

GPCOG Executive Committee

MINUTES January 17, 2023

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Jarrold Maxfield	Windham
John Hawley	Naples
Mary Fernandes	Casco
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Krista Chappell	Gray
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Mark Dion	Portland

Welcome

With Jarrod and the other officers remote for the meeting, Kristina opened the meeting.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Acceptance of 11/15/22 Minutes

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

Spotlight: Broadband in our Region

Clara McCool, Regional Broadband Coordinator, said that 57% of households in Cumberland County are unserved, based on the state's definition. The Lakes Region, where GPCOG has been convening a subregional group to expand broadband access, is covered by Spectrum, but does not have high speeds or reliable service. The goal is to extend universal high speed internet coverage that is affordable. John

Hawley, who has been working with Clara, said that towns can't address broadband issues alone because they are unable to get the attention of funders. Bigger projects attract grants and service providers. Nat asked whether GPCOG was funded through state money, and Clara said that federal funds are flowing through the state. Nat noted that the federal and state definitions of adequate speeds are quite different. Clara said that the Federal Communications Commission is aware that the federal definition is outdated. Clara used [this slide deck](#).

Executive Director's Report

Kristina announced that Gray, Durham, Bridgton, and Casco will receive new transportation studies via GPCOG's rural transportation program. Casco, Naples, Raymond, Sebago and Standish will all receive \$10,000 in broadband planning funds, secured through a grant GPCOG wrote for the communities. She congratulated Yarmouth and Freeport for deciding to share a new Sustainability Coordinator. Upcoming guests on Let's Connect, the WMPG radio show Kristina hosts include Kate Lewis and Tom Hall.

Regional Strategy to Expand Housing Choices

Executive Committee members provided feedback on the draft regional housing strategy, noting that:

- We are in a crisis, or at least in a challenging and perpetual housing shortage.
- Not many tools are being used successfully by municipalities, so it's worth GPCOG addressing housing and encouraging towns to think longer term.
- Will it work? We don't know, but we should try.
- But, the Leadership Council isn't the way to go. Creating a Council would create, at best, another meeting or layer of government, and at worst, could provide an excuse for some to drag their feet, and put time in between ideas and action.
- The group suggested an alternative: a clearinghouse that was a more 'bottom-up' approach focused on a 'coalition of the willing' municipalities. Help/ technical assistance will be in the form of providing data, public education, best practices, tools, and a general ability to help towns answer questions they encounter. This will allow GPCOG to tailor help for different types of municipalities, ranging from cities to rural towns.
- Some towns, like Bridgton, need help developing relationships with developers, for example. South Portland has already done a lot on housing. Windham hired a consultant to look at its ordinances to see what might be impeding housing. This type of technical assistance is valuable.
- The barriers listed in the strategy are real issues, not just obstacles to overcome.
- One barrier to affordability is lack of access to capital. Developers need to be paid to produce affordable housing.
- One strategy could be the creation of a regional housing authority.
- Another consideration is ensuring long-term affordability of units.

Jarrod noted that cities and towns can't stop the growth that's coming. GPCOG's role is to share best practices, support the capacity of towns to shape the coming growth, including advocating for funding for municipalities, and cooperate regionally to address the shortage. We need to move with purpose.

Staff will bring back a revised housing strategy, reflecting this input, for Executive Committee consideration at the February meeting.

Proposed Brownfield Grant and Loan

Joined by Mike Hulseley from the South Portland Housing Development Corporation, Paul presented the proposed \$500,000 grant and \$177,000 loan to clean up the brownfield at 149A Front Street in South Portland. Mike reported the Authority is planning to develop housing on the Yard South site. Carmen noted there is value in any brownfield being cleaned up and made usable. Kate requested information on whether the conditions of the grant and loan require that the land be used for affordable housing and asked if the clean-up will proceed if the site is not approved for a zoning change that would allow housing. She also asked if there's a timeframe within which the funds need to be used. Paul replied that the cleanup will, most likely, happen independent of the zone change approval. Additionally, he would doublecheck the loan conditions in regard to affordable housing. Paul confirmed for Matt that GPCOG holds the first position on financing and that all other loans are subordinated. Kate noted that she will vote in favor of the grant and loan, but noted that she is not endorsing a change in zoning or indicating support for the proposed Yard South project.

Matt moved approval of \$500,000 in grant funding and \$177,000 in loan funding for the South Portland Housing Development Corporations clean-up of the 149A Front Street 3.16 acre parcel in South Portland. Mark seconded. The role was called, and all were in favor.

FY24 Member Dues Rate

Tony reviewed the proposal to increase the member dues rate to \$2.10 for FY24, with an intention of increasing the dues \$2.20 for FY25 and \$2.25 for FY26. and presented data in a [slide deck](#). Krista asked if the population was recently adjusted, and Kristina confirmed that dues were adjusted this last year (FY23) based on the new decennial census data. Kate expressed reluctance given the financial strains on South Portland. Nat noted that the proposed 5% increase covers a 4 year period, and the return on investment justifies and increase. Krista noted that the total increase for Gray is \$1,500, and that the services Gray receives more than makes up for this increase. Matt reminded the group that GPCOG had no dues increase for 27 years, and that hamstrung us and we left money on the table because we couldn't match grants. We don't want a repeat of that situation. The advice from our investment agency was to hold the line with the investment account to allow the fund to grow back.

Nat moved to recommend to the General Assembly a FY24 dues increase to \$2.10, with an endorsement of the concept to increase dues in future years. Matt seconded. The roll was called and all were in favor.

FY22 Audit Report

Jen Conners from Runyon Kersteen Ouellette reviewed GPCOG's FY22 financial statements and audit, including indirect costs, and used [a slide deck](#). The auditor has an unmodified opinion, noting that GPCOG has no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies. In the audit team's testing, there were no compliance findings. The audit was very clean across the board. The Executive Committee opted not to ask staff to leave the room for a private discussion with the auditor, and offered their congratulations to Josh for his excellent work for the agency.

Matt moved to accept the audit, noting thanks to staff. Nat seconded. All were in favor.

The Executive Committee adjourned.