

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

Minutes of Meeting: February 16, 2022

The February 16, 2022 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 7:01 p.m. with Chair Andrew Deslaurier presiding. The following were in attendance:

Councilors

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

Guest

- Joan

Staff

- Justin Howard, Assistant Director / Transportation Program Manager
- Bert Almeida, Financial Officer
- Christopher Hayes, Housing and Economic Development Planner
- Katrina Garavanian, Executive Assistant

I. MINUTES OF MEETING: JANUARY 19, 2022

The minutes of the January 19, 2022 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 19, 2022 meeting as presented. Darrin Wizst abstained, as he was not present for the January meeting.

II. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Assistant Director's Report was previously distributed to the Councilors for review. 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 George Zaharoolis and seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Financial Report and Warrant were approved. The Financial Report is included as Attachment #3.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

1. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR POSITION UPDATES

Following the January Council meeting, the Executive Director Job description with increased salary ranges was distributed and posted. Chair Andrew Deslaurier explained that the Executive Director Search Committee had incorporated feedback from the full Council and now believes the quality of resumes received is better. The Committee has engaged a slightly different process than in the Fall. Committee members began with introductory phone calls with potential candidates. From there, virtual interviews with the full committee will occur. The goal of the committee is to pare the candidates down to two finalists who will then interview in person with the full Council in attendance. A set of questions to be asked by the Council will be developed for each of the final candidates. The Committee is beginning with screening phone calls now with the goal of finalist interviews being conducted at the March Council meeting. Discussion followed regarding an in-person meeting for full Council interviews with finalists. NMCOG staff will also be invited to meet the finalists at that meeting.

2. MPO UPDATES

A. FFY 2022-2026 TIP AMENDMENT 1 – ACTION ITEM

Justin Howard informed the Council that at the January 26, 2022 NMMPO meeting, Draft TIP Amendment 1 was released for a 21-day public review and comment period, which ends on Tuesday, February 22. He provided a summary of the amendment, which involves programming additional funds of just over \$500,000 for the rehabilitation of the Beaver Brook Road Bridge over the Beaver Brook in Westford. In addition, the programming of the LRTA

purchase of five bus lifts will now be purchased completely using State funds and has a cost increase of \$50,000 to \$350,000 total. To date, no public comments have been submitted.

Based on a motion by Jayne Wellman and seconded by Darrin Wizst, the Council voted to authorize the NMCOG Chair to vote in favor of endorsing FFY 2022-2026 TIP Amendment 1 at the February 23 NMMPO meeting.

B. FY 2023-2027 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) AND THE FY 2023 UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM (UPWP) FINANCIAL GUIDANCE AND TIP READINESS DAY RESULTS

Justin Howard informed the Council that NMCOG staff have received financial guidance for development of the next Transportation Improvement Program (FFY 2023-2027 TIP) and Unified Planning Work Program (FFY 2023 UPWP). As discussed briefly at the previous Council meeting, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides an opportunity for significant increases in funding for the TIP and UPWP. He provided a brief presentation showing the federal apportionment, regional funding and priorities. In addition, Justin covered the results of TIP readiness day, where staff met with MassDOT to review the design status of TIP eligible projects and offer recommendations for project programming. Justin also provided State guidance on FFY23 UPWP development and budget.

3. OTHER OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. COMMUNITY REPORTS

Jerry Frechette mentioned that the Rourke Bridge Working Group met on February 3rd. This group includes members of the original Rourke Bridge Advisory Committee formed in 2013. Jerry explained that the design alternative selected was Alignment 3, which runs from the original starting point at Wood Street diagonally over the Merrimack River to the intersection of Old Ferry Road and Pawtucket Boulevard. This alignment affords opportunity for overlook vistas of the river, additional automotive lanes in both directions and a pedestrian-bike lane wide enough to accommodate both pedestrians and bikes. The piers of the bridge will be situated such to allow for Olympic-sized rowing lanes for the Regatta. Public art will be incorporated into the bridge design, celebrating the industrial as well as colonial history of the greater Lowell area. Dan Rourke added that the design-build planning for the bridge is a big help in moving the bridge forward.

Phil Thibault informed the Council the Town of Dracut is now on the Massachusetts School Building Authority checklist and is looking to combine the Campbell School and the Greenmont School into an elementary school for 800 students. Phil believes this will be about an 8-year process if Dracut is approved.

2. PROJECT REFERRALS

There were was none.

3. DLTA XV PROJECT SOLICITATION

Chris Hayes informed the Council that the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) XV RFP was sent to all NMCOG communities on January 25th with a proposal submittal date of February 9th. The total budget amount is 2,225 hours of staff time and \$200,236. Chris detailed the breakdown of regional projects into plans for Housing, Growth, Community Compact, and Housing Choice Initiative. NMCOG received two proposals each for six communities, all of which were eligible for inclusion in this round of DLTA funding. Letters of Agreement were sent to the communities and NMCOG staff work can begin upon receipt of signed LOAs. There is some additional funding available and Chris encouraged communities who were not able to submit proposals at this point to submit for assistance in the next round.

4. PROPOSED FY 2022 BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS – REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Jerry Frechette reminded the group that the Council revisits the current year’s budget each February in order to identify any needed adjustments. He provided an update, stating that the Finance Committee met twice within the past week to review the revised FY 2022 budget and the proposed FY 2023 budget. Jerry gave background information on the need to meet twice to formulate this year’s budget as a result of the indirect rate being driven above the MassDOT threshold of 1.55 due to the retirements of Jay Donovan and Beverly Woods, an unfilled transportation planner position, and the posting of the Executive Director position at a higher salary. He highlighted what was built into the 2022 revised budget, including estimated Executive Director and two transportation planner salaries. Looking at the gap created with the increase in the Executive Director’s position, the finance committee also recommended adjusting the Assistant Director’s salary from \$90,000 to \$110,000 based on the direction and responsibilities Justin Howard is currently taking on. Rebalancing the direct and indirect rates puts NMCOG in a better position to bill appropriately, retain and develop staff. This is necessary for a number of positive challenges ahead with incoming federal funding. The Council agreed more work would be accomplished with the appropriate staff in place.

Based on a motion by Chris Tribou and seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Council voted unanimously to approve the FY 2022 budget adjustments as proposed.

5. APPROVAL OF THE FY 2023 BUDGET

Every February, the Council must establish a proposed budget for the next fiscal year in order to set community assessments. Jerry Frechette presented an overview of the proposed FY 2023 budget based on what is known now, and explained the Finance Committee's recommendations. Justin Howard provided background on the changes in numbers for grants and contracts from the FY 2022 budget. The FY 2023 budget assumes full staff going forward. The Council will revisit the budget in June 2022, at which point it will be adjusted and finalized for the next fiscal year.

Based on a motion by George Zaharoolis and seconded by Chris Tribou, the Council voted unanimously to approve the FY 2023 Budget as proposed.

6. PROPOSED FY 2023 COMMUNITY ASSESSMENTS

Jerry Frechette reminded the Council that it is required to set community assessments for the following fiscal year each February. By law, NMCOG is allowed to increase assessments by 2.5% per year, as provided by Proposition 2 ½. The Finance Committee took up this issue at their meeting earlier in the evening, and gave their recommendation to proceed with the 2.5% increase. Assessments are per capita and based on the 2020 Census.

On a motion by George Zaharoolis and seconded by Darrin Wizst, the Council voted unanimously to approve the FY 2023 Community Assessments as presented.

7. OTHER NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pat Wojtas mentioned, for the long time Councilors who will remember him, that Mark Goldman passed away this week. Mark was a Lowell resident who provided commentary for most public comment requests, and possessed a wealth of knowledge about the greater Lowell area. Mark continued to request and receive the Council and NMMPO monthly meeting packets, keeping up with regional happenings right up until this month.

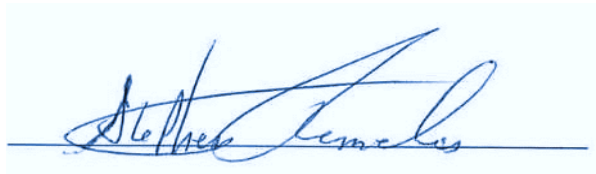
VI. ADJOURNMENT

Following a motion made by Jerry Frechette and seconded by George Zaharoolis, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:23 pm.

CLERK'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of February 16, 2022.

Attest:



Stephen Themelis, Clerk