

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

Minutes of Meeting: June 15, 2022

The June 15, 2022 meeting of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments was in held hybrid form via the Zoom platform and in person at the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments Office, 40 Church Street, Lowell, Massachusetts. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. with Clerk Stephen Themelis presiding. The following were in attendance:

Councilors

- Pat Wojtas, Chelmsford Select Board
- Paul McDougall, Chelmsford Planning Board
- Phil Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- Gerard Frechette, Lowell Planning Board
- Chuck Walkovich, Pepperell Select Board
- Stephen Themelis, Pepperell Alternate
- James Duffy, Tewksbury Planning Board
- Ron Keohane, Tyngsborough Board of Selectmen
- Katerina Kalabokis, Tyngsborough Alternate
- Jim Silva, Westford Alternate

Staff

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

I. MINUTES OF MEETING: MAY 18, 2022

The minutes of the May 18, 2022 meeting were distributed to all Councilors for review. Based on a motion made by Jerry Frechette and seconded by Phil Thibault, the Council voted to approve the minutes of the May 18, 2022 with one correction in the attendance record to include Councilor Jim Silva. Ron Keohane and Katerina Kalabokis abstained, as they were not present for the May 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 Phil Thibault and seconded by Ron Keohane, the Financial Report and Warrant were approved. The Financial Report is included as Attachment #3.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

1. MPO UPDATES

a. Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Updates

Justin Howard informed the Council that at the May Northern Middlesex MPO meeting, staff presented comments on the Draft FFY 2023-2027 TIP and FFY 2022-2026 TIP Amendment 2. NMMPO members voted to endorse both documents at that meeting. He stated that the website has been updated, with each document being submitted to the State for inclusion in the Statewide TIP. In addition, this past week the NMMPO has been made aware that the FFY 2022 TIP needs an adjustment in a funding source for an LRTA bus improvement project involving the purchase of automatic passenger counters. The project-funding source will move from the FTA 5339 funding program to the FTA 5307 program. No action is needed by the Council or the MPO on the adjustment.

b. FFY 2023 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

Justin Howard informed the Council that at the May 25th MPO meeting, staff presented the UPWP in its entirety and members voted to release the document for a 21-day public review and comment period, which ends on Tuesday, June 21st. To date, minor comments have been received from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration. Justin presented comments received, which included removing internal staff review comments in the draft, and a MassDOT review, which indicated no comments. Justin requested the Council authorize the NMCOG Chair and NMMPO Representative to vote in favor of endorsing the FFY 2023 UPWP at the June 22nd NMMPO meeting.

Based on a motion by Chuck Walkovich and seconded by Ron Keohane, the Council voted to authorize the NMCOG Chair and the NMMPO Representative to vote in favor of endorsing the

FFY 2023 Unified Planning Work Program at the June 22, 2022 Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting.

2. DISTRICT LOCAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (DLTA) XV UPDATE

Chris Hayes provided a summary of DLTA XV projects and an update on each. Included in the meeting packet was a full list of Planning Ahead for Housing, Planning Ahead for Growth, Support the Community Compact, and Support the Housing Choice Initiative projects, including budget and hours dedicated to each individual project. Chris informed the group that currently staff are at 23% of the overall DLTA budget, are on track with most projects, and will be up to date with the Brownfield project upon the hiring of a new environmental planner.

3. OTHER OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. COMMUNITY REPORTS

Ron Keohane informed the Council that the Town of Tyngsborough overwhelmingly passed a \$28 million new middle school project at its recent town meeting. The project will incur \$1 million from of the Town’s operating budget annually; however, the project will be offset with \$1 million in additional incoming property taxes from the Toll Brothers’ new housing project.

Jim Silva stated that the Town of Westford approved the use of electronic clickers at its recent town meeting. He inquired as to the experience of other towns using electronic voting systems. Pat Wojtas stated that the Town of Chelmsford has been using the electronic system successfully. Phil Thibault stated that the Town of Dracut is only in the investigating stages of electronic voting.

2. PROJECT REFERRALS

There were none.

3. STAFFING CHANGES

Justin Howard introduced NMCOG’s new Transportation Planner, Shrvanathi Gopalan Narayanan, who is in her second week of employment and very welcome. Shrvanathi is a recent graduate of Tufts University with a degree in Environmental Policy and Transportation

Planning. The Council offered a hearty welcome to Shrvanathi. Justin also informed the Council that David Righter, Energy and Environmental Planner, has taken a position closer to his home in Portland, Maine. David will be sincerely missed at NMCOG. Advertising will begin soon to hire a new Environmental Planner, most likely right after the start of new Executive Director, Jenny Raitt.

4. REPORT OF THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE: STAFF SALARY REVIEWS

Pat Wojtas informed the Council that the Personnel Committee, including Jerry Frechette, Phil Thibault and herself, met Monday, June 13, to review salary changes proposed by Justin Howard. Pat stated that in anticipation of the start of the new fiscal year, Justin has conducted annual staff reviews and made suggestions to the Committee, the average salary increase proposed is 5.5%. The funds are available for the increase, and the recommendation of the Committee is to support the proposal due to: staffing changes and vacant positions; inflated cost of living; and, NMCOG staff flexibility and adjustment to work remotely, hybrid, distanced and in person through fluctuating pandemic needs and recommendations. The Committee did stress the caveat that this is a single recommendation and not to be expected by staff yearly.

Based on a motion by Phil Thibault and seconded by Jerry Frechette, the Council voted unanimously to approve the salary adjustments as presented.

5. REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE: REVISED FY 2023 BUDGET

Jerry Frechette informed the Council that on Monday, June 13, the Finance Committee, including Jayne Wellman, Andrew Deslaurier and Jerry, met with Justin Howard and Bert Almeida to review a slight revision to the FY2023 budget, which was initially approved in February. Revisions were made due to the later start date of proposed new hires including Executive Director, a slight decrease in expenses for legal ads in the Lowell Sun, and an increase in IT provider costs. These are minor in nature and reflect a revised net change of approximately \$6,848. The Finance Committee recommendation to the Council is to vote in favor of revisions as presented. The new budget goes into effect July 1, 2022.

Based on a motion by Phil Thibault and seconded by Pat Wojtas, the Council voted unanimously to accept the Revised FY 2023 Budget as presented.

6. SUMMER MEETING SCHEDULE

Justin Howard reminded the group that traditionally, the Council elects to cancel either the July or the August meeting. At the moment, there are no pressing issues requiring a vote of the

Council in July. As always, this is subject to change. New Executive Director, Jennifer Raitt, will be starting on July 11 and still be onboarding by the next scheduled meeting date of July 20. The summer meeting schedule is at the discretion of the Council.

Based on discussion and unanimous agreement the Council opted not to meet in the month of July, unless a need arises. The Council will plan to hold their next meeting on August 24.

7. OTHER NEW BUSINESS

Chuck Walkovich informed the Council that the Town of Pepperell is looking for effective communication avenues to reach all town residents in a timely and effective manner. He requests that any Councilors with communication channels and tactics which are working within their own communities please pass along suggestions.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There was none.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Following a motion made by Phil Thibault and seconded by Jim Silva, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:45 pm.

CLERK'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of June 15, 2022.

Attest:



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen Themelis", is written over a horizontal line.

Stephen Themelis, Clerk