

Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
40 Church Street, Suite 200
Lowell, MA 01852

Minutes of Meeting: February 17, 2021

The February 17, 2021 meeting of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments was held virtually on the Zoom platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. with Chair Andrew Deslaurier presiding. The following were in virtual attendance, as indicated in Attachment #1:

Councilors

- Andrew Deslaurier, Chair, Billerica Board of Selectmen
- Chris Tribou, Billerica Planning Board
- Pat Wojtas, Chelmsford Select Board
- George Zaharoolis, Chelmsford Alternate
- Philippe Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- Kieran Meehan, Dunstable Board of Selectmen
- Daniel Rourke, Lowell City Council
- Gerard Frechette, Lowell Planning Board
- Chuck Walkovich, Pepperell Planning Board
- Stephen Themelis, Pepperell Alternate
- Jayne Wellman, Tewksbury Board of Selectmen
- Anita Tonakarn-Nguyen, Westford Select Board
- Darrin Wizst, Westford Planning Board

Guests

- Anthony Beattie, Pepperell Select Board

Staff

- Beverly Woods, Executive Director
- Jay Donovan, Assistant Director
- Bert Almeida, Financial Officer
- Justin Howard, Transportation Program Manager
- David Righter, Environmental Planner
- Katrina Garavanian, Executive Assistant

I. Minutes of Meeting: January 20, 2021

The minutes of the January 20, 2021 meeting were distributed to all Councilors for review. Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Jerry Frechette, the Council voted to approve the minutes of the January 20, 2021 meeting. Chuck Walkovich, Anita Tonakarn-Nguyen and Darrin Wizst abstained as they were not present for the January meeting.

II. Executive Director's Report

The Executive Director's Report was previously distributed to the Councilors for review. Upon a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Phil Thibault, the Council voted unanimously to accept the Executive Director's Report as presented. The report is included as Attachment #2.

III. Financial Report and Warrant

Bert Almeida presented the Financial Report and the Warrant for review and approval. Based on a motion made by Jerry Frechette and seconded by George Zaharoolis, the Financial Report and Warrant were unanimously approved. The Financial Report is included as Attachment #3. The warrant was sent by mail for signatures due to the COVID pandemic.

IV. Old Business

1. Results of DLTA XIV Project Solicitation

Jay Donovan reminded the Council that an RFP was issued on January 22, 2021 to the local communities for DLTA project proposals to be submitted by February 3, 2021. He discussed the results of the RFP process, including projects that will be undertaken within each community, the amounts available and the number of staff hours that will be committed to each. A summary was included in the Council packet.

2. FY2022-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Funding Targets and TIP Readiness Day Results

Justin Howard provided an overview of the region's funding targets for the FY2022-2026 TIP. He summarized the results of "TIP Readiness Day", describing the projects discussed with MassDOT. Based on this discussion, MassDOT offered its recommendations relative to the programming year for each TIP project. A handout was included in the Council packet summarizing the status of each project and the MassDOT recommendations.

3. FY2022 UPWP Development Process Update

Justin Howard informed the group that MassDOT recently provided budget information for the FY2022 UPWP, and due to federal obligational authority limitations, the FY2022 budget will be

about \$27,000 less than in FY2021. Justin presented an update on the development of the document and a timeline for completion.

4. COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Discussion

Beverly Woods stated that the vaccine rollout program has been bumpy and there is widespread criticism and discontent to date. The program seems to change daily, and there are a number of legislators, municipalities, and health care providers advocating for changes to the current situation. Much of the existing frustration lies with the lack of vaccine availability, which the Biden administration is working to address by purchasing additional doses and by ramping up production through the Defense Production Act. The difficulty in navigating the state's website to schedule an appointment has also been an issue.

Municipalities are frustrated by the structure of the program. Governor Baker has committed to providing 100 vaccines per week to the majority of communities, while communities disproportionately impacted (such as Lowell) will receive 400 doses per week. This commitment is contingent upon receiving an adequate supply from the federal government. The administration is directing most residents to the mass vaccination sites, and has asked that municipalities use their supplies to vaccinate frail elderly residents who are unable to leave their homes.

The Council discussed these issues at length. NMCOG offered to assist its communities in planning collaborative vaccination programs if requested, and as DLTA funds permit.

5. Other Old Business

There was none.

V. New Business

1. Community Reports

Steve Themelis informed the Council that the Town of Pepperell is putting together a zoning bylaw article for town meeting for an adult-use marijuana establishment. The meeting will be held outside at the Nissitissit Middle School parking lot on March 13, 2021.

2. Project Referrals

Beverly Woods informed the Council that currently there are two projects under MEPA review within our region. An Environmental Notification Form (ENF) was filed for National Grid's S145/T146 Line Switch Installation project in Tewksbury, Andover and North Reading. The project includes the installation of 10 new 115 kV electric flyover switch structures associated with three existing substations, including the East Tewksbury #59 substation at 1470 Shawsheen

Street. The project exceeds MEPA review thresholds for Rare Species and Wetlands. A copy of the staff comment letter was included in the Council packet.

An ENF for water supply and distribution system improvements in Dracut and Tyngsborough was filed last fall by the Dracut Water Supply District and was later withdrawn. Recently, an ENF for the project was resubmitted to MEPA. The proposed project includes construction of a new manganese water treatment facility to treat up to 2.65 MGD, transmission main improvements, the construction of a redundant water supply well at Well 5a, and the replacement of two water storage tanks in the State Forest (includes areas in both Dracut and Tyngsborough) and K-Street Tanks. The proposed State Forest Water Storage Tank is located within Priority and Estimated Habitat for Rare Species (Blanding's Turtles). Comments are due at MEPA on March 2nd.

Based on a motion by George Zaharoolis and seconded by Steve Themelis, the Council voted unanimously to approve the staff comment letter for the National Grid S145/T146 Line Switch Installation project.

3. Proposed FY2021 Budget Adjustments – Report of the Finance Committee

Jerry Frechette informed the Council that the Finance Committee met just prior to the Council Meeting for its review of the current fiscal year budget to identify any needed adjustments. The Finance Committee presented proposed revisions to the Council.

Based on a motion by George Zaharoolis and seconded by Chris Tribou, the Council voted unanimously to approve the revised FY2021 Budget as presented.

4. Approval of the FY2022 Budget

Jerry Frechette informed the group that every February, the Council must establish a proposed budget for the following fiscal year. He presented an overview of the proposed FY2022 budget based on what is known at this point in time, and provided the Finance Committee's recommendations. The Council will revisit the budget in June 2021, at which point it will be adjusted and finalized for the next fiscal year.

Based on a motion by George Zaharoolis and seconded by Darrin Wizst, the Council voted unanimously to approve the proposed FY2022 Budget as presented.

5. Proposed FY2022 Community Assessments

Jerry Frechette reminded the group that the Council is required to set the community assessments for the following fiscal year each February. By law, the Council is allowed to increase assessments by 2.5% per year, as provided by Proposition 2 ½. The Finance Committee took up this issue at its meeting prior to the Council meeting, and offered its recommendation to the

Council. Assessment funds are used to match federal and state grants received by the agency, and to cover costs associated with OPEB.

Based on a motion by George Zaharoolis and seconded by Chuck Walkovich, the Council voted unanimously to approve the FY2022 Community Assessments as presented.

6. Other New Business

There was none.

VI. Announcements

Justin Howard informed the Council that the February NMMPO meeting will be held virtually on Wednesday, February 24, 2021 at 2:00 PM.


VII. Adjournment

Following a motion made by Jayne Wellman and seconded by Chris Tribou, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 pm.

CLERK'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of February 17, 2021.

Attest:



Stephen Themelis, Clerk