

**Northern Middlesex Council of Governments**  
**672 Suffolk Street, Suite 100**  
**Lowell, MA 01854**

**Minutes from Council Meeting December 20, 2023**

**I.** The December 20, 2023 meeting of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) was held hybrid at 672 Suffolk Street, Suite 100, in the conference room and via Zoom. The meeting was called to order by Andrew Deslaurier at 7:03 p.m. The following were in attendance:

Councilors:

- Andrew Deslaurier, Chair, Billerica Select Board
- Chris Tribou, Assistant Clerk
- Mary McBride, Clerk, Billerica Alternate
- Pat Wojtas, MPO Rep, Chelmsford Select Board
- Philippe Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- Ron Keohane, Tyngsborough Select Board
- Gerard Frechette, Treasurer, Lowell Planning Board
- Stephen Themelis, Vice Chair, Pepperell Alternate
- Chris Barrett, Westford Select Board
- Darrin Wizst, Westford Planning Board
- James Silva, Westford Alternate

Staff:

- Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director
- Kelly Lynema, Deputy Director
- Paul Christner, Transportation Planning Program Manager
- Sara Schreiber, Finance and Benefits Manager
- Lesley Shahbazian, Executive Assistant
- Christopher Glenn Hayes, Housing and Economic Development Manager

## **II. Welcome and Introductions to new NMCOG Staff Member**

Paul Christner, NMCOG's new Transportation Planning Program Manager introduced himself. He most recently worked at the Boston MPO and he is excited to join NMCOG.

## **III. Approval of Minutes**

The Minutes of the November 21, 2023 meeting were distributed to all Councilors for review. Based on a Motion by Stephen Themelis, seconded by Mary McBride on a roll call vote, the Council approved the Minutes of the November 21, 2023 meeting.

## **IV. Financial Report and Warrant - Income and expense statements 11/21/2023-12/18/2023**

Ms. Schreiber, Finance and Benefits Manager, presented the Financial Report and the Warrant for review and approval. Based on a Motion by Gerard Frechette, seconded by Mary McBride, following a roll call vote, the Council unanimously approved the Financial Report and Warrant.

## **V. Mid-Year Budget Update and Amendment**

Gerard Frechette presented the NMCOG Mid-Year Budget. The Finance Committee met to review the FY2024 budget and made some mid-year adjustments. There has been an increase in expected revenue. The biggest adjustment was an increase in expenses as a result of the office move. The Finance Committee approved the use of funds from the money market account to cover those expenses as a one-time expense and a plan to replenish those funds.

Based on a Motion by Stephen Themelis, seconded by Mary McBride on a roll call vote, the Council approved the Revised FY 2024 Mid-Year Budget.

## **VI. Draft FFY 2024-2028 TIP Amendment 1 (Pat Wojtas, NMMPO Rep)**

This may be discussed at a future meeting.

## **VII. Resolution to Commit Matching Funds for the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) Transit Planning Contract with the US Department of Transportation**

NMCOG is still working on the LRTA contract – how much it will be and when it will actually occur. Paul Christner is the lead on this and when the draft resolution is complete, it will be discussed at a future Council meeting.

## **VIII. At Home in Great Lowell – A Regional Housing Strategy - update and discussion**

Chris Hayes gave an overview presentation on the “At Home in Greater Lowell – A Regional Housing Strategy”, which is one of the agency’s largest planning projects in 2024. NMCOG received a planning grant of \$125,000 from the Executive Office of Environmental and Energy Affairs. NMCOG also received a small grant from the Greater Lowell Community Foundation. We are also looking for some additional funds. The kick-off summit is Tuesday, February 13 from 1:00-5:00. The full presentation has been included in this packet.

Kelly Lynema emphasized what we are asking of the Council. First to help recruit people to volunteer for the steering committee and also to spread the word about the summits – getting people to attend these summits and especially city and town board and committee members.

## **IX. Report of the Executive Director, November 2023**

The Executive Director’s report was distributed for review to the Council in advance of this meeting. Ms. Raitt shared some highlights:

- The Greater Lowell Vision Zero Plan has kicked off in earnest. Consultant is on board. There will be multiple engagement events happening next year.
- We ended the traffic counting season in November and a report will be forthcoming.

- Weights and Measures was ahead of schedule and finished their work for the year in November. Mark Normandin and Ricardo Machado are working on their plans for next year.
- Chris Hayes and Kelly Lynema worked on submitting the final grant application to the EDA to offset the cost of creating the next Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region. The current CEDS expires in mid-2025.
- All of our communities that are MBTA communities submitted models for the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to review. This will help those communities be in a good position to begin the work of drafting bylaw amendments to be ready for Town Meeting in each respective community.
- The Dunstable Housing Production Plan wrapped up and will now be reviewed and must be adopted by the Planning Board and Select Board prior to submission to EOHLC for approval.
- The Dunstable Walk Audit has wrapped up. Kelly Lynema made a presentation to the Select Board and submitted the final reporting to AARP.
- The Northern Middlesex Municipal CEO Group completed one year of meetings and are planning their next year of work, including pursuing a Regionalization Grant through the Community Compact program.

## **X. Community Exchange**

**Westford** – Darrin Wizst – The MBTA Communities zoning project has been a lot of work and a lot of progress has been made. Some final edits are being made before it is submitted to EOHLC. The Town held two public hearings: one was a strategic planning session this past summer and a recent workshop with a consultant.

**Tyngsborough** – Ron Keohane – Two breweries opened in town. A new middle school is being built. A special act was passed about a year ago to create a DPW in town. The town received a \$2 million MassWorks grant for Kendall Road.

Toll Brothers is building 100 new homes on a former golf course property. The town decided to forego purchase of this property in order to put funds in the school operating budget which will also reduce the tax burden on the community. Toll Brothers gave the town 35 acres of the property. The town

plans to build a recreational facility on a portion of that property which will include an existing clubhouse that Toll Brothers will help renovate.

**Pepperell** – Stephen Themelis – The Economic Development Advisory Committee added new members and is starting to meet again. The Town Planner is still open. The town has a 90-day contract with a planner until a permanent hire is made.

**Dracut** – Philippe Thibault – The town is continuing work on the new elementary school and proposals from Owners Project Managers are expected soon. Interviews will begin in January. The town started discussions on the MBTA Communities zoning at the last zoning bylaw review committee meeting.

**Chelmsford** – Pat Wojtas – Chelmsford was invited to apply to the MA School Building Authority for a new school building. A brewery is planned to open soon in the town center.

**Billerica** – Chris Tribou - 279 Boston Road was torn down. The Planning Board is trying to encourage a mixed-income and mixed-use development at that location (housing and a restaurant). The Board also discussed MBTA Communities and identified three potential locations for new growth.

Andrew Deslaurier – The town is anticipating a court decision which will determine if the town needs to have a ballot question for the town center project.

## **XI. Reminders and Announcements**

1. NMCOC Strategic Committee Meeting – January 13, 2023 at 12:00 at the Chelmsford Library.
2. NMCOC Council Meeting – January 17, 2023 at 7:00 PM

## **XII. Other Business not known at the time of posting of this agenda**

### **XIII. Adjournment**

Following a motion made by Gerard Frechette and seconded by Mary McBride on a voice vote the Council unanimously adjourned the meeting at 8:34 pm.

#### **CLERK'S CERTIFICATE**

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of  
December 20, 2023.

Attest:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mary K. McBride", is written over a horizontal line.

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Mary K. McBride, Clerk