).

**Action:** Information and an opportunity to share member perspectives on the scope and duties of the new ONA.

## 8. Adjourn

## Upcoming Meetings (all Noon to 1:30 pm both in person and remote via Zoom)

November 21, 2023  
December 12, 2023  
January 9, 2024  
February 13, 2024  
March 12, 2024  
April 9, 2024  
May 21, 2024  
June 18, 2024

## Attachment A



# Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

## September 12, 2023

### In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Hope Cahan	Falmouth
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Jeremy Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Ephrem Paraschak	Gorham
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Travis Kennedy	Cumberland County
Gail Kezer	Office of Sen. King
Halsey Frank	Office of Sen. Collins
<b>Guest</b>	Kristen Dow, City of Portland
<b>For GPCOG</b>	Chris Hall, Bellinda Ray, Matt Panfil, 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 June 20, 2023 meeting

Jerre Bryant moved acceptance of the minutes of the June 20, 2023 MRC meeting seconded by Matt Sturgis. A roll call was conducted. The motion was passed unanimously among those voting.

### 3. Public Comment

None.

#### 4. MRC Work Plan 2023-2024

Each year in September the Metro Regional Coalition establishes its work plan for the coming year. Chris Hall presented a draft FY 2023-24 MRC work plan prepared by staff for member feedback, edits, additions, and revisions.

After reviewing the plan format Hall described four proposed priorities for action and advocacy, and three educational priorities. Members offered the following discussion and decisions:

**Goal #1:** “Continue expanding housing choices and increasing the supply of workforce housing in MRC communities” was approved as presented. This work is a continuation of previous MRC work plan priorities and remains a top regional concern.

- Matt Panfil, GPCOG’s Planning Director, spoke to the upcoming regional housing scorecard as a new data collection mechanism (replacing the MRC-based housing report from prior years).
- Members confirmed their understanding of Connect 2045 Priority Centers, and how those centers can be focal points for integrating housing with transportation and other related investments.

**Goal #2:** “Provide more options for unhoused people in our region through transitional housing, reforms to General Assistance, and increased shelter capacity” was also approved as presented.

- [LD 1721](#), *An Act to Create Transitional Housing Communities for Homeless Populations in the State*, was carried over by the legislature to the next session, and the bill remains an opportunity to advance a statewide transitional housing strategy.
- General Assistance reforms are under consideration by the Mills Administration and will be a part of the next legislative session.
- Encampments of unhoused people are an accelerating challenge that MRC will have an opportunity to engage.

**Goal #3:** “Grow our region’s workforce through assisting with the implementation of the Governor’s 10-year Economic Development Plan” was approved as presented with the substitution of the third Action to focus on municipal workforce shortages and retention challenges.

- Members shared their collective struggles finding and retaining municipal workforce at every level.
- Members felt that existing municipal workforce programming needs to be supplemented and strengthened.
- Members noted that the lack of affordable and available childcare was another major barrier to finding and retaining the workforce. While members agreed not to add it to the formal work plan, they expressed interest in maintaining an educational focus on the issue.

**Goal #4:** “Prepare for climate change through planning and emergency preparedness” was removed from the work plan because these issues are being addressed elsewhere, and because MRC can only focus effectively on a limited number of issues.

- Members agreed that moving this topic to an educational work plan item would allow for updates and better collective understanding of the work being done at the local level.
- Members noted that climate migration will add additional pressure to the region’s housing problems

Regarding educational priorities for the work plan, members approved the Economic Development and Transportation topics, removed the Governance topic, and substituted the Climate Action and Preparedness topic.

Staff will redraft the MRC work plan to reflect the members’ input and will include approval of the amended work plan in the October 10<sup>th</sup> MRC meeting agenda.

## 5. Transitional Housing and Shelter Update

Belinda Ray provided updates on several developments over the summer impacting the unhoused in our region, including:

- [Project HOME](#) was successfully launched by the Quality Housing Coalition, building on the 2019 Host Homes project, and focusing on longer term housing in private homes for asylum seekers.
- 166 Industrial Parkway on Riverside Street in Portland is nearing completion of its renovations, turning the former commercial space into a new 180-bed shelter housing facility that will in turn free up other shelter spaces. The project expects to be ready for occupancy by Thanksgiving.
- [Safe in Maine](#) continues to receive new municipal financial support as it advances transitional housing opportunities, most recently receiving \$25,000 from the Town of Falmouth.
- [Phoenix Flats](#), which the MRC toured in June, is now 80% occupied with full leasing expected very soon, providing 45 new affordable housing units.
- In response to a question, Belinda reported that the Unity College transitional housing campus proposal remains viable and is now in the hands of the state and partners in central Maine.

Next, Kristen Dow, Portland’s Director of Health & Human Services, gave members an update on housing challenges in the city.

She reported that despite managing 850 shelter beds in Portland nightly, at last count 224 tents remained occupied by an undetermined number of unhoused people. The City will hold a public workshop on September 14<sup>th</sup> to discuss policy options and the evolving logistics of the encampments.

Finally, members agreed that the MRC should request a meeting with the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future regarding the Governor’s [Executive Order](#) last month setting the stage for establishing a state level Office of New Americans. Staff will request a meeting.

## **6. MRC Member Roundtable**

Members deferred discussion until the next meeting due to time constraints.

## **7. Adjourn**

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

## Attachment B

### **Metro Regional Coalition 2023-2024 WORKPLAN REVISED DRAFT 9.13.23**

These are the Metro Regional Coalition's goals for Fall 2023 through Summer 2024 and its planned actions to achieve those goals.

#### **Priorities for Action and Advocacy**

##### **Expand Housing Choices**

**Goal #1:** Continue expanding housing choices and increasing the supply of workforce housing in MRC communities for low-, moderate-, and middle-income households, while implementing recent state zoning and housing requirements.

##### **Actions:**

Lead a collective response to help our region meet state housing growth targets:

- a) Collect and track housing data through the Metro Regional Coalition's annual housing report
- b) Provide planning and technical assistance, as requested, to support member strategies to encourage well-located housing projects that expand density, mobility options, resilience, and sustainability.
- c) Work to align local and regional investments in infrastructure, transportation, and climate action with housing developments, in Priority Centers

##### **Advance Solutions to Homelessness**

**Goal #2:** Provide more options for unhoused people in our region through transitional housing, reforms to General Assistance, and increased shelter capacity.

##### **Actions:**

- a) Continue support for [LD 1721](#), *An Act to Create Transitional Housing Communities for Homeless Populations in the State*.
- b) Continue support for changes to state General Assistance law that reduce the staffing and fiscal burdens on municipalities.
- c) Understand and implement best practices for replacing encampments of unhoused people with safer, more supportive housing options.

##### **Retain and expand our workforce**

**Goal #3:** Grow our region's workforce through assisting with the implementation of the Governor's 10-year Economic Development Plan.

**Actions:**

- a) Engage with the formation of the state [Office of New Americans](#) at the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future.
- b) Welcome and retain newly arriving asylum seekers, refugees, and other relocating populations through regional implementation of the Governor's Economic Development Strategy and the Safe in Maine Fund.
- c) Examine existing supports for municipal worker attraction and retention and identify opportunities to strengthen efforts to attract and retain municipal workforce at all levels.

**Education Priorities**

- A. **Economic Development** – Learn about emerging new developments in the region and the implementation of [Greater Portland's Regional Prosperity Plan 2023-2028](#), the new GPCOG 5-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) plan.
- B. **Transportation** – Learn about the regional implementation of [Connect 2045](#), [Transit Together](#), [Vision Zero](#)
- C. **Climate Preparedness** – Learn about what individual municipalities are doing to increase climate preparedness and encourage collaboration and exchange of best practices throughout the region.