

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

**Minutes of Meeting: October 20, 2021**

The October 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
- Paul McDougall, Chelmsford Planning Board
- George Zaharoolis, Chelmsford Alternate
- Phil Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- Daniel Rourke, Lowell City Council
- Gerard Frechette, Lowell Planning Board
- Mark Mathews, Pepperell Select Board
- Stephen Themelis, Pepperell Alternate
- Jayne Wellman, Tewksbury Select Board
- Steven O'Neill, Tyngsborough Planning Board
- Anita Tonakarn-Nguyen, Westford Select Board
- Darrin Wizst, Westford Planning Board

Visitors

- Andrew Jennings, LRTA Advisory Board

Staff

- Beverly Woods, Executive Director
- Bert Almeida, Financial Officer
- Justin Howard, Transportation Program Manager
- Chris Hayes, Economic Development & Housing Planner
- Katrina Garavanian, Executive Assistant

## **I. Minutes of Meeting: September 15, 2021**

The minutes of the September 15, 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 September 15, 2021 meeting.

## **II. Executive Director's Report**

The Executive Director's Report was previously distributed to the Councilors for review. The report is included as Attachment #2.

Beverly Woods introduced Chris Hayes, NMCOG's newly appointed Economic Development and Housing Planner. Chris gave a brief summary of his work experience and thanked the Council.

## **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 Mary McBride, 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. Update from the Executive Director Search Committee**

Andrew Deslaurier informed the Council that the Executive Director Search Committee has had a positive response to the listing for the position and a number of different types of resumes. He stated that resumes were of varying degrees in terms of quality. The Committee has reviewed them and is beginning to interview select candidates, though it is slightly behind schedule. Andrew believes the team wants to focus on hiring the right Executive Director rather than working in haste. He hopes to bring the search process to a successful conclusion prior to the end of the year. Four finalists will be interviewed over the next two weeks and a recommendation will be brought to the Council subsequently.

Mark Mathews inquired as to the time of overlap and training prior to Beverly Woods' retirement. The Committee would prefer at least six weeks but re-emphasized the need to have the "right" candidate.

### **2. Other Old Business**

There was none.

## **V. New Business**

### **1. Community Reports**

Mark Mathews stated that the Town of Pepperell, pursuant to Pepperell's Master Plan, is proposing a Community Preservation Act be brought to Town Meeting on November 6<sup>th</sup>, and a community engagement evening is scheduled on October 21<sup>st</sup>. The Town has been working with a citizens' advocacy group to provide as much communication as possible. The article is proposing a 1% CPA tax with exemptions for the first \$100,000 in property value, and also for those within the low income classification.

Anita Tonakarn-Nguyen stated that the Town of Westford's Boston Road Complete Streets project received pushback from abutters when approaching the 75% design point. The Town has held subsequent meetings and has been able to make edits and design changes to reach the 75% design and move forward. Anita thanked Justin Howard and Beverly Woods for their help and support.

Jayne Wellman informed the Council that the Town of Tewksbury's Local Housing Partnership Committee members voted to dissolve the Partnership as it currently exists and tendered their resignations, as the group was unable to obtain the administrative assistance it needs.

Anita Tonakarn-Nguyen requested a discussion on ARPA funding as a future Council agenda item. She is particularly interested in the methods other towns are using to collect community feedback and establishing priorities.

### **2. Project Referrals**

There were none.

### **3. EDA Build Back Better Grant Application in Partnership with MAPC**

Beverly Woods informed the Council that NMCOG is partnering with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and eight other regional planning organizations across the Commonwealth on an EDA Build Back Better regional application. The application is focused on growing the cybersecurity industry in Massachusetts, and the project would include the following components:

- Improving outreach and awareness of cybersecurity training opportunities to immigrant, non-English speaking, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), women and rural communities who have struggled to access higher education or well-paying jobs. This includes wraparound services (day care, transportation, etc.), and provisions for adult basic education /ESOL.

- Coordinating internship and apprenticeship opportunities in the public and private sector for students enrolled in Cybersecurity programs.
- Establishing private/nonprofit business accelerators that can support start-ups and established businesses to expand.
- Investment in faculty and resource capacity at key academic and workforce training facilities across the state.
- Capital investments to expand fiberoptic broadband infrastructure, including fiber to residential connections in unserved and underserved areas of the state.
- Programming to support digital literacy and personal cybersecurity awareness to ensure individuals can protect themselves online, offered in multiple languages and community contexts.
- Establishment of regional cyber resource centers that are connected to academic and workforce institutions to support non-cyber businesses and local governments.

A draft of the application narrative was included in the meeting packet for review.

#### **4. Report of the Personnel Committee: Hiring Recommendation for the Assistant Director Position**

Pat Wojtas provided an update to the Council on Assistant Director search process since the September meeting. She stated that Beverly Woods and Jay Donovan interviewed four candidates to the Assistant Director position, and then narrowed the field to two candidates. The Personnel Committee met on October 13<sup>th</sup> to conduct interviews with the finalists: David Fields and Justin Howard. Following the interview process, the Committee voted to recommend promoting Justin to the position of Assistant Director. She then requested that the Council consider the Personnel Committee's recommendation.

Based on a motion by Steve Themelis and seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Council voted unanimously to promote Justin Howard to the Assistant Director position.

#### **5. Other New Business**

Beverly Woods solicited input from the Council on a proposed gathering in honor of her upcoming retirement and the very recent retirement of Jay Donovan. The Council agreed unanimously to authorize a gathering in November at Lenzi's in Dracut.

#### **VI. Announcements**

There were none.

#### **VII. Adjournment**

Following a motion made by Jerry Frechette and seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:39 pm.

**CLERK'S CERTIFICATE**

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

Attest:



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

Stephen Themelis, Clerk