



METRO REGIONAL COALITION

Agenda

September 10, 2019

Noon to 1:30 pm

GPCOG, 970 Baxter Boulevard, Portland

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Acceptance of minutes from June 11, 2019, June 19, 2019 and August 13, 2019 meetings (Attachments A, B and C) (5 minutes)

3. Expanding housing choices – Additional research (Attachment D) (30 minutes)

Staff report: Frank O'Hara, formerly of Planning Decisions (and GPCOG), will present his findings on the region's housing shortages. O'Hara's presentation is designed to communicate the urgency of expanding housing choices as members work with their Councils on the MRC Joint Resolution this fall. Councils should aim to consider and vote on the resolution before the third week of October, in preparation for a public regional announcement the last week of October.

We will leave time for Q&A after the presentation.

Action: Receive Frank O'Hara's report and incorporate it in on-going discussions with other elected officials and municipal staff on the importance of expanding housing choices.

4. Regional transportation priorities (15 minutes)

Staff Report: Coalition members requested an report on PACTS' selection of transportation investment priorities. PACTS completed its work over the summer, and staff will provide a summary of survey results, outcomes of sub-regional meetings, and PACTS deliberations.

Action: For information only.

5. Spotlight presentation on the regional response to the Expo Crisis (15 minutes)

Staff report: Tom Bell has prepared a slide presentation to summarize the wonderful work accomplished in our region in response to the Expo emergency shelter crisis. Kristina Egan and Jon Jennings will share comments and invite others to do so as well.

Action: No action is necessary.

6. Preparing for another influx of people experiencing homelessness (15 minutes)

Staff report: Following up the MRC's direction at its August meeting, staff recommend formation of a small working group to analyze this summer's crisis and begin work on designing a system to respond to a similar crisis in the future.

Action: Vote to create a working group.

7. Adjourn

Upcoming Meetings

October 8, 2019
November 12, 2019
December 10, 2019
January 14, 2020
February 11, 2020
March 10, 2020
April 14, 2020
May 12, 2020
June 9, 2020

Attachment A



Metro Regional Coalition MINUTES

June 11, 2019

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Bill Donovan, Chair	Scarborough
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Jeremy Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Sue Henderson	South Portland
Belinda Ray	Portland
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Guests:	Liz Blackwell-Moore
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan Chris Hall Zoe Miller

Welcome

Bill Donovan called the meeting to order at 12:06 pm.

Acceptance of 5/14/19 minutes

Acceptance as presented moved by Matt Sturgis, seconded by Jeremy Gabrielson, and unanimously passed by members.

Final Review of MRC Joint Resolution on Expanding Housing Choices

Following up the MRC discussion of the draft resolution in May, as well as member revisions to the resolution after the May meeting, the final MRC Joint Resolution on Expanding Housing Choices was reviewed by members.

Members discussed a number of aspects of the Joint Resolution, including:

- How should the Resolution be structured – specifically should each MRC community be able to craft its own goal regarding expanded housing choices? Members agreed that yes, each community should have flexibility to define how they will participate in expanding housing choices. Options will range from agreeing to engage in a Council and community discussion of the issue to setting specific housing expansion goals.
- Will all communities agree to a regional goal of 10% expanded housing choices for middle and lower income households in the region? Members agreed that a regional goal was appropriate, with individual communities setting their own plan for engaging the regional goal.
- What is the baseline against which expansion of housing choices will be measured? Staff presented preliminary data that defined a 2017 baseline of housing affordable to middle income households, as well as information on how many of those households pay more than 30% of their income in housing costs, and how many new units of housing would be needed to alleviate that cost burden. Members discussed the preliminary data in some detail and directed staff to develop more refined data, working in consultation with MRC managers and housing staff.
- Members added to the resolution an annual report from GPCOG on progress made toward the regional goal of expanding housing choices and including information on successful policies and programs in MRC communities.

Members directed staff to amend the resolution in three specific ways:

1. First, add a paragraph that allows each individual community to engage the regional goal as it sees fit
2. Second, add a placeholder that allows each individual community to define its own metric for expanding housing choices in its community, and
3. Third, incorporate an annual report from GPCOG on progress toward the regional goal in the Resolution.

Matt Sturgis moved that the MRC adopt the Joint Resolution to Expand Housing Choices as amended by the three elements detailed above. Sue Henderson seconded the motion. All members voted in support of the motion.

Next steps – Advancing the Joint Resolution

Members discussed how to bring the Joint Resolution forward into each MRC community. Different communities will use different approaches, from Housing Committees to Council workshops.

Staff and members discussed the specific of moving forward in each MRC community this summer and fall. Action steps included:

- Data refinement by GPCOG staff setting a baseline for existing housing choices and detailing the specifics of a 10% increase in housing choices by 2025. Staff will work internally and with municipal managers and staff to ensure that publicly-presented data is clear and correct.

- Staff will reach out to MRC members to set up local 'next steps' in each community which will include:
 - MRC members engaging their colleagues to introduce the resolution and its purposes
 - Staff and MRC members setting up meetings with local Councils, housing committees or other appropriate groups to advance the resolution
 - Members and staff including 'peer' presentations from other communities (such as Councilors from Westbrook visiting with Gorham Councilors) to support and prioritize the resolution
 - Staff will work with MRC members to define a timeline for each community's adoption of the resolution, and to arrange a public announcement of the expanded housing choices initiative when appropriate (before the end of 2019).

Members were in agreement with this plan.

Opioid project "lessons learned"

Liz Blackwell Moore and Zoe Miller presented an update on GPCOG's opioid prevention work. They reported on the success that the Falmouth pilot project has enjoyed, including deep community engagement and notable community action to engage, understand and support those in the community who have struggled with opioids.

After their report Belinda Ray shared that Portland is considering becoming the third opioid prevention pilot site, pending Portland City Council approval. Members agreed to offer the opportunity to Portland to become the third MRC pilot site, should Portland want to pursue it, and pending GPCOG acquiring grant resources needed to deliver the program to Portland.

Matt Sturgis moved to offer the opportunity to Portland to become our third pilot community for opioid prevention work, pending Portland Council approval and GPCOG acquisition of necessary funding. Jim Gailey seconded the motion and all members voted to approve it.

Meeting dates for September 2019 through June 2020

Belinda Ray moved that the MRC set its meeting dates for FY19-20 as monthly on the second Tuesday of the month from noon to 1:30 pm starting in September 2019 and ending in June 2020. Nathan Poore seconded the motion. All members voted in support of the motion.

Next meeting

- September 10, 2019 from noon to 1:30 pm at GPCOG's office in Portland.

Adjourn. Chairman Donovan adjourned the meeting at 1:40 pm.

Attachment B



Metro Regional Coalition

Emergency meeting to address the continuing arrival of asylum seekers in
Portland and the region

MINUTES

June 19, 2019

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Bill Donovan, Chair	Scarborough
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Jeremy Gabrielson	Cape Elizabeth
Virginia Wilder-Cross	Gorham
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Sue Henderson	South Portland
Belinda Ray	Portland
Tom Hall	Scarborough
Amy Kuhns	Falmouth
Claude Morgan	South Portland
Ethan Strimling	Portland
Jon Jennings	Portland
April Caricchio	South Portland
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Travis Kennedy	Cumberland County
Guests:	Greg Jordan, METRO Ellie Espling
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan Chris Hall Tom Bell

Welcome

Bill Donovan called the meeting to order at 9:05 am.

Update on current situation

Portland City Manager Jon Jennings briefed members on the current situation in Portland and what needs the City anticipates regarding the arrival of current and future asylum seekers in Portland.

Jennings shared the following information:

- On June 9th Portland began receiving asylum seekers arriving from the southern border. 39 people arrived that day, the first of 260 that have arrived in the last ten days.
- Portland utilized its overflow family shelter capacity to house arriving asylum seekers, maxing out facilities at the Salvation Army, the City's General Assistance Office and the emergency warming center within 24 hours.
- On Tuesday June 11th the City opened the Portland Expo as an emergency shelter as authorities from San Antonio Texas reported that another 150 asylum seekers were headed to Portland. Portland staff did an outstanding job standing up the Expo shelter in 24 hours.
- Immediate help was made available by Maine CDC, the Governor's Office, Maine DHHS, along with Mercy Hospital, Maine Medical Center, Preble Street and Wayside.
- As of today the Expo emergency shelter is stable with 223 people in residence last night.
- Donations have been generous, with \$350,000 already received from donors in the region, the state and out of state. Jennings noted the generosity of USM and Bowdoin – both have made their dorms available as temporary housing for asylum seekers, but both are time limited (USM needs their dorms back on 8/3, and Bowdoin on 8/12).
- The next challenge facing the City is moving 259 people out of emergency shelter and into housing. Jennings shared that he has received support from local developers and property owners, some of whom have made apartment units and empty buildings available for long term occupancy.
- In all over 100 families need housing, and the City and its partners cannot house them all. Jon Jennings asked every MRC leader to talk to developers and property owners in their community about making housing units, or any building that can be used as housing, immediately available for asylum seekers.
- The cost of housing these families was discussed. Jennings and Mayor Strimling both indicated that the Mills Administration is working on legislation to make General Assistance payments to asylum seekers reimbursable by the State (up to 70%, as it was prior to the LePage

Administration's decision to eliminate those reimbursements). That bill (LD 1317) is up for final action today at the State House.

- Jennings noted that asylum seekers are receiving health screening by US officials before reaching Portland, and children are being carefully supported by state and federal authorities. The legal status of asylum seekers was discussed, and it was hoped that LD 1317 would eliminate any question about their General Assistance eligibility.
- Belinda Ray emphasized that all asylum seekers are legally present in the US.

Update on regional response to date

In addition to the regional responses mentioned by Jon Jennings in his update, members shared information about their communities' responses to date, including:

- Claude Morgan shared that the South Portland City Council voted last night to authorize a \$40,000 donation to the Portland based Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project to help pay for expedited asylum applications for arriving families. Morgan emphasized that South Portland stood with Portland, and that no city could handle this kind of crisis alone.
- Morgan said the South Portland Council saw opportunity for our region in the arrival of so many families and urged all MRC communities to plan for additional immigration surges. He indicated that South Portland will be planning for the long run and looked forward to working as a region to do the same.
- Members noted that no one expected other communities to duplicate Portland's shelter system – rather they agreed on the need to work collectively to muster resources as each community is able to collectively address future influxes, and to better address long term housing deficits in the region.

Kristina Egan agreed and said the longer term discussion will be included on the next MRC agenda.

- Scott Morelli shared financial information about the cost of housing an asylum seeking family. Without state assistance a family of 4 will cost \$2376/month to house or about \$28,000/year. With state reimbursement those figures drop to \$715/month or about \$8500/year.
- Matt Sturgis indicated that Cape Elizabeth Councilors are fully willing to help and although there may not be a great deal of housing available in town, financial donations were certainly possible.
- Jerre Bryant shared the Monday evening special Westbrook Council meeting outcomes. There was full agreement that Westbrook wants to help, and an acknowledgment that local costs could be an issue. Restoration of state reimbursement of local General Assistance costs would be very helpful to Westbrook citizens and decision makers.

With 78% of current General Assistance in Westbrook going to new Americans, and most of those people coming to Westbrook from Portland, Bryant noted the healthy and appropriate

way the two communities were already supporting each other. Bryant said that Westbrook will stand with Portland and help find housing.

- On behalf of Falmouth Nathan Poore also indicated a strong desire to assist Portland in their need for housing for asylum seekers. He indicated he will immediately engage his network to seek housing opportunities.
- Greg Jordan expressed his hope that housing opportunities would be found in proximity to transit services since asylum seekers will not have private transportation.
- Virginia Wilder-Cross shared the Gorham Council's discussion of the issue at their meeting on Monday. All Gorham Councilors are committed to help, and they are particularly focused on the families at the USM Gorham dorms. Gorham is committed to raising funds and will work with staff to speak with developers and property owners about potential housing options.

Review of additional regional support opportunities

Members discussed other ways to support Portland and respond to the crisis, including:

- Hosting families in Maine homes. Members gave this idea careful discussion. Jon Jennings shared that the City has reached out to United Way of Greater Portland to help establish a vetting process for asylum seekers, and for potential hosts. Issues of cultural sensitivity, language and needed supports are all important aspects of housing asylum seeking families with Maine residents.

Members asked GPCOG to take the lead in organizing a regional system for placing asylum seeking families with Mainer residents. Kristina Egan will form a small committee to further develop a system. Amy Kuhns, Matt Sturgis, Claude Morgan and Nathan Poore all volunteered for the committee. The group will work with United Way, Catholic Charities and other regional non-profits with expertise in this area such as CIEE.

- Members discussed using the existing emergency management response network to coordinate mutual aid in future crises. Jon Jennings emphasized how helpful the Cumberland County Emergency Management team has been, often stepping in to provide support when it was needed. Jennings endorsed Poore's idea of using the existing system to address future issues like the current crisis.
- Belinda Ray noted that 500+ people are homeless in Portland every night, and urged everyone to think about the larger homelessness problem in our region as we address the current crisis. Members agreed and noted the continuum of missing housing choices for middle and low income households all across our region. Nathan Poore agreed and discussed the need for equity, fairness and efficiency in all our responses to homelessness.

In addition to Housing First solutions, Jon Jennings offered to provide content to a forum on how Portland is donating land to Community Housing of Maine and Avesta in order to leverage more housing choices in the City – he urged other MRC members to consider doing the same.

- Members discussed charitable donations. Jon Jennings has directed corporate donations toward non-profit agencies who are working to support asylum seeking families. Jennings will provide GPCOG a list of non-profits where donations are best directed by MRC municipalities. GPCOG will share that list with all MRC communities so that donations are coordinated and aligned.
- Members agreed that all 7 regional transit agencies should come together to support mobility for asylum seeking families.
- Members identified the region-wide need for more education and outreach to residents and community leaders to help everyone understand the current crisis and the need for a collective response. Nathan Poore suggested using the opioid prevention pilot as a model for community education and outreach so that wider support can be earned for needed regional responses.

Action steps

Bill Donovan thanked everyone for their time and their commitment to supporting Portland in this crisis and working together to do so.

Kristina Egan summarized next steps as:

- Municipal managers will continue to work with Jon Jennings regarding immediate City needs in response to the shelter crisis.
- Municipal managers will speak with their own network of property owners and developers to find suitable housing opportunities for asylum seeking families in their communities.
- GPCOG will immediately establish a subcommittee to work on screening families and hosts for placement of asylum seeking families with Maine residents.
- GPCOG will reach out to Saco, Biddeford and Old Orchard managers and officials to include them in today's discussions.
- GPCOG will coordinate a conversation among the 7 regional transit agencies in support of mobility for asylum seeking families.
- In addition to these immediate steps GPCOG will work with the MRC to address longer range planning and resource issues and evaluate our immediate responses to this crisis in order to improve our ability to respond to the next one.

Adjourn. Chairman Donovan adjourned the meeting at 10:40 am.

Attachment C



METRO REGIONAL COALITION Minutes of August 13, 2019 Special meeting on supporting asylum seekers in Portland and the region

In Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Bill Donovan, Chair	Scarborough
Nathan Poore	Falmouth
Matt Sturgis	Cape Elizabeth
Scott Morelli	South Portland
Heather Brown	Portland
Belinda Ray	Portland
Kevin Sutherland	Saco
Amy Kuhn	Falmouth
Claude Morgan	South Portland
Kate Simpson	Office of Senator Susan Collins
Jerre Bryant	Westbrook
Jim Gailey	Cumberland County
Guests:	Will Gale, NEPPRA Belinda Hutchinson, RTP
For GPCOG:	Kristina Egan Chris Hall Tom Bell

Welcome

Bill Donovan called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm.

At the start of the meeting Kristina Egan asked Nathan Poore to share the great feedback he received at the Maine Town and Cities Managers' Association meeting last week regarding the presentation on opioid prevention that included GPCOG's work in Falmouth and Gorham. Attendees said it was among the best sessions of the conference and they felt motivated to act on the information presented to help their community better deal with opioid prevention.

Current situation & what's left to do this week

Members discussed the current situation with housing asylum seekers at the Expo and reviewed what has been done by cities and towns in the region, as well as faith and immigrant community leaders, over the last eight weeks to support newly arrived asylum seekers. They also discussed what remains to be done to meet the August 15th deadline for emptying the Expo.

Belinda Ray thanked the Metro Regional Coalition for its support in creating the Host Homes program. She thanked everyone who has made contributions, financial and otherwise. And she urged everyone to remain engaged.

Heather Brown also thanked everyone and gave a status report. As of 8/8/19 52 families totaling 164 people have been placed in permanent housing by the City since 6/9/19.

Since 6/9/19 448 people have been taken in at the Expo. As of 8/12/19 132 people remained at the Expo.

Heather emphasized that work continues to place remaining families in housing before the Thursday deadline for closing the Expo. Goodwill Hinckley is one option being explored for 6 possible placements.

Kristina summarized the Host Homes work that's been done. As of 8/13/19 25 families have been placed with temporary volunteer hosts. The Council on International Educational Exchange, Inc. (CIEE) has vetted 102 applications from volunteer hosts, passing the vast majority of those applications on to our partners in the immigrant leadership community for interviews and matching with Expo families. 65 volunteer hosts have been interviewed. Host Homes has brought together over 30 partner organizations and churches, municipalities and service providers to work together. Another 10 Host Home placements are anticipated before the deadline on Thursday.

Member communities recounted their effort. Several members said their initial outreach to property owners revealed that there were very few available housing units for rental. Some communities were able to make donations to the work of supportive non-profit organizations. Where an existing pipeline of housing exists, as in Westbrook, many families from Portland were relocated.

Kate Simpson from Senator Collins' office thanked Portland for its help in securing a supplemental Federal Emergency Management Administration allocation that will be available next month to help offset the costs associated with responding to the recent influx of asylum seekers.

Will Gale from NNEPRA and Belinda Hutchinson from RTP both shared how their agencies are helping with transportation needs of asylum seekers.

Members reviewed what's anticipated after the Expo closes. Those families who do not secure permanent or temporary housing by 8/15 will be moved to the Portland Overflow Shelter which has a capacity of over 100 individuals. At the Overflow Shelter families will have space to sleep from 7 pm to 7 am, but no other services. During the day they will be outside.

Members discussed the potential for using non-traditional housing spaces, as well as utilizing municipal community centers for daytime shelter for those in the Overflow Shelter. South Portland offered a potential space, and follow up between Portland and South Portland after the meeting was planned.

Members discussed general assistance for asylum seekers. They are eligible for GA now that the Mills Administration has changed the rules. Because each municipality may have different rules, GA issues are being dealt with on a case by case basis in the receiving municipality.

Belinda Ray explained how the City of Portland has not yet allocated the \$850,000 in donations it has received, but plans to prioritize 1) housing for new arrivals, 2) funding to reimburse non-profit organizations who have overextended themselves helping people at the Expo, and 3) reimbursement of City expenses related to crisis response. She noted that funds probably will not be available for other municipalities or purposes.

Kristina Egan outlined several remaining challenges, including:

- Transportation for host homes guest families, including access to transit, the need to teach newcomers how to use transit service, and the need to coordinate resources around the travel needs of guest families. GPCOG has solicited over 50 volunteer drivers who CIEE is vetting. A transportation coordinator will be needed to match ride requests with available volunteer drivers and other transportation options.
- Case management and cultural navigation services for host home guest families is needed. GPCOG will be talking with partners to explore options.
- Once the Expo is empty GPCOG will get a list of how many host home guest families have been placed in each community.
- GPCOG will continue to update its www.host-homes.com website as a resource for guest and host families.

Members expressed their intention that the Host Homes program be sustained and remain available as a network and a resource for use when it is needed again. To that end several next steps were outlined, including:

- A small group debriefing on the Host Homes program after the Expo is closed;
- Exploration of a mutual aid agreement that defines working partnerships throughout the region at the municipal level when new arrivals come again in large numbers
- Additional advocacy at the State House in support of legislation to expand affordable housing in our region

GPCOG staff will report back to the MRC at its September meeting on these and other steps taken to sustain and improve the Host Homes program.

Expanding housing choices resolution update

Chris Hall reminded members that GPCOG staff is available and anxious to work with each MRC Council to educate Councilors and municipal staff on the proposed MRC Expanded Housing Choices resolution that the MRC endorsed in June. The MRC's goal is to have each MRC Council act on the resolution before the end of the year. Hall asked that MRC members work with him to set up meetings in each MRC community so that work can begin.

Adjourn

Chairman Donovan adjourned the meeting at 2:55 pm.

Attachment D

See separate document.