



DRAFT

Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

April 12, 2022

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Amy Kuhn, Chair	Falmouth
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Kate Snyder	Portland
Anne McGuire	Portland
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Mark Winter	Office of Senator Collins
Gail Kezar	Office of Senator King
Sarah Lawrence	Office of Representative Pingree
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan, Belinda Ray, Chris Hall, Tom Bell

1. Welcome and introductions

Amy Kuhn called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm and welcomed everyone.

2. Acceptance of minutes from the February 8, 2022 meeting

Ginny Wilder-Cross moved acceptance of the minutes of the March 8, 2022 MRC meeting. Kate Snyder seconded. A roll call vote was held. The motion passed with all voting in favor.

3. Public Comment

There was none.

4. Asylum Housing White Paper Presentation

Belinda Ray presented a report on GPCOG's research into transitional housing strategies, discussing the opportunities to shape regional strategies to create short-term and long-term temporary shelter solutions.

Belinda's power point presentation can be found [here](#).

Belinda began by framing the arrival of asylum seekers as a regional and statewide opportunity to reverse our population demographics, to add to our cultural diversity, and to expand our work force in the years ahead.

But our state, regional, and local capacity to house newly arriving asylum seekers is broken. Belinda detailed how our current procedures for providing temporary shelter are reactive, unplanned, scattered. Insecure, and expensive.

Mayor Snyder shared that as of 4/11/22 Portland was supporting 313 asylum seeking families (1071 people), and has been receiving approximately 100 additional asylum seekers every week for the last several weeks. These numbers do not include people unhoused for other reasons, who total approximately 500.

The vision of a campus-style transitional housing facility was offered as a long-term solution. The campus would include housing, support services, amenities, and stability for new arrivals until permanent housing could be found for them.

Belinda estimated that it would take two years to open a campus. But since new temporary shelter options are needed immediately, she discussed several options for creating short-term transitional housing, which she hoped might be available as early as July of this year if everyone comes together around this approach.

These options included modular, mobile, pallet-built, tents, and repurposing of existing commercial and other interior spaces. All options are being evaluated for cost, for how quickly they can be built/erected, and how they can be repurposed after the need for their use is over.

During Q&A the following points were addressed:

- The cost of both temporary and long-term solutions will be worked out with partners. Funding sources may include federal, state, and local government funding, as well as philanthropic, business, and faith community contributions.
- Kristina Egan discussed her efforts to identify specific locations for these efforts. To date she has spoken with 18 community leaders and identified over 35 potential locations. Each location is being evaluated against several criteria, including safety, access to transportation, and ease of service delivery.
- While asylum seekers are the primary focus today, the solutions that emerge for them can be used by other populations over time.

- In response to member questions about shortening the time that asylum seekers must wait before getting a work permit (currently one year), Mark Winter shared Senator Collins' efforts to advance her bill to shorten the waiting period, which Senator King has joined as a cosponsor. Sarah Lawrence also shared Representative Pingree's efforts to advance her similar bill in the House.
- Mayor Snyder asked Congressional staff to renew discussions with the delegation about the need to extend federal emergency funding for housing asylum seekers, which is due to expire in June.
- Colleges and universities in Maine were suggested as an additional location for temporary shelter housing which staff will investigate.

Belinda closed by saying that work on this approach continues, and the staff will continue to update MRC as progress is made in the coming weeks.

5. 2021 MRC Housing Choice Progress Report Presentation

Chris Hall shared a summary of the upcoming 2021 MRC Housing Choice Progress Report. Chris's power point can be found [here](#). Chris summarized the report in three ways:

First, in 2021, MRC communities saw a large number of housing units produced. Unfortunately, most new units were market rate, and construction of affordable housing for low-and-moderate income households lagged behind.

Second, the cost of housing is rising faster than household income, putting a housing purchase beyond the reach of more and more households.

Third, local housing policies and zoning matter more than ever. Local governments can identify where new housing should be located, they can define what types of housing they want (including below-market housing units), and they can use a growing toolkit of policies and ordinance changes to support developers where needed to help them build housing that is affordable to working families, seniors, young people, and everyone who wants to live and work in the same community.

Chris closed by saying that the full report will be ready soon. When it is, he will circulate to all MRC members. He asked every member to review the report, with particular attention to the individual community reports. Members were encouraged to share any corrections, additions, or other changes they would like to see before the report is finalized.

6. Legislative Update

Chris Hall briefed members on the progress of [LD 2003](#), *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions*, as well as the housing provisions contained in the Governor's Supplemental Budget ([LD 1995](#)).

He reported that LD 2003 is in the final stages and votes in the House and Senate are expected this week. Maine Municipal Association's objections have not been satisfied and MMA remains opposed. GPCOG testified in support of MMA's objections, and also in support of housing goals for the state and each region, technical assistance for municipalities, and state funding for regional support of local housing policy changes. Chris encouraged members to communicate soon if they wanted to share their views with legislators.

Chris also noted that the Governor's Supplemental Budget contains \$22 million for helping address homelessness, and a separate Housing Opportunity Fund at DECD to assist municipalities make housing policy and zoning changes to increase housing. Both provisions are on track in the legislative process so far.

7. COVID-19 Roundtable

Kristina noted that GPCOG will begin hybrid meetings next month, including the May MRC meeting.

8. Adjourn

At 1:24 pm Nathan Poore moved to adjourn, seconded by Kate Snyder. A roll call vote was held and all voted in favor of the motion.