

GPCOG Executive Committee

MINUTES

September 20, 2022

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Krista Chappell	Gray
Jarrold Maxfield	Windham
Mark Dion	Portland
John Hawley	Naples
Kate Lewis	South Portland
Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Teagan Betori, Vincent Edwards, Tony Plante, Belinda Ray, Tom Bell, Julia Breul, Paul Johnson	GPCOG Staff

Welcome

Jarrold Maxfield opened the hybrid meeting and welcomed Krista to her first Executive Committee meeting.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Acceptance of 5/17/22 Minutes

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

Spotlight: Resilience Corps Fellows

Julia Breul, Resilience Program Manager, delivered a [slide deck](#) sharing that the region hosted 10 Fellows this year. She reported that seven of last year's cohort of Fellows are now working at jobs in the region. Julia introduced three of this year's Fellows: Mia Ambroiggio, City of South Portland Sustainability Fellow; Haley Castle-Miller, City of Portland Economic Opportunity Fellow; and Claire

Luning, GPCOG Land Use and Transportation Fellow. Each Fellow summarized their work and experience building community resilience in our region. Kate Lewis asked the Fellows whether they had faced challenges securing housing in the area, and all replied that the cost and availability of housing is challenging, but the Fellows got on a group chat and shared resources and found housing.

Executive Director's Report

GPCOG has an updated membership services brochure, which was distributed. Chebeague Island and Brunswick have recently decided to work with GPCOG on climate action planning. An oral update on GPCOG's efforts to welcome and retain New Mainers was provided by Belinda Ray. The Safe in Maine fund now has over \$60,000 from contributions from the City of Westbrook, the Town of Cape Elizabeth and private donors. A new website to attract donations will be launched soon. GPCOG has also applied for American Rescue Plan Act funds held by the City of Portland to support a transitional housing campus development. Kristina highlighted this past week's Sunday Telegram article about the importance of New Mainers to addressing the state's workforce shortages.

Loan Committee Appointments

Paul Johnson shared the goal of GPCOG's loan program: to bridge financing gaps for small businesses. The loan committee will be meeting regularly and needs to increase its membership. He invited city and town officials to spread the word to businesses about the availability of the financing GPCOG can provide.

Kate moved to appoint Tina Bonney as Chair of the Revolving Loan Committee and appoint John Cloutier, William Mann, Joshua Brister and Jennifer Allen to the Committee. Mark seconded. The roll was called, and all voted in favor.

Round Robin: Your Community

Each member community answered the question: "What significant thing is happening in your community?"

Yarmouth: Nat said that Yarmouth is starting comprehensive planning, which will be more complex to do in the context of LD2003. The Army Corps is reviewing a proposal to remove the Royal River dam. He is seeing disengagement in local government and volunteer clubs. This has implications for boards, committees, and municipal staffing, like volunteer firefighters. It's a struggle to keep Yarmouth from becoming polarized.

Naples: John noted that it's the time of year that Naples is "rolling up its sidewalks for the season." The town concluded a 2 year revaluation which resulted in a lower mil rate. In November, residents will consider a \$12M proposal to invest in the town office, post office, and community center. The town is short election volunteers, and the Town Hall will need to close on election day so that town staff can

serve as the election workers. At the polls, there has been inappropriate behavior and verbal abuse of election workers. Naples' clerk is fielding lots of Freedom of Information requests.

Portland: Portland is experiencing a moment of great uncertainty. Mark said the City is a sailboat that has no wind and is headed into a fog bank. The upcoming election will be significant for the City's future. Ballot questions propose re-engineering city government. In practice, this uncertainty means a lot of decisions can't be made now, such as the hiring of a permanent City Manager. Portland is also facing big challenges with lack of affordable housing, homelessness, and opioid misuse, but the majority of department heads are interim and the police department is understaffed. Portland, like Naples, is fielding a lot of Freedom of Information requests, the public trust level in government is low, and conspiracy theories are circulating.

South Portland: Kate said the City has many of the same issues as others. There's unrest, conspiracy theories, and lots of Freedom of Information requests. The level of distrust in local government is unprecedented. The school department is serving the most asylum seekers as a percentage of their overall school population in the whole state. The kids are terrific and it's a heavy lift to obtain the needed resources. The City is also facing severe housing challenges, with 400 – 500 families at risk of rent increases. At one point in time according to MLS listings, only 10 units were available in the whole City last month. The City also has a lot of ongoing planning work, including a comprehensive plan and master planning for neighborhoods.

Gray: Gray is doing visioning work for its village center, with GPCOG's and Principle Group's support. Krista reported there's been a positive public response, and she noted that visuals have been particularly helpful. The next step is to work with MaineDOT on changes to the street network to support the village vision. Gray is also experiencing a lot of staff transitions. The Town struggles to find the time and resources to do ordinance development, and Krista is particularly concerned about how LD2003 will affect Gray's plans.

Westbrook: Downtown Westbrook has four simultaneous construction projects happening right now. Jerre said the projects are great; the disruption is not. A medical campus is breaking ground at Rock Row, which is exciting since it is the first non-retail use in Rock Row. The City, like others, is struggling with workforce attraction and retention. Also there is an unprecedented lack of competition for elected positions. Only 2 races of 8 are contested the November.

Windham: Jarrod said that Windham has 3 uncontested Council seats in the upcoming election. There is more polarization at the school board level than in Council chambers. Conspiracy theories are circulating. Some positive developments include the sewer bond passing 70:30 percent in the summer referendum. Access roads to support that project were funded with 90% federal and state funds. The Town is also conserving 700 acres of land to help counter the rapid housing growth in Windham. Trash disposal and recycling are also big issues in town.

Sabbatical Highlight: Community Resiliency

Kristina shared that she learned a lot about mobility and land use on her time away, but decided to focus on the most surprising element of her travels: the very visible climate damage Europe is experiencing. She shared visuals and data on heat and drought, falling water levels on rivers, and shrinking glaciers. While Maine is experiencing damage from climate change, Europe provided her a preview of potential impacts for our region to expect and prepare for. Kristina thanked the Executive Committee for making the sabbatical possible.

The group did not discuss retreat planning due to lack of time. The group adjourned by a show of hands.