



# DRAFT

## Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

May 10, 2022

### In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Amy Kuhn, Chair	Falmouth
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Pete LaFond	Falmouth
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Ephrem Paraschak	Gorham
Kevin Jensen	Gorham
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Susan Gillis	Cape Elizabeth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Kate Snyder	Portland
Danielle West	Portland
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Mark Winter	Office of Senator Collins
Sarah Lawrence	Office of Representative Pingree
<b>Guest presenter</b>	
Kate Dufour	Maine Municipal Association
<b>For GPCOG</b>	Kristina Egan, Belinda Ray, Chris Hall, Tom Bell

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Amy Kuhn called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm and welcomed everyone.

### 2. Acceptance of minutes from the April 12, 2022 meeting

Mike Foley moved acceptance of the minutes of the April 12, 2022 MRC meeting. Ginny Wilder-Cross seconded. A roll call vote was held. The motion passed with all voting in favor.

### 3. Public Comment

Ken Capron suggested adding an MRC mission statement to the MRC agendas.

### 4. Legislative Update – Guest Kate Dufour

Kate Dufour, Maine Municipal Association's Director, Advocacy & Communications, shared a comprehensive update from the just-concluded legislative session. Kate touched on many legislative outcomes, including the following:

Thematically, municipalities faced many small legislative actions that accumulated into large impacts on local budgets and municipal operations.

At the same time, many good things were done by the legislature that benefit municipalities, especially in the state budget. In the supplemental state budget:

- Funding was continued for 55% of local educational costs totaling \$1.35 billion in state aid to education. In addition, the property tax credit was increased.
- For the first time the legislature created a \$15 million dollar education funding reserve to cover future shortfalls in state aid to local education.
- A \$10 million dollar housing relief fund was created, along with \$22 million dollars dedicated to addressing homelessness.
- In support of LD 2003, \$2.5 million dollars in state funding for housing related zoning and land use planning and technical support was approved, as well as funding necessary to reimburse municipalities for zoning and land use changes mandated by LD 2003.

Outside the budget Kate reviewed the following:

- The Secretary of State will increase election integrity efforts, and expand training and support for municipal clerks.
- A study of General Assistance will continue and is expected to result in changes in the current system. Some members expressed keen interest in being involved in future policy discussions.
- State funding of County jails will move to a more data-based system, and will include \$20 million dollars in guaranteed minimum funding for the first time. Kate saw this as a win for Counties, municipalities, and taxpayers.
- LD 2003 became law and will require changes in land use and zoning for most municipalities regarding multifamily housing, accessory dwelling units, and housing density regulations.

- A new study Commission was formed to examine the impact of short term rentals on housing availability.
- Legislative actions to limit sludge spreading to reduce PFAS exposures will increase municipal waste disposal costs, but will benefit the environment. Similarly, legislative requirements to shift municipal light duty vehicle fleets to electric vehicles will have similar impacts.
- New legislation liberalizes the use of remote meetings by local governments, and eases the use of a remote meeting to institute remote meetings.
- Tax law changes include expansion of the Veteran's property tax benefit, creation of a new property tax stabilization program where qualifying seniors can 'freeze' their assessment, with the state paying for lost revenues, and a new \$20,000 per town funding allocation for communities that open their towns to marijuana sales for the first time.

Kate concluded by urging members to run for the MMA Legislative Policy Committee, asking others to do the same, and communicating with LPC members throughout the year to help MMA best represent the diverse municipal views across the state.

## **5. Asylum Housing Crisis Progress Report**

Belinda Ray gave an update on progress being made toward finding innovative solutions to the region's asylum seeker housing crisis. She shared the latest information on efforts to locate temporary and permanent shelter housing, as well as the status of ongoing work with local, regional, and state partners.

Belinda shared that meetings with local officials are ongoing, and the number of potential locations is being refined. Belinda is assembling a group of experts to help local decision makers get answers to their questions about local educational impacts, social services, General Assistance impacts, and other related matters.

Belinda indicated that recent Portland numbers show approximately 300 asylum seeking families (1200 individuals, roughly half children) are in temporary shelter housing (mostly hotel rooms) in 15 locations spread across 7 communities.

Mayor Kate Snyder and Interim Manager Danielle West provided additional information. Last Friday May 6<sup>th</sup> the City hit 1800 total unhoused people. As a result, the City no longer has the staffing, or the financial capacity, to continue to take in new unhoused people as they have been doing.

As of Friday, the City is changing its approach by aligning its procedures with current state law. This means the City will be providing GA housing vouchers to new arrivals, but will not be doing placements or extended support. The City will continue supporting previous placements. State law requires a receiving community to fund GA for 30 days if the unhoused individual finds housing in a different

community. If a receiving community places an unhoused person in a different community, the original receiving community doing the placement is responsible for 6 months of GA costs.

Danielle emphasized the City's continuing request for state and regional help, and for state law changes. She urged MMA, Congressional staff, GPCOG, and other municipalities to all help. In response to a question, she noted that state GA housing maximums are far less than current hotel costs – the result will be that hotels may become unaffordable to unhoused individuals.

Mayor Snyder emphasized that state, federal, and regional discussions are ongoing, but the size of the problem facing Portland is five times bigger than it was during the 2019 asylum housing crisis. With no remaining hotel rooms, no staff capacity, and no financial solution the City is planning on considering a Council Resolution establishing a Task Force to address GA issues facing the City. She encouraged everyone's participation and expected the Resolution to be on the June 6<sup>th</sup> Council agenda.

Members discussed federal progress on extending work permit expiration dates, to 540 days, which will help folks with work permits to continue to work. They also reviewed the end date for FEMA reimbursement of local GA costs, which remains slated for 6.20.22.

## **6. MRC Housing Progress Report Feedback**

Chris Hall invited members to provide him with feedback on the final draft of the MRC 2022 Housing Choice Progress Report. Hall said he hopes to finalize the report by the end of May.

## **7. COVID-19 Roundtable**

Members noted that they are returning to mask requirements, and to remote meetings, as case numbers continue to increase.

## **8. Adjourn**

At 1:20 pm Nathan Poore moved to adjourn, seconded by Mike Foley. A roll call vote was held, and all voted in favor of the motion.