

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

Minutes of Meeting: January 20, 2021

The January 20, 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
- Mary McBride, Billerica Alternate
- Pat Wojtas, Chelmsford Select Board
- George Zaharoolis, Chelmsford Alternate
- Philippe Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- Gerard Frechette, Lowell Planning Board
- Stephen Themelis, Pepperell Alternate
- Jayne Wellman, Tewksbury Board of Selectmen
- Jim Silva, Westford Alternate

Guests

- Margaret Scarsdale, Pepperell Select Board
- Mark Mathews, Pepperell Economic Advisory Committee

Staff

- Beverly Woods, Executive Director
- Jay Donovan, Assistant Director
- Bert Almeida, Financial Officer
- Justin Howard, Transportation Program Manager
- Chris Curry, Transit Manager, Associate Planner
- Katrina Garavanian, Executive Assistant

I. Minutes of Meeting: November 18, 2020

The minutes of the November 18, 2020 meeting were distributed to all Councilors for review. Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Mary McBride, the Council voted

to approve the minutes of the November 18, 2020 meeting. George Zaharoolis and Phil Thibault abstained as they were not present for the November 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 Chris Tribou, 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 Steve Themelis and seconded by Jerry Frechette, the Financial Report and Warrant were unanimously approved, inclusive of an amendment to "Payroll and Taxes" changing the pay period dates to "January 21 and February 3." 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. Update on Environmental Planner position

Beverly Woods advised the Council that NMCOG received twenty-one resumes for the Environmental Planner position. Jay Donovan and Beverly met with eight candidates and narrowed the field to three finalists. The Personnel Committee reviewed the resumes and interviewed the three finalists to identify a preferred candidate.

Jerry Frechette gave the report of the Personnel Committee, stating that the Committee was in agreement that David Righter captured the strengths of all the candidates combined, including technical and communication skills, as well as a second language and knowledge of the Greater Lowell area. The Personnel Committee agreed to offer the position to David. His resume was distributed to all Councilors for review.

Based on a motion by Jerry Frechette, seconded by George Zaharoolis, the Council unanimously approved the offer of the Environmental Planner position to David Righter.

2. Development process for the FY2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and FY2022-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Justin Howard gave a short presentation and explained the process of developing the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). He stated that each year MassDOT provides the MPOs with financial targets for each document, as both documents must be financially constrained in order to receive federal approval. MassDOT will provide these funding targets at a meeting scheduled for January 26th.



NMCOG staff will participate in a conference call with MassDOT staff on February 10th to review the status of candidate projects for the upcoming TIP. MassDOT will provide their opinions as to when they feel each project will be ready for advertising. NMCOG may be reaching out to its member communities to get clarification on the status of their projects. A TIP and UPWP Development Schedule were included in the Council packet.

3. Other Old Business

There was none.

V. New Business

1. Community Reports

Jayne Wellman informed the Council that Money Magazine named Tewksbury #10 of the best places in the country to live if you are working from home. The selection was based on items such as the concentration of access to parks, restaurants with good takeout, and so forth. Also, Joe Kearns was sworn in this week as the new Tewksbury Fire Chief following the retirement of Chief Michael Hazel.


Steve Themelis told the Council that Pepperell has formed a Master Plan Implementation Committee to oversee the prioritized goals and their newly completed Master Plan.

Mary McBride updated the group that the Billerica Community Food Pantry has moved from the LDS Church to the Masonic Hall, which the Town recently purchased. She stated that the Pantry's demand is much higher than it has been, but that the new facility is beautiful and up to the task. She also stated that Architectural Record has recently published a pictorial article on the new Billerica High School facility.

Andrew Deslaurier informed the Council that the Billerica School Nutrition Services passed an amazing milestone and recently distributed their millionth meal.

2. Project Referrals

Beverly Woods informed the Council that there is only one project in the region currently under MEPA review. National Grid has filed an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) for the 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. Each switch will be 18 feet in height, and in the Tewksbury work will occur along the transmission ROW at 2 locations. The project exceeds MEPA review thresholds for Rare



Species (301 CMR 11.03 (2)(b)) and Wetlands and Waterways (301 CMR 11.03 (3)(b)(1)(d)). Comments are due at MEPA on January 26th, and comments were received today from the Tewksbury Town Engineer, stating that the town has no environmental concerns related to the project. The MEPA table was included in the Council packet.

Beverly added that NMCOG was notified on January 19th that the Dracut Water Supply District resubmitted the Environmental Notification Form for a project they had withdrawn a couple months ago. The project is to install a new well and water lines in Tyngsborough and to build new water storage structures within the Lowell-Dracut-Tyngsborough State Forest. When NMCOG receives a MEPA project number and further information, it will be provided to the Council.

3. COVID Relief Grant Opportunities

Beverly Woods advised the Council that billions of dollars in additional COVID relief funding will be coming to Massachusetts from the recent Stimulus Bill, a significant portion of which will go to fund unemployment benefits and the vaccination program. In addition, significant funds will be made available through state grants for businesses and communities. Included in the Council packet was a handout providing information on the Payroll Protection Program, which was recently reopened by the Small Business Administration (SBA). Information was also provided for the Commonwealth Places grant program which provides resources for placemaking in downtown and neighborhood commercial districts through MassDevelopment. Beverly stated that many grant opportunities are expected in the near future and NMCOG will keep the Council apprised of additional funding opportunities as they are announced.

4. DLTA XIV Update and information on the RFP process

Jay Donovan informed the Council that the DLTA program was included in the budget signed by the Governor, and has been level-funded. NMCOG staff are very grateful that the program was funded at this level during such a challenging time. He outlined the RFP process for soliciting proposed projects from NMCOG's communities. Given how late the state budget process concluded, it is expected that a signed contract with DHCD will be completed in mid-February. Jay stated that NMCOG staff will be in touch with communities and their planners soon and that anyone with questions should reach out to him.

Beverly Woods added information regarding a cash match requirement of 10%, which can be 5% in kind and 5% cash, for the funding allowance. Based on a motion by Steve Themelis, seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Council voted to approve up to \$10,000 cash to match the State grant.

5. Planning for Housing webinar series in partnership with the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Beverly Woods informed the Council that she and Jay Donovan met with the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission staff to plan a jointly-sponsored webinar series on housing. The concept presently includes three sessions, no longer than two hours in length. The group has identified some potential speakers and presenters. She stated that it would be helpful to hear from the Council members regarding the housing issues that are most prevalent in their communities, whether they are COVID-related or have been ongoing for some time. Input from the Council is important for creating seminars that are helpful and timely. Following discussion, councilor suggestions and ideas were summarized into three potential webinars as: 1) For the resident and layperson that explains the basics of 40B, what it is and how it works; 2) For elected officials explaining the history of 40B and the need for affordable housing, offering strategies on handling difficult meetings that are related to 40B projects; and 3) For Zoning Boards of Appeal offering tools and strategies for affordable housing production and so forth.

6. Other New Business

Chris Curry presented the LRTA Resolution which authorizes the commitment of matching funds by NMCOG for our contract with the LRTA. Specifically, the resolution is for \$15,000 in local funding to match FTA funding of \$60,000. Chris explained NMCOG's role in safety planning, route planning, ridership analysis, annual ADA programs, Title VI, environmental justice, EEO and other annual and monthly reporting requirements.

Based on a motion by Steve Themelis and seconded by George Zaharoolis, the Council voted to approve the Resolution.

VI. Announcements

There were none.

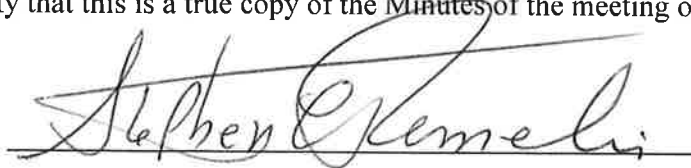
VII. Adjournment

Following a motion made by Mary McBride and seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 pm.

CLERK'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of January 20, 2021.

Attest:



Stephen Themelis, Clerk