
GPCOG Executive Committee

MINUTES

January 13, 2021

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Jerry Maxfield	Windham
Sandy Carder	Grey
Belinda Ray	Portland
Justin Poirier	Chebeague Island
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Stephen Cole	Maine Dept. of Transportation
Tom Reinauer	Maine Dept. of Transportation
Chris Chop, Chris Hall, Clara McCool, Julia Breul, Harold Spetla, Kristina Egan, Tony Plante, Andrew Butcher	GPCOG Staff

Welcome

Nat Tupper, President, opened the meeting, which was held via Zoom.

Acceptance of 11/9/20 Minutes

Matthew Sturgis moved approval of the 11/09/20 meeting minutes. Susan Witonis seconded. The roll was called, and all were in favor.

Public Comment

No public comment was provided.

Nominations for Executive Committee

Matthew Sturgis moved approval to appoint Justin Poirier and Kate Lewis as Executive Committee members for a five-month term. Belinda Ray seconded. The roll was call and all were in favor. The GPCOG General Assembly will appoint two vacancies in May of 2021.

Executive Director's Report

Kristina Egan gave a summary of the recent Portland Press Herald article and editorial which profiles GPCOG and helps position the agency as a vehicle to address regional challenges. Also highlighted was Tony Plante's work on a Mutual Aid Compact with the public works directors in the region aimed to share relief (from pandemic and other threats) across towns. Harrison, Durham, Arundel, and Sebago have already signed on.

A call to action has been put to the region for both shovel ready and shovel worthy projects. Chris Chop is leading the agency in developing a list for projects in the transportation sector as well as broadband, climate and other relevant areas. GPCOG is advocating through the appropriations process for the state to develop a Predevelopment Assistance Fund for resilience projects.

There will be a Coffee with COG called Transit Disrupted in January to discuss the future of transit. Chairs in a Circle will take place in February encouraging representatives to engage in a peer exchange with a focus on budget priorities.

PACTS committees have been restructured and applications are open to citizens who want to participate in the allocating of federal funding. Positions valuing environmental, active transit and equity perspectives are to be included.

Westbrook and the City of Portland are working on a Winter Dine effort to encourage the region's residents to patron local restaurants safely.

GPCOG has a new partnership with the Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center by way of staff member Marcel Ntagora helping immigrant businesses understand and complete state application process.

Spotlight: Resilience Corps

Julia Breul is the Program Manager for the Resilience Corps – a program aimed to boost capacity and enable resilience across the region. AmeriCorps, by way of Volunteer Maine, has awarded GPCOG with a \$217,000 grant leveraged by recovery funding from EDA CARES. Fourteen AmeriCorps members are serving terms of 17,00 hours from November 6th 2020 to October 14th 2021 within GPCOG and with regional members and partners. Service topics include events and communications, economic development, sustainability and climate, broadband and equity, data and digital service, land use and planning, transportation and outreach. Four Corps Members are being highlighted in the Maine Dept Economic and Community Development storytelling initiative. Clara McCool gave an update on her work as the broadband resilience corps member working with the towns of Harrison and Naples as well as the Maine Broadband Coalition.

Nat Tupper gave remarks of encouragement and upliftment about the energy and dedication of

the fellows. This is a pilot year and the potential for AmeriCorps fellows to be working with GPCOG is potential three years.

Partnership with MaineDOT

Tom Reinauer is the director of public outreach and planning and Stephen Cole is a regional planner for Midcoast and Cumberland/York county at the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT).

GPCOG has two contracts with MDOT. One is for PACTS and includes eighteen communities and another funds non-PACTS communities, like helping Sebago with sidewalks. The rural Maine funding is much smaller of which MDOT has worked with GPCOG's Harold Spetla.

Key aspects of this partnership include stakeholder outreach and municipality communication. MDOT wants to provide relevant and correct information with its nine regional organizations, like GPCOG. Jen Brickett is the director of the MDOT bureau which is directly under the commissioner Bruce Van Note which points to the importance of integrating regional planners, planning bureaus, the community services of MDOT, and regional offices.

Within the month, MDOT will release its statewide workplan which shows the three-year funding plan for specific projects. MDOT hopes to include regional planning agencies in the future with things like a survey for municipal feedback.

Sandy and Kate spoke to their good experience with MDOT and expressed hope for better communication. Nat suggested that there be a better way to report on financial status and contract obligations.

Federal Funding

Chris Hall has been tracking state and federal funding. He clarified aspects of the December 27th Horizon law that includes additions to the CARES Act and changes in the FY21 appropriations structure, both highlighting additional transportation funding.

The Horizon law has almost ten billion in surface transportation block grant programs, and it indicates that some of it can be used for a variety of purposes. Fifteen billion was awarded to transit agencies and GPCOG staff is looking at regional eligibility.

In the appropriations portion, two billion dollars is set aside for discretionary highways and infrastructure programs, two billion is for capital investment, five hundred million for transit infrastructure grants and one billion for national infrastructure investments. It's important to talk as a region to discuss the most important projects to pursue. GPCOG might not be able to accept the new transit aid, save the Downeaster, because state and local government wasn't funded in this round.

The call for projects that GPCOG has put out welcomes input on the process to influence where incoming federal money goes. When towns speak as a region, it will be more likely to receive

funding.

Sandy mentioned her town is working on their shovel ready list. Jerry is pushing forward on a partnership with Portland Water District in North Windham, encouraging the regional hub. Nat offered the need for a comprehensive shared vision for the region and asked about match requirements. It will most likely be program specific.

Revenues from Maine Economic Recovery Grant Program

Josh Kochis administered sixty-seven million dollars in economic recovery grants and GPCOG was paid by fee per application. There is now \$400,000 dollars to allocate to other purposes. In fiscal year 2018, GPCOG had a deficit of \$255,000 and in fiscal year 2019, there was a deficit of \$150,000. GPCOG is in much better financial shape now because there was no withdrawal in the last two years.

GPCOG staff suggests putting the \$400,000 back into the GPCOG Reserve Fund. Belinda happily shared that this motion represents meeting a goal to be fiscally sustainable. Matt echoed that this represents a good standing position to be in the future.

The organizational budget at GPCOG has grown. It is now at about four million operating dollars. There is an investment policy that says GPCOG will try to utilize no more than 3% of principal balance at the start of the year, but it is not binding. GPCOG will send out the investment policy to the board. The investment committee will meet in April.

Belinda Ray made a motion to approve the staff recommendations and Matt Sturgis seconded.

Nat called for a full roll call, Chris Hall asked all were in favor.

Adjourn

The final item on the agenda, the next strategic plan, will be tabled until the next meeting on February 10. Matt Sturgis moved to adjourn, and Sandy Carder seconded.