

GPCOG Executive Committee

MINUTES May 23, 2023

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Krista Chappell	Gray
Jarrold Maxfield	Windham
Mary Fernandes	Casco
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Mark Dion	Portland

Welcome

Jarrold opened the meeting at 12:05 p.m., confirmed quorum, and noted that today's meeting was a rescheduling of the 5/16/23 meeting at which the Executive Committee didn't reach quorum.

Public Comment

Mr. Willey, a Portland resident, mentioned that he attended GPCOG's gathering to gather input on the Regional Prosperity Plan in Yarmouth, provided his professional background, and explained the importance of water filtration plants.

Acceptance of 4/25/23 Minutes

Carmen moved approval of the 4/25/23 meeting minutes. Mark seconded. A roll call was conducted. All were in favor.

Spotlight: Radio Show

Teagan Betori, Communications Specialist, said that Let's Connect Greater Portland is GPCOG's radio show that airs live on WMPG, 90.9 FM, every Thursday at 11:30 a.m. There are 25 episodes to date and the radio broadcast reaches GPCOG's full geography. The show is an extension of all of GPCOG's work, providing a forum for educating Greater Portland residents about transportation, housing, broadband, sustainability, and also to celebrate and elevate the leaders in our region. Carmen suggested reaching out to Bridgton's local TV station to share content through that communications vehicle.

Executive Director's Report

GPCOG will convene "Greater Gray" and "Greater Bridgton" subregional meetings this fall. Kristina Egan thanked Jerre for testifying on behalf of a bill that would create a transitional housing campus for people newly arriving in Maine. She also thanked the region's mayors for their testimony on General Assistance reform. GPCOG has received several new grants since the Executive Director's report was written for this agenda, including for marine electrification, Drive Electric Maine, village planning in Pownal, and for small business support through a "hub" program.

FY24 Executive Committee Members and Officers

Kate shared that she is not seeking re-election in November but is pleased to continue to serve with GPCOG through the end of the November. She recommends that the incoming Mayor replace her mid-year.

Jerre moved the nominating committee's slate for FY24. Mark seconded. All were in favor.

Regional Prosperity Plan

The draft Regional Prosperity Plan was developed with the input of many municipalities economic development staff and has been well-received by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The document is structured to be a framework for action, not a list of specific projects, in order to be flexible to roll with the rapidly changing economy. The themes are innovation, inclusion, and resilience.

Kate had several comments:

- Housing is a barrier to shared prosperity, and that needs more emphasis. Chris Hall will amplify that message in the document.
- The language around the lack of political will vilifies elected officials. There are many forces that have blocked housing, and elected officials are often the ones that are advancing housing choices. Chris noted that this concept came from the advisory committee, and he will soften the message to maintain the idea, but phrase it to say that our region needs municipalities to act more quickly to address the housing shortage.
- Items 1 – 6 are general, and we need to make sure there are specific strategies and timelines for taking action.

Kristina asked what the strategies are for getting the work done and for engaging elected leaders in supporting it. Chris said that the plan envisions municipal governments as the main agents of action, and that quarterly convenings will help keep focus on the plan's implementation.

Jarrold noted that the plan is a good roadmap, but, like Kate, is similarly concerned about how elected officials are characterized in the document. Public engagement and education is so important, and when cities and towns advance housing, the public may vilify elected bodies for this work unless better informed and engaged. All of us need to better get the word out about the pros and cons of housing. Chris agreed, and noted that GPCOG's regional housing strategy, adopted by the Executive Committee earlier in the year, embraces public engagement and education as a core activity.

Mary said that housing is a hot issue in Casco and said that casual meetings and discussions can help

change minds, and that constant conversation is needed. The public should be our partners. If we don't provide information, misinformation will fill a vacuum, particularly on social media.

Carmen said that it's important to expand tools for businesses to grow, and asked if agriculture is included in the plan. Chris said it is; agriculture and the food economy is a big part of our region's economic base. Carmen suggested that, as the plan moves into implementation, that meetings with towns include both an elected official and the Town Manager. It is important not to exclude elected officials from this work.

The group agreed on three proposed changes to the plan before adoption:

- Emphasize the importance of housing
- Clarify the municipal role in implementing this plan
- Note the importance of public education to developing public and political support for new housing

Jerre moved to adopt the plan, incorporated the three suggestions of the group in the final version. Mark seconded. The roll was called. Kate opposed, and the remaining members supported, with the motion passing.

Impacts of Member Withdrawal from GPCOG

Tony Plante presented the impact on the region, GPCOG, and any member that withdraws from GPCOG. GPCOG exists to meet our members' needs when they have a need. GPCOG also offers all member access to resources and people. Together we have a larger voice, a more coordinated response to challenges, and an implementing tool for needed actions.

Carmen noted that Raymond pulled out some years back, and that our communities are so interconnected, that the amount each community spends on dues is not a significant amount compared to what communities receive. Tony noted that South Portland's proposal to withdraw would reduce GPCOG's budget by about 1%, but the impact on member services would be much greater since dues dollars leverage federal funds and provide direct and flexible member services on-demand.

This item was for discussion only.

Scope for Strategic Plan Update

Krista asked if there will be a need for a consultant, and Kristina believes the staff team can do this work in-house. The group suggested no changes to the proposed scope.

Advocacy Positions on New Bills

The group discussed [LD 1934](#), *Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine*, which directs the Office of Policy Innovation and the Future to review opportunities for structural changes in the organization of State Government and to make recommendations that will result in the improved coordination and implementation of planning grants and technical assistance programs for communities in this State and regional planning and development organizations. There is no controversy about this proposal.

The group also discussed [LD 404](#) Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council, and its complement, [LD 1450](#) An Act to Fund the Recommendations of the Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council. Mark said that he needed more information about to assess the suitability of existing rail beds for future light rail. Others noted that the trade-off between future rail and trail uses is hard to understand as policymakers as articulated by planners and advocates. The group flagged this for future discussion.

Jerre moved GPCOG support LD 1934. Mark seconded. All were in favor.

FY24 Meeting Calendar

The group adopted the FY24 meeting calendar for the Executive Committee.

Jerre moved adjournment. Mark seconded. All were in favor and the meeting ended at 1:43 p.m.