

# Metro Regional Coalition Meeting Minutes

## October 10, 2023

### In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Michael Foley	Westbrook
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Hope Cahan	Falmouth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Ephrem Paraschak	Gorham
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Mary Davis	Portland
Melissa Hue	Portland
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Gail Kezer	Office of Sen. King
Sarah Lawrence	Office of Rep. Chellie Pingree
<b>Guests</b>	Hannah Pingree and Georges Budagu Makoko, Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future
<b>For GPCOG</b>	Kristina Egan, Chris Hall, Bellinda Ray, Matt Panfil, Dani Deason, Tom Bell

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Chair Michael Foley called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm and welcomed everyone. Attendees gave brief introductions.

### 2. Acceptance of minutes from the September 12, 2023 meeting

Jerre Bryant moved acceptance of the minutes of the September 12, 2023 MRC meeting seconded by Matt Sturgis. Chair Foley declared the minutes accepted without objection.

### 3. Public Comment

None.

### 4. MRC Work Plan 2023-2024

Each year in September the Metro Regional Coalition establishes its work plan for the coming year. Staff revised the draft work plan per member input at the September MRC meeting. The revised draft (attached below) was reviewed and approved as presented on a motion by Tom Hall, seconded by Hope Cahan, after a unanimous roll call vote of all members voting.

### 5. State Housing Report Update

On Wednesday 10/4/23 MaineHousing, Maine DECD, and GOPIF released a study entitled [State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study](#). As reported in the [BDN](#), [MPBN](#), and the [PPH](#), the study sets a baseline for state housing production and anticipates the amount of new housing needed in Maine by 2030.

Matt Panfil, GPCOG's Director of Planning, provided an overview of the study's findings. Please refer to slides 1-4 in this [slide deck](#) for details of his presentation.

Kristina Egan led a discussion of the study's implications for our region and how GPCOG can help member communities meet the report's expectations. Please see slides 5-10 in the linked slide deck for details.

During discussion after their presentations the following points were made:

- GPCOG can support municipal housing efforts by educating the public and demonstrating the true impacts and benefits of new housing, which are often misunderstood or misrepresented during local housing debates.
- Funding for GPCOG technical assistance will come from the state, or from dedicated transportation funding in PACTS communities.
- Members discussed the shortage of construction workers and available firms as a barrier to expanding housing creation, something also noted in the state report.
- Members also identified other infrastructure limits as potential bottlenecks to development, such as limited sewer and water connections/capacity.
- Hannah Pingree spoke about the state report's underlying approach that focused on current and future state workforce needs, which drove the large target housing numbers in the report.
- Members discussed declining school enrollment, despite housing growth, as one of the persistent misunderstandings in the public.
- Members also discussed public resistance to large housing projects, using Gorham's 391-unit housing proposal in the Village District as an example.

Kristina concluded by emphasizing that GPCOG staff are ready to assist member communities as they assess their capacities and willingness to expand housing development in response to the state report.

## **6. Office of New Americans Update**

Hannah Pingree, Director of the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF), joined members to update them on her Office's work developing proposals in response to Governor's [Executive Order](#) establishing a state Office of New Americans (ONA).

Using this [slide deck](#), Pingree said ONA's core focus will be how to best engage new Mainers in our economy and society as a part of meeting the state's demographic challenges (detailed in the Housing report, above).

To do so, Pingree identified 6 objectives for the ONA (see slide 10). GOPIF's Georges Budagu Makoko explained how GOPIF is meeting with groups all across the state to get their input on prioritizing these 6 objectives (and identifying others). Members were invited to share their own input with GOPIF on what they hope the ONA will accomplish, and how you hope to work with the ONA, by using [this form](#). In addition, GPCOG staff will draft a letter to GOPIF on the ONA reflecting the MRC's discussion for member review and approval via email.

During discussion the following points were made:

- Mayor Foley emphasized that more transitional housing is needed across the state, and he urged state policy to move support for new Mainers away from General Assistance and into a more holistic state managed approach.
- Members stressed the need for more municipal workers and hoped that the ONA could connect new Mainers with training and education to position them for municipal work when they are ready and able. Members also noted that education and training are powerful tools to help new Mainers understand their new home's culture.
- The need for a statewide system to track General Assistance across municipalities was noted, and legislative action is expected this winter on that issue.
- Mayor Foley referenced [Convey911](#) as a translation service used by Westbrook which has been very helpful to municipal staff.
- Kristina Egan emphasized the importance of transitional housing as a central element in cultural and economic integration, and urged that transitional housing be a part of the ONA's mission. In response Hannah Pingree agreed and referenced the work the state has done with local and nonprofit partners in Saco and South Portland.
- Belinda Ray amplified Kristina's comments and noted that while training may be prohibited until federal work authorization is granted, education is not prohibited and transitional housing campuses are a perfect location for education.
- In response to a question about the state's receptivity to embracing new Mainers, Hannah Pingree noted that work force shortages are driving change in public opinion, often led by employers who are desperate for new workers.

Mayor Foley concluded this portion of the agenda by thanking Hannah for joining MRC members and listening to their input.

## 7. Adjourn

Mayor Foley adjourned the meeting by acclamation at 1:24 pm.

**Final MRC Work Plan 2023-2024**

**Metro Regional Coalition  
2023-2024 WORKPLAN  
FINAL – Approved 10.10.23**

These are the Metro Regional Coalition’s goals for Fall 2023 through Summer 2024 and its planned actions to achieve those goals.

***Priorities for Action and Advocacy***

**Expand Housing Choices**

**Goal #1:** Continue expanding housing choices and increasing the supply of workforce housing in MRC communities for low-, moderate-, and middle-income households, while implementing recent state zoning and housing requirements.

**Actions:**

Lead a collective response to help our region meet state housing growth targets by:

- a. Collect and track housing data through the Metro Regional Coalition’s annual housing report
- b. Provide planning and technical assistance, as requested, to support member strategies to encourage well-located housing projects that expand density, mobility options, resilience, and sustainability.
- c. Work to align local and regional investments in infrastructure, transportation, and climate action with housing developments, in Priority Centers

**Advance Solutions to Homelessness**

**Goal #2:** Provide more options for unhoused people in our region through transitional housing, reforms to General Assistance, and increased shelter capacity.

**Actions:**

- a. Continue support for [LD 1721](#), *An Act to Create Transitional Housing Communities for Homeless Populations in the State*.
- b. Continue support for changes to state General Assistance law that reduce the staffing and fiscal burdens on municipalities.
- c. Understand and implement best practices for replacing encampments of unhoused people with safer, more supportive housing options.

**Retain and expand our workforce**

**Goal #3:** Grow our region’s workforce through assisting with the implementation of the Governor’s 10-year Economic Development Plan.

**Actions:**

- a. Engage with the formation of the state [Office of New Americans](#) at the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future.
- b. Welcome and retain newly arriving asylum seekers, refugees, and other relocating populations through regional implementation of the Governor's Economic Development Strategy and the Safe in Maine Fund.
- c. Examine existing supports for municipal worker attraction and retention and identify opportunities to strengthen efforts to attract and retain municipal workforce at all levels.

### ***Education Priorities***

- A. **Economic Development** – Learn about emerging new developments in the region and the implementation of [Greater Portland's Regional Prosperity Plan 2023-2028](#), the new GPCOG 5-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) plan.
- B. **Transportation** – Learn about the regional implementation of [Connect 2045](#), [Transit Together](#), [Vision Zero](#)
- C. **Climate Preparedness** – Learn about what individual municipalities are doing to increase climate preparedness and encourage collaboration and exchange of best practices throughout the region.