
DRAFT

GPCOG Executive Committee Retreat

MINUTES

October 14, 2020

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Sue Witonis	Cumberland County
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Claude Morgan	South Portland
Sandy Carder	Gray
Nat Tupper	Yarmouth
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Carmen Lone	Bridgton
Kristina Egan, Andrew Butcher, Chris Hall, Tony Plante	GPCOG Staff

Welcome

Nat Tupper, President, opened the meeting, which was held via Zoom. He welcomed Carmen Lone of Bridgton as a new Executive Committee member.

Acceptance of 9/9/20 Minutes

Claude Morgan moved approval of the 9/9/20 meeting minutes. Matt seconded. The roll was called, and all were in favor.

Public Comment

Ken Capron, Microrail, said that 3 minutes of public comment time is limiting and asked the Executive Committee to consider inviting public comment of 3 minutes on all agenda items. Ken said that PACTS and GPCOG are not compliant with the Freedom of Access laws and the Maine Human Rights Act. He has made complaints before, but has seen not change in the way the agencies conduct business. Ken said that Microrail should be considered a part of PACTS,

and said that his company has been wrongly excluded from receiving funding from PACTS and from being a member of PACTS.

Spotlight: Recovery Dashboard

Chris Hall presented data on the economic impacts of COVID on the region using the interactive MySidewalk software developed by GPCOG's Data Analyst, Abe Daily. The major takeaway is the uneven impact of the pandemic and recovery. GPCOG strategies need to be sensitive to this. Federal support is critical at every level.

The food preparation and service industry has been hit hardest economically. The unemployment rate by town is uneven, ranging from 3% to 11%. For example, Falmouth is 2% where Portland is 8% and South Portland is 10%.

The impact of the payroll protection program was notable as it supported 55% of businesses in the GPCOG region.

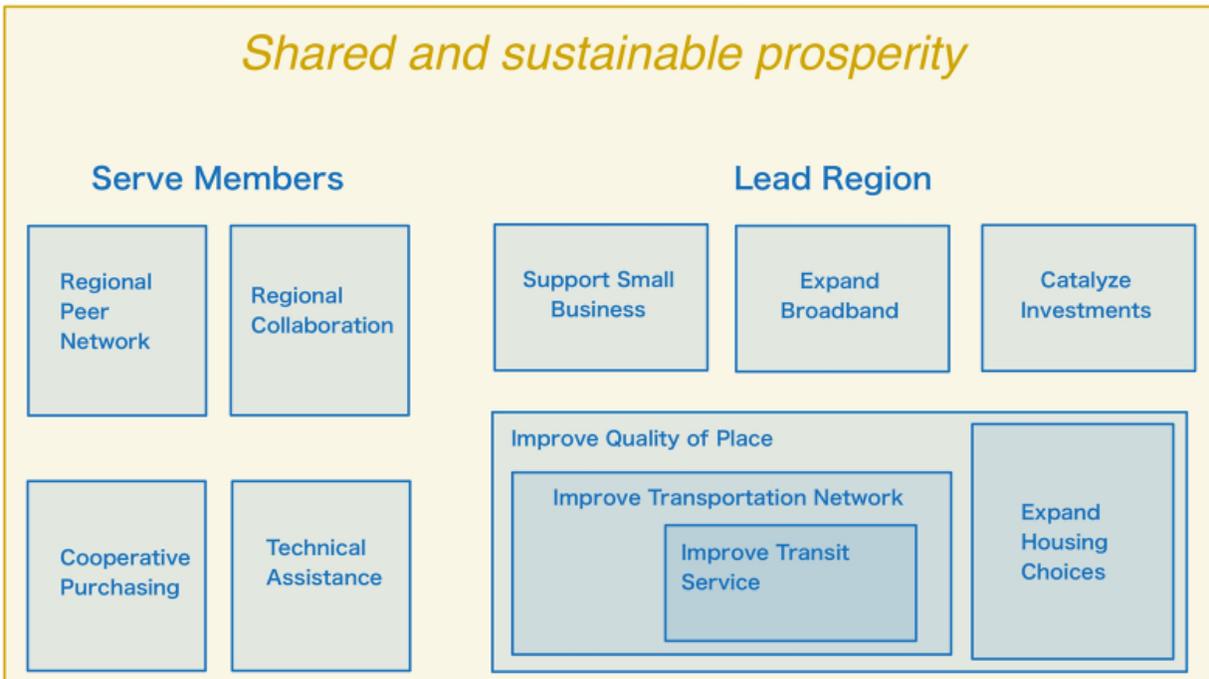
The next twelve months are extremely uncertain as there is an estimated 13% loss of revenue from the general fund. In the GPCOG region, transit ridership took a huge hit with an 87% reduction in April. Since then ridership has climbed back in line with national trends, but is still at 50% its normal level.

GPCOG is responding to the pandemic in different ways. PACTS is facilitating the allocation of \$53 million to the region's transit agencies to address net losses, and to fund adapted services and ridership recovery. EDA has provided \$400,000 to GPCOG to help with pandemic recovery and resiliency. Loan programs have increased with a focus on low and moderate business assistance. GPCOG is administering our region's portion of \$200 million the state has allocated for small business relief.

Claude Morgan asked if the science supported the transit agencies promoting ridership. Kristina offered the four best practices for increase in ridership: help agencies implement safety precautions, tell riders it is safe to ride with these safety precautions in place, attract people to get back on transit, and follow up the Transit Tomorrow study with a Transit Together study that will allocate \$380,000 for a fresh look at transit services across the region.

GPCOG's Role in the Region

Kristina briefed the group on GPCOG's strategic priorities and how these have shifted to handle the COVID-19 pandemic and response. Below is a summary of how GPCOG organizes its work, and [here](#) is the full slide deck she presented.



GPCOG serves its municipal members in many ways, and particularly by convening a regional table for public works, planners, elected officials, and managers.

With the pandemic and economic fall-out, GPCOG is more focused on economic development. GPCOG has expanded its work in supporting small businesses through loans and CARES grants. Other efforts include the Resilience Exchange, expanding broadband and the development of shovel ready projects, including transportation projects, to be prepared for potential federal stimulus funds. GPCOG is focused on improving housing affordability, and addressing the threats of a growing digital divide, retail/restaurant vacancy, and racial tensions and injustice.

GPCOG Executive Committee members offered the following comments:

- Claude noted that there is a lot on GPCOG’s plate, said that GPCOG has successfully morphed itself to deal with the current regional duress. He advised caution in taking on more projects in this unstable time. He added that he is not discouraging GPCOG from continuing to expand its impact.
- Sue agreed with Claude’s remarks and offered that GPCOG should continue to do well what it does now. She said the pandemic has made the future uncertain.
- Sandy said the pandemic is driving everything, and reinforced the need for GPCOG to advocate for funding for our cities and towns, and to help our municipalities save money as revenues decrease. She supported the creation of a project development fund and said it is expensive to plan and engineer projects to get them a shovel-ready.
- Carmen said there is opportunity in crisis. The pandemic puts into relief the projects and priorities that have been hard to describe in the past. She highlighted the need for

short-term support for our residents who need housing and health care. She urged GPCOG to focus on concrete projects like broadband and expanded transportation.

- Nat noted that it is hard to get his arms around all that is happening through GPCOG's work. He wants to more clearly understand the pieces of the GPCOG puzzle and how they fit in together. He asked, 'Is leading the region the goal? Or is it to develop the leadership that helps local government?' GPCOG is an extension of local government, and functions as a tool for municipalities to work together to get things done. He urged GPCOG to retain its roots as a regional planning agency.

Others added that COG's role is to help develop new community leaders, help elected officials perform their functions, and inspire and catalyze community leadership. Local government has been beat down, and there was a shared concern about the future of citizen-led government since so many people are disenfranchised or disillusioned right now. Municipalities are challenged to retain staff and attract quality talent. The leadership trainings for Chairs and Vice Chairs have provided valuable information, and Sandy encouraged GPCOG to educate more residents to encourage them to serve on appointed boards, like the planning board or zoning board of appeals.

The group embraced the idea of regular convenings amongst planners, and Claude said that there is not enough understanding on how our collective zoning is affecting housing choice. Providing data and tools to municipalities to help them make better decisions is an extremely valuable role for GPCOG to play.

The meeting adjourned at 1:43 p.m.