



Northern Middlesex Council of Governments

NOTICE OF MEETING

A Multi-Disciplinary
Regional Planning
Agency Serving:

Billerica
Chelmsford
Dracut
Dunstable
Lowell
Pepperell
Tewksbury
Tyngsborough
Westford

Andrew N. Deslaurier
Chair

Jennifer M. Raitt
Executive Director

40 Church Street
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The next meeting of the **Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG)** will be held on **Wednesday, March 15, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.** at **NMCOG Offices, 40 Church St, Suite 200, Lowell, MA 01852** with optional remote access via Zoom. To join this meeting via Zoom, please go to: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88101757628?pwd=MIl4dEhJaXFHZERLNHlxZzN0ZHN6dz09>. The Meeting ID is: 881 0175 7628 and Passcode is: 439793. If you are joining by phone, dial (646) 558-8656, Meeting ID# 881 0175 7628

AGENDA

- I. **Call to Order and Roll Call**
- II. **Approval of Minutes from February 15, 2023**
- III. **Financial Report and Warrant - Income and expense statements 2/14/2023-3/14/2023**
- IV. **2023 Greater Lowell CEDS Annual Performance Report – presentation and vote for endorsement**
- V. **Report of the Executive Director**
- VI. **Community Exchange**
- VII. **Reminders and Announcements**
 1. **Envision 2050 (long-range regional transportation plan) Public Forum – March 22, 2023 6-7:30 PM at UMass Lowell @ Wannalancit Mills, Rm 305**
 2. **NMCOG Council Meeting – April 19, 2023 at 7:00 PM**
- VIII. **Other Business not known at the time of posting of this agenda**
- IX. **Adjourn**

CITY/TOWN CLERKS: PLEASE POST PURSUANT TO OPEN MEETING LAW

Please contact Lesley Shahbazian at lshahbazian@nmcog.org with any questions on this agenda.

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

Minutes from Council Meeting February 15, 2023

I. The February 15, 2023 meeting of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) was held in hybrid form via Zoom and in person at the NMCOG office at 40 Church Street, Lowell, Massachusetts. The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. with Chair Andrew Deslaurier presiding. The following were in attendance:

Councilors:

- Andrew Deslaurier, Chair, Billerica Select Board
- Mary K. McBride, Clerk, Billerica Alternate
- Pat Wojtas, MPO Rep, Chelmsford Select Board
- Paul McDougall, Chelmsford Planning Board
- George Zaharoolis, Chelmsford Alternate
- Phil Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- Gerard Frechette, Treasurer, Lowell Planning Board
- Chuck Walkovich, Pepperell Select Board
- Joan Ladik, Pepperell Planning Board
- Stephen Themelis, Pepperell Alternate
- James Duffy, Tewksbury Planning Board
- Anita Tonakarn-Nguyen, Vice Chair, Westford Select Board
- Darrin Wizst, Westford Planning Board
- James Silva, Westford Alternate

Staff:

- Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director
- Justin Howard, Transportation Director
- Bert Almeida, Financial Officer
- David Tilton, Sealer of Weights & Measures/ Transportation Planner
- Christopher Hayes, AICP, Housing and Economic Development Planner
- Jeff Owen, AICP, Regional Planner
- Lesley Shahbazian, Executive Assistant

II. Minutes of Meeting: January 18, 2022

The Minutes of the January 18, 2022 meeting were distributed to all Councilors for review. Based on a Motion by Steve Themelis, seconded by Mary McBride, on a roll call vote, the Council approved the Minutes of the January 18 meeting as presented.

III. Financial Report and Warrant – Income and Expense Statements 2/23/2023

Bert Almeida presented the Financial Report and the Warrant for review and approval. Based on a Motion by Darrin Wizst and seconded by Mary McBride, following a roll call vote, the Council unanimously approved the Financial Report and Warrant.

IV. Annual Budget

This is Ms. Raitt's first presentation of a budget for NMCOG. Ms. Raitt and Bert Almeida worked together with input from Justin Howard and Chris Hayes. The budget reflects current and anticipated revenue. Jerry gave a report out from the Finance Committee which included Andrew, Jerry, and Bert. The budget being presented shows a projection for increase in revenue from prior years' budget.

A new line for direct staff planning costs was added, which includes an Indirect Rate for staff meetings and other meetings not associated with a specific project.

On the expense side, the budget for IT Services increased. Currently we use PCG – Portsmouth Computer Group in Portsmouth, NH, and have not had a contract. PCG provided NMCOG with a proposal for their essential services package, and also a premium services package which will include help desk support and all other services, cybersecurity costs and a one-time startup fee. Staff will procure and secure a contract for this service. Councilors are welcome to share names of IT companies to encourage responses.

Another expense the Finance Committee discussed was the rent. The number in the budget includes a cleaning cost and a moving fee. Our lease is expiring.

The current budget does not incorporate staff salary increases or adjustments. Ms. Raitt will present these to the Council in June.

With no further comments, based on a Motion made by Jerry Frechette and seconded by Darrin Wizst on a roll call vote, the Council approved the FY24 Budget as presented.

V. Personnel Committee Updates

Pat's updates - Personnel Committee (Pat Wojtas, Phil Thibault, and Jerry Frechette) met last week. The committee has been very busy doing interviews and looking at how staffing can be adjusted and upgraded. Most positions that we are interviewing for are already funded and in the budget. With the Transportation Planner and Sealer of Weights and Measures leaving, we will be hiring for one full-time transportation position and would like to add a new position of part-time

Sealer. The full-time transportation position was included in the mid-year budget update. The part-time sealer position needs to be voted on by the Council.

Chris Curry has announced he will be retiring soon. We will have different titles for some of these positions. We are also looking to outsource traffic counting and will be posting a request for proposals soon. We will also be posting for a Deputy Director.

Based on a Motion by Pat Wojtas, seconded by Mary McBride, on a roll call vote, the Council approved the part-time Sealer position.

Bert Almeida and David Tilton are leaving NMCOG. Both were thanked for their years of service to NMCOG.

VI. Strategic Planning process, committee, and timeline-presentation, discussion, and vote

Following the kick-off meeting, Ms. Raitt met with the Officers and senior staff to discuss a proposed strategic planning process. Ms. Raitt reviewed the 5 phases of the Strategic Planning process. The first step before all others is to form a Strategic Planning Committee to help with the development of the plan. The Committee would consist of the Officers, plus two additional members of the Council, two NMCOG staff, one person from the LRTA and one MPO representative. The Committee would work with Ms. Raitt, the Council and other staff to assist with all aspects of the plan.

Based on a motion by Phil Thibault, and seconded by Mary McBride, the Council unanimously approve the proposed Strategic Planning process and approve the forming of the Strategic Planning Committee.

VII. Office Space Update

Ms. Raitt followed up on her beginning efforts to determine the types of office spaces that are currently available, size, cost, and amenities. The rents range from \$9.50-\$15.00/sq. ft. Ms. Raitt discussed potential improvements with the current landlord, and these improvements would likely be part of any proposal the current property owner might submit as part of the competitive RFP for Lease Space. Ms. Raitt will reconvene the Lease Subcommittee to review the draft RFP.

VIII. Report of the Executive Director

The Executive Director's Report was distributed for review to the Council in advance of the meeting, and was extensive. Ms. Raitt shared some highlights:

Lesley Shahbazian has been hired as Executive Assistant. The Council welcomes Ms. Shahbazian.

The new Deputy Sealer of Weights and Measures, Mark Normandin, has been hired. David Tilton has been training him.

The next Envision 2050 forum is on March 22nd and we are hoping for wide attendance from the Council. The transportation team has done excellent work moving this project forward.

Ms. Raitt also thanked Chris Hayes and Jeff Owen for their work on the CEDS and for pulling together the Annual Report. She also congratulated them on a successful formation and implementation of work through the Tourism and Marketing subcommittee.

NMCOG filed for Economic Development District Designation in 2019 and it has been stagnant since that time. Following a meeting staff held with representatives from the Economic Development Administration, staff will be updating the application previously submitted to get it on the fast track for federal approval. This would be a very important designation for NMCOG and the region for economic development, opportunity, resiliency, and recovery.

We are also working on the regional application through the Massachusetts Broadband Initiative Digital Equity Program.

Ms. Raitt thanked Daniela Garcia Moreno who is pulling together the regional energy workshop being held on February 23 at 1:00 PM.

All of our communities have complied with the Action Plan filings for the MBTA Communities program. Three of those communities have an approved plan – Westford, Lowell, and Dracut. NMCOG was able to secure additional funding to work with Tyngsborough to assist with their planning efforts.

Ms. Raitt thanked Daniela and Jeff for their work on the Dracut Open Space and Recreation Plan kick-off and community engagement planning process.

We are still continuing monthly meetings with the Northern Middlesex Managers Group. NMCOG has been providing support with these meetings, including organizing topics, agendas, and providing facilitation.

IX. Community Exchange

Jim Duffy thanked Ms. Raitt and Justin Howard for providing outreach materials for Tewksbury. Informing residents is a great idea to introduce them to NMCOG and our services.

Jerry Frechette informed us that in January in Lowell the Planning Board gave a non-binding recommendation to the City Council to eliminate the parking requirement in the downtown mixed used zone to help the redevelopment of some key properties in that area. The City Council adopted that change.

Westford welcomed their new Town Manager: Kristen Las.

Chuck Walkovich thanked Ms. Raitt for facilitating the Town's first joint Select Board and Planning Board session to get their goals aligned for the Master Plan.

Stephen Themelis spoke about the excellent turnout for an informational meeting in Pepperell about the roundabout at Rt. 111 and Rt. 113. The Town received a \$400,000 redevelopment grant. The project will kick off in the summer.

IX. Reminders and Announcements

- **Council Meeting**
March 15 at NMCOG Offices at 7PM

X. Other Business Not Known at Time of Posting

XI. Adjournment

CLERK'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of February 15, 2023.



Attest: _____

Mary K. McBride, Clerk

NORTHERN MIDDLESEX COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
WARRANT

March 15, 2023

PAYMENTS PENDING

Enterprise Operating Account	\$ 49,728.45	Checks dated 3/1/2023 & 3/15/2023 presented for payment
Total	\$ 49,728.45	

ANTICIPATED EXPENSES / INVOICES PENDING

Canon Financial Services	\$ 682.00	April Copier Lease
Guardian Life Insurance	\$ 400.00	April life insurance
Verizon	\$ 50.00	StormWater Mobile Phone
Lambert Almeida	\$ 1,000.00	Est Transition Accounting Services
MIIA	\$ 32,963.86	April health & dental (Includes LRTA Portion)
NearMap	\$ 20,200.00	Fly-over Photography Tyngsborough, Westford, Dracut
Owl Stamp Visual Solutions	\$ 78.00	Stamp for Weights & Measures
W.B. Mason	\$ 500.00	Est Office Supplies
Atlantis Ventures	\$ 8,399.00	April Rent
	\$ 64,272.86	

PAYROLL & TAXES

Paydate March 16, 2023, March 30, 2023 and April 13,2023(Estimate)	\$ 116,000.00
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TOTAL WARRANT	\$ 230,001.31
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NORTHERN MIDDLESEX COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

**FINANCIAL REPORT
March 15, 2023**

CASH BALANCES:

Enterprise Bank - New Investment Acct	497,408
Enterprise Bank - New Operating Acct	11,715
Washington Savings - Investment Acct.	533,600
Salem Five 36 MO.CD	<u>173,154</u>

TOTAL CASH ACCOUNT BALANCES 1,215,877

Restricted Cash Account: OPEB (VantageCare RHS-EIP:Vantagepoint MP Trad Growth Dedicated Retirement Health Savings Plan)	308,709
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ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE - PROJECTS:

Proj 30950 - MassDOT #118971 - January 2023 Invoice	98,721
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TOTAL PROJECT RECEIVABLES: 98,721

ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE - FY 2023 MEMBER ASSESSMENTS: 0

OTHER RECEIVABLES: 0

TOTAL ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLES: 98,721

NET CASH TOTAL INCLUDING RECEIVABLES: 1,314,598

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE :

A/P CHECKS PRESENTED FOR SIGNATURE	(49,728)
ANTICIPATED EXPENSES / INVOICES PENDING	(64,273)
ANTICIPATED PAYROLL & TAXES (Through April 15, 2023)	<u>(116,000)</u>

TOTAL WARRANT: (230,001)

TOTAL ACCOUNTS PAYABLE: (230,001)

NET CASH TOTAL (INCLUDING RECEIVABLES, LESS ACCOUNTS PAYABLE): 1,084,597

Other Outstanding Obligations:

Contract Advance-DLTA XV	(54,807)
Due to/from Grantor-MHD Contracts FY94 - FY22	<u>(125,827)</u>

(180,634)

NET CASH TOTAL (Less) OTHER OUTSTANDING PAYABLES: 903,963



2023 GREATER LOWELL ANNUAL CEDS REPORT

Presentation to CEDS Committee, March 2, 2023



THIS DOCUMENT WILL COMMUNICATE CHANGES TO EDA, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY HELP REGIONAL PARTNERS WORK WITH ONE ANOTHER.

THE CEDS ANNUAL REPORT

The CEDS Annual Report highlights key changes to the regional economy and the corresponding priorities and strategies.

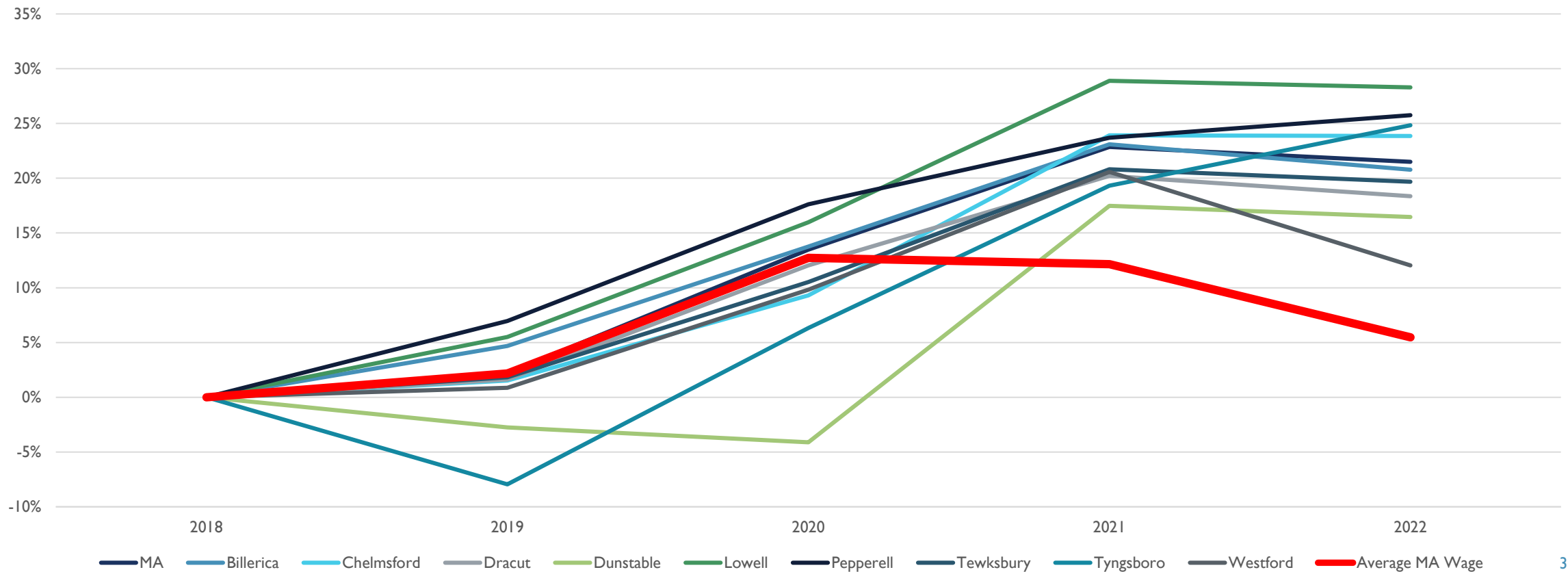
It also should list the accomplishments of the regional economic development entity (NMCOG) and the district as a whole. It should be a concise and easily accessible to both the public and decision-makers.

The CEDS Committee, a roughly 25-member committee representing municipalities, nonprofits, agencies, and private businesses, guides the CEDS process. On March 2, it voted unanimously to recommend 2023 CEDS Annual Report to be adopted by NMCOG Council and filed with the Economic Development Administration

Image: LDFC

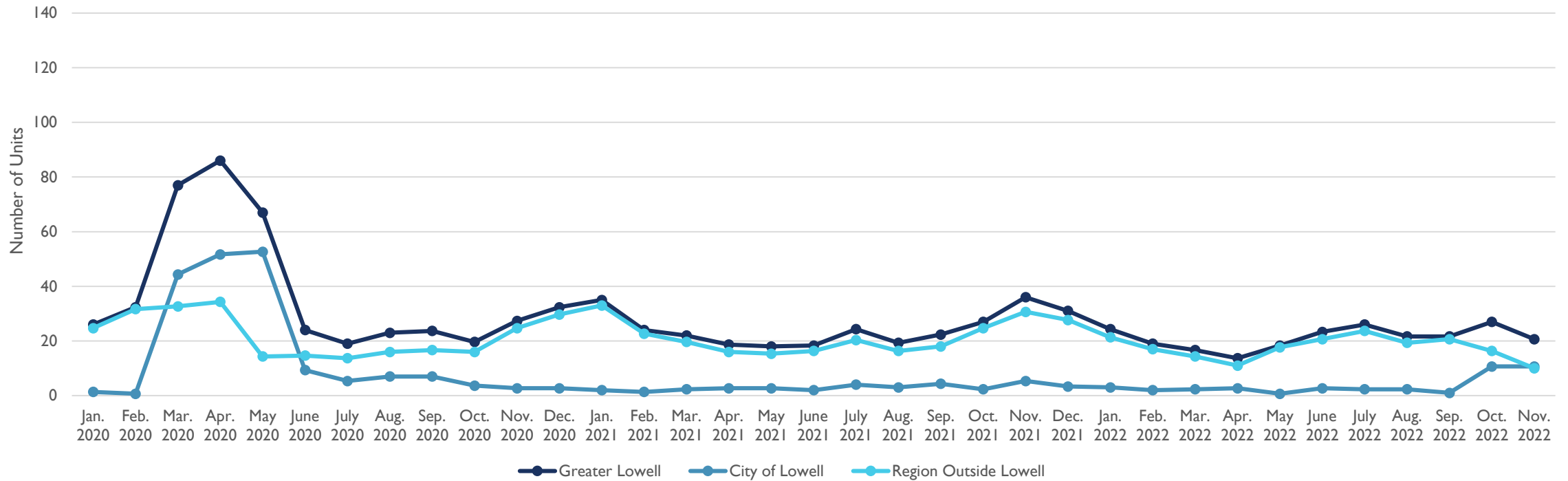


SINGLE-FAMILY HOME MEDIAN SALES PRICE VS. AVERAGE MA WAGE, INFLATION-ADJUSTED CHANGE



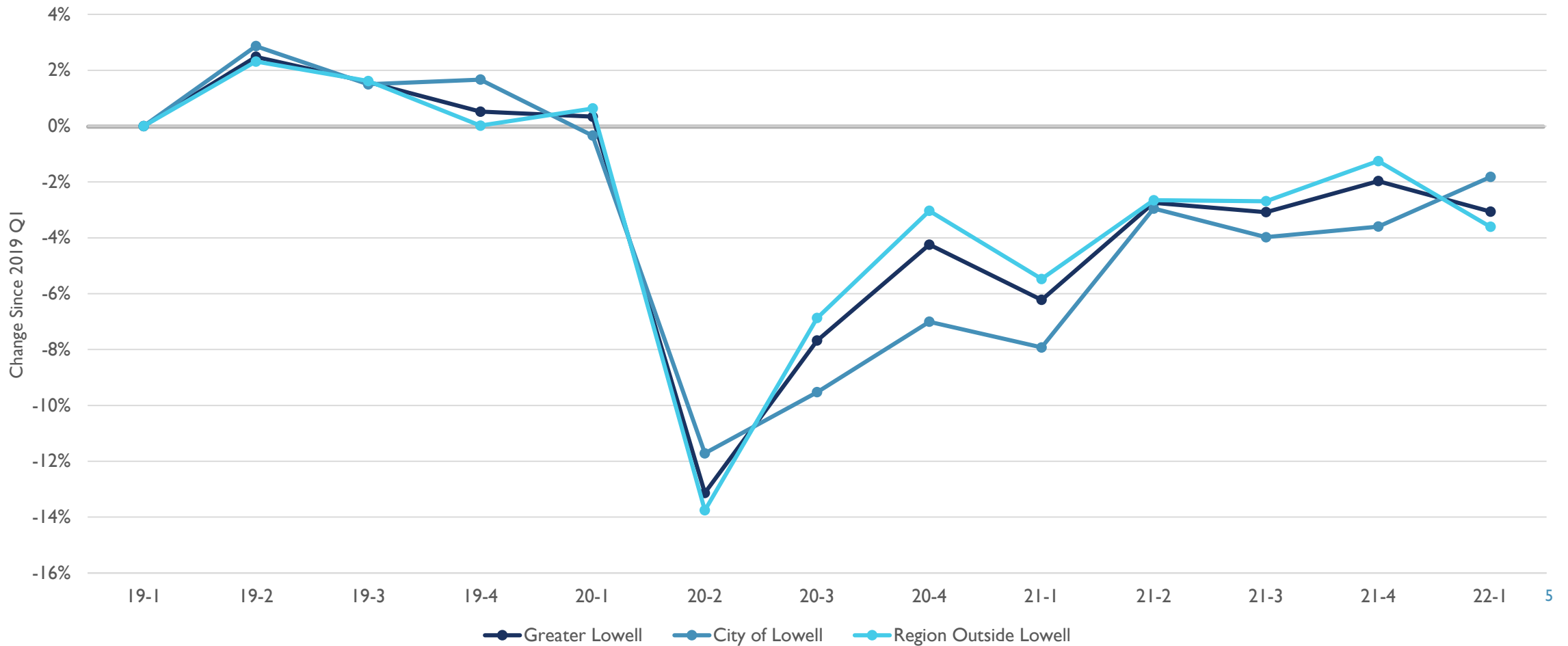
Source: Warren Group, ES-202 Data

UNITS PERMITTED BY REGION, 3-MONTH ROLLING AVERAGE, 2020-2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Building Permits Survey, via Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) State of the Cities Data Systems (SOCDS) Database. <https://socds.huduser.gov/permits/> Accessed January 20, 2023

CHANGE FROM 2019 Q1, # EMPLOYEES, 2019 Q1 - 2022 Q1



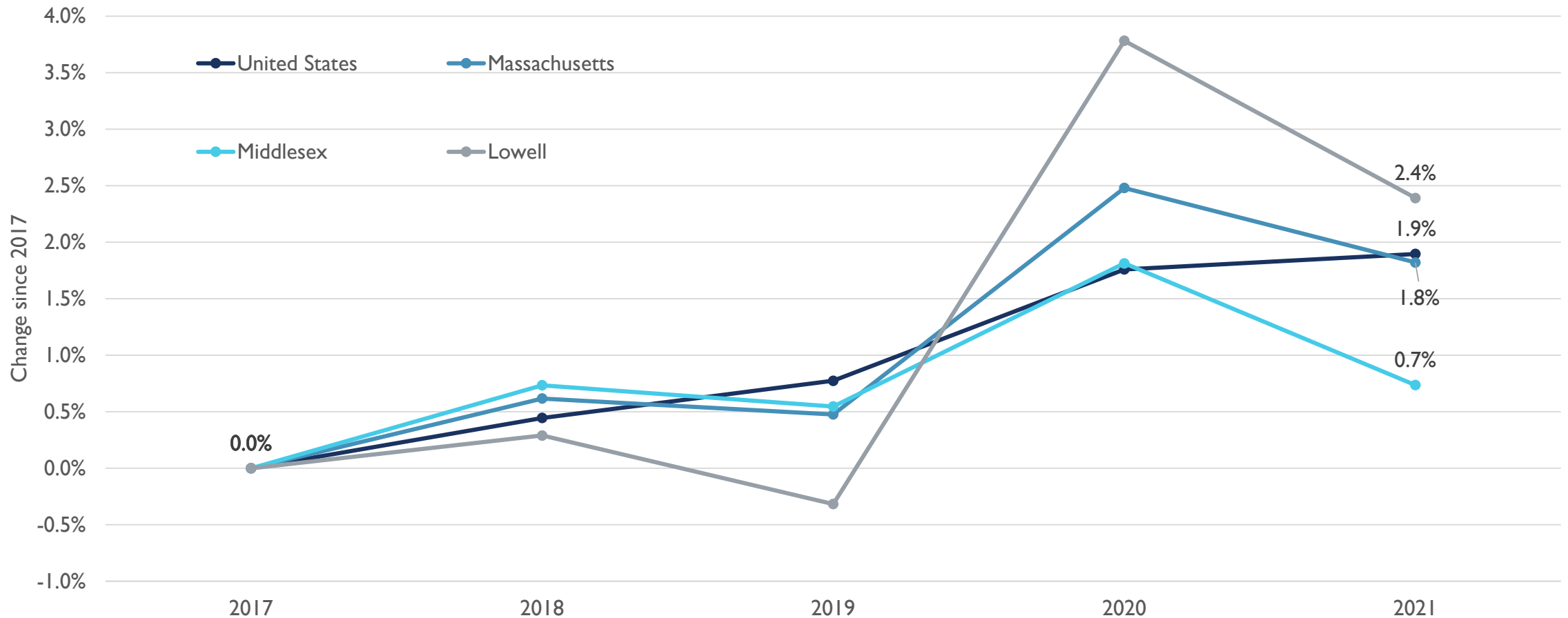
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. The chart above shows how each region changed as a proportion of 2019 Q1

ESTABLISHMENTS, EMPLOYEES, AND WEEKLY WAGE GREATER LOWELL COMPARISONS

	Establishments		Employment		Average Weekly Wage	
	2020	Change since 2019	2020	Change since 2019	2020	Change since 2019
Goods-Producing	1,519	4%	26,496	2%	\$ 2,178	3%
Natural Resources and Mining	18	500%	207	1280%	\$ 771	55%
Construction	1,140	4%	7,741	0%	\$ 1,516	15%
Manufacturing	355	11%	18,466	22%	\$ 2,472	11%
Service-Providing	8,738	11%	98,734	-4%	\$ 1,473	13%
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	1,251	-2%	20,966	2%	\$ 1,300	32%
Information	171	28%	3,126	-13%	\$ 3,080	19%
Financial Activities	469	7%	3,336	-5%	\$ 1,870	10%
Professional and Business Services	1,521	10%	22,846	0%	\$ 2,381	1%
Education and Health Services	3,773	22%	31,191	-5%	\$ 1,099	14%
Leisure and Hospitality	695	-3%	9,950	-16%	\$ 481	17%
Other Services	718	0%	3,436	-10%	\$ 811	8%
Public Administration	92	-2%	3,200	1%	\$ 1,584	1%
Total, All Industries	10,257	10%	125,232	-3%	\$ 1,622	10%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.

POPULATION CHANGE IN % SINCE 2017 ACS, 2017 TO 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, One-Year data, Table B01001. *2020 1-year data is not available, so data from U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, Table PL1 was used.

SHOCKS TO THE GREATER LOWELL REGION ECONOMY

- **Inflation & Supply Chain Disruptions**
- **Interest Rate Hikes**
- **Pronounced Jump in Housing Prices**
- **Climate Change Prompting Need for Environmental Sustainability and Resilience**
- **Impact of PFAS on Communities**
- **Constrained Water and Wastewater Infrastructure**
- **Need for Broadband Access**
- **Layoffs**
 - 64 layoffs by Peloton Interactive, Inc. in Billerica; 2/8/22
 - 32 layoffs by Starry, Inc., in Lowell; 10/21/22
- **Conclusion: Erratic Growth Coupled with High Inflation and Low Unemployment**

OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC HIGHLIGHTS

- **The region is more highly-educated than the U.S. as a whole, and becoming more educated** (*Although this isn't universal—such as foreign-born population*)
- **New businesses to the region (small- and micro-businesses) are continuing to positively trend post-pandemic** (*Especially in Lowell*)
- Although the region's population aged 19 and below has been shrinking over the past years, the **city of Lowell's youth population grew so much it offset the decline for the first time in many years**

Image: Dracut Economic Development



CEDS 2023 SCHEDULE OF GOALS

WHAT WE'LL DO TOGETHER TO BE MORE SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE, RESPONSIVE, AND
EQUITABLE



SCHEDULE OF GOALS

Activity/Project	Typical Tasks	Typical Actors
1. Planning for housing at the local and regional levels	Complete a Regional Housing Strategy Plan and local Housing Production Plans	NMCOG, Municipalities, Housing Nonprofits
2. Supportive housing with wrap-around services	Develop a phased plan for 300 supportive housing units and begin at least one new project	Housing Nonprofits
3. MBTA Community Multi-Family Compliance	Provide technical support to develop scenarios and potentially draft zoning	NMCOG, Municipalities
4. Local and Regional Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Plan and Implementation	Apply for infrastructure funding, create a PFAS task force, undertake a needs study, and continue MS4 permit compliance	NMCOG, Municipalities
5. Regional Energy and Sustainability Planning and Coordination	Develop a regional sustainability collaborative, complete net zero plans, assist small businesses in sustainability initiatives, and advance other sustainability plans	NMCOG, Municipalities, Small Business Center

SCHEDULE OF GOALS

Activity/Project	Typical Tasks	Typical Actors
6. Enhance Regional Transportation Planning	Complete Envision 2050, coordinate Complete Streets activities, implement SS&R4A	NMCOG, Municipalities, MVPC
7. Transit and Alternative Transportation Connections	Evaluate various transit and alternative transportation measures, coordinate agencies, advocate for Capital Corridor Rail connection	NMCOG, LRTA, MassHire, Health Providers, State Agencies
8. Continue Focus on Transportation Safety and State of Good Repair on Projects of Regional Importance	Seek funding for various safety and good repair projects of regional importance, including participation in Rourke Bridge planning	Municipalities
9. Regional Partnerships for Workforce Recruitment, Retainage, and Development	Complete scope and seek funding for holistic studies, create a shared business contact database, work with MassHire and schools	NMCOG, Health Providers, MassHire, Educational Agencies
10. Strengthen partnerships for regional equity in health, food access, and economic outcomes	Track demographic, health, and economic outcomes, support contingency planning, increase language access for programs	CBOs, NMCOG, Business Providers, Health Providers

SCHEDULE OF GOALS

Activity/Project	Typical Tasks	Typical Actors
11. Implement the ERRP Phase II to strengthen the resiliency of regional healthcare systems	Compile lessons learned during COVID-19 to better prepare for future health emergencies, including testing sites, hospital beds, telehealth	Health Providers, Municipalities, NMCOG
12. Strengthen childcare networks to support employment opportunities and economic mobility for child guardians	Evaluate zoning and other policy to identify roadblocks to childcare facilities, work to support public and private childcare initiatives	NMCOG, Municipalities, CBOs
13. Regional Digital Equity Plan	Complete a Regional Digital Equity Plan	NMCOG, Municipalities
14. Grant Application and Administration Capacity Building	Work to identify local and regional priorities and support grant applications and administration	NMCOG
15. City of Lowell Master Plan	Complete Lowell Forward	City of Lowell

Activity/Project	Typical Tasks	Typical Actors
16. Revitalization of Regional Network of Village and Neighborhood Centers	Continue steps on LRRPs, continue other activities to enhance downtown vitality	Municipalities, NMCOG
17. Evaluate and Improve Regional Zoning and Permitting Practices	Evaluate zoning and policy to streamline permitting, identify barriers to development in priority development areas	Municipalities, NMCOG
18. Industrial and Mixed-Use Development	Undertake specific projects in priority development areas to encourage private investment	Municipalities
19. Enhance Coordination among Businesses, Small Business Assistance Providers, and Municipalities	Share information about existing or new business assistance programs, including evaluating feasibility of a one-stop website	Business Assistance Providers, Municipalities
20. Enhance Tourism and Visitation	Study and enhance existing marketing and identify cross-promotional themes	Economic and Tourism Agencies, NMCOG
21. Economic Development District Application	Amend and update application	NMCOG
22. Prepare for the 2024 CEDS Report and 2025-2029 CEDS	Evaluate internet-based small business, small business formation, Women- and Minority-owned businesses, and apply for grant	NMCOG

THANKS!

- **Chris Hayes, Economic Development and Housing Planner**
 - chayes@nmcog.org
 - [\(978\) 454-8021](tel:(978)454-8021) x122



To: Northern Middlesex Council of Governments, Council and Alternate Members
From: Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director
Re: Executive Director's Report
Date: February 2023

REGIONAL PLANNING ACTIVITIES

Transportation/ MPO

On February 22, the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO) convened its monthly meeting with several topics on the agenda. Staff presented updates on activities associated with development of the FFY 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program, focusing on financial allocation to the region and results of TIP readiness day. Also at the meeting, the MPO voted to release draft FFY 2023-2027 TIP Amendment Two, which involves adding additional federal funding for a project to rehabilitate two bridge on I-495 in Tewksbury, over Route 38 and Route 133. In addition, the MPO voted to release the draft 2023 Title VI Plan, which looks to equitably allocate federal funding in the region. The Amendment and Title VI Plan are open for public comment through March 17.

The next meeting of the NMMPO will be on March 22 at 2PM. Meeting topics will include consideration of updated performance targets addressing congestion/air quality, which feed into development of Envision 2050, the Regional Transportation Plan, and Transportation Improvement Program prioritization process. Other agenda items will include updates on Envision 2050, TIP and UPWP development.

Regional Transportation Plan

The next regional forum will be on March 22nd, which will share themes heard from municipal and partner meetings, preliminary results of the survey, and preliminary financial information to be used in developing recommendations of the plan.

FFY 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Development

NMCOG staff continue working on development of the next TIP document and are currently developing TIP Scenarios based on the results of TIP Readiness Day, project evaluation scoring, and financial constraint. Staff presented the results of MassDOT TIP Readiness Day and a financial summary of Federal allocations for the TIP at the MPO meeting on February 22, 2023. Staff coordinated with LRTA to review a preliminary list of regional transit projects. Staff reached out to the communities seeking eligible projects for CMAQ funding. Based on the response from Westford, staff submitted a GHG analysis summary for the Westford-Rehabilitation of Boston Road project to be considered by the State CMAQ Consultation Committee for CMAQ funding eligibility.

Title VI 2023 Plan Update

On February 22, 2023, Transportation Planner Jessica Boulanger presented the Draft 2023 Title VI Plan to the NMMPO for release for public comment. In compliance with the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, and related federal and state statutes and regulations, we are required to update our Title VI Plan annually. Title VI prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and requires that no person in the United States of America shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal assistance. For the last few months, Jessica Boulanger and Chris Curry have collected demographic and transit data using the latest census information available. Additionally, the project team used geospatial analysis to visualize demographic changes and Environmental Justice factors across the region using EJ principles established by Massachusetts Environmental Protection Agency. The draft plan is available for public comment, and the 21-day public comment period, which began on February 24, 2023, will end on March 17, 2023. Staff will request endorsement and signatures from the NMMPO board at the March 22, 2023, NMMPO meeting.

Transit – ADA / Paratransit Application Review

NMCOG staff continued the processing of ADA applications for the LRTA Road Runner demand response service. A total of twenty-eight (28) applications were reviewed with seventeen (17) ADA demand response service approvals and eleven (11) senior application approvals, during the month of February.

Transit – Ridership Data Analysis and Reporting

Monthly data collection and reporting via MassDOT (Grants Plus) and FTA (National Transit Database) online systems were continued by NMCOG staff. As anticipated, fixed route ridership declined by 9% from 60,478 in January to 54,879 in February, this decline is a result of the shortness of the month and the public school vacation week. There was, however, an increase of over 10% from February 2022 to February 2023. The demand response (Road Runner) saw a similar ridership pattern, dropping from 6,857 in December 2022 to 6,489 in January 2023 or a reduction of a little more than 5%. (February figures for demand response service is not yet available). Historically, it can be predicted that ridership on the Road Runner will decline further in February and will begin to increase in March. Year-over-year ridership increased by nearly 8%, displaying a continued growth from the lows of COVID.

Transit – Drug and Alcohol Program Management

NMCOG staff managed the drug and alcohol program for the LRTA contractors to ensure compliance with the Federal Transit Administration regulations. Annual FTA Drug and Alcohol Management Information System (MIS) reports were finalized and submitted after staff review and revisions to the information supplied by the LRTA

third party administrator (DISA). The Federal Transit Administration overall mandatory minimum random testing rates of 50% drug and 10% alcohol were achieved.

Traffic Counting

NMCOG is currently looking for consultants to assist with the Traffic Counting Data Collection Program for the 2023 traffic counting season. NMCOG staff are developing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for these services, which includes between 60 and 80 count locations in the region. Based on the interest, a consultant will be selected and a contract will be finalized in April 2023.

Weights and Measures

During the month of January, NMCOG's Weights and Measures program conducted 21 inspections in the communities of Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Littleton, Lowell and Tewksbury. Of those 21 inspections conducted in January 17 were annual inspections and 4 were re-inspections for devices that did not pass the annual inspection. The outcome of these inspections resulted in 58 devices being inspected and sealed.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Annual Report

On March 2, 2023, the Greater Lowell CEDS Committee voted unanimously to recommend the 2023 Greater Lowell CEDS Annual Performance Report to be adopted by NMCOG Council and filed with the Economic Development Administration. This report was based on demographic and economic data, discussions with the CEDS Committee and other stakeholders, and a workshop attended by 15 CEDS Committee members. The report's Schedule of Goals includes specific, time-bound actions for NMCOG, municipalities, and other regional agencies to work toward economic development and is a key part of the Annual Report.

Regional Tourism and Marketing

On February 27th, NMCOG hosted a hybrid meeting of the Regional Tourism and Marketing Work Group to discuss visitor metrics that are tracked to better understand tourism and to focus marketing efforts. NMCOG also met with economic development staff from the towns of Concord and Bedford about participating in the Tourism and Marketing Work Group to address the goals of (1) Defining the region, creating a vision for the region, and identifying branding; (2) Evaluating existing marketing, determining where the gaps are, and creating a plan to coordinate communities' marketing; and (3) Considering a cross promotional theme or event that would encourage people to explore the region. NMCOG staff are meeting with other neighboring communities to explore similar partnerships.

Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program

NMCOG has received six letters of support from interested NMCOG member communities, with a seventh pending a Select Board meeting the week of March 13.

NMCOG is working with the City of Lowell to submit an application with a goal of submission by the end of that week. This grant will provide planning services to identify needs of people who face barriers to internet use, such as affordability, availability of equipment such as computers, and training and position communities to compete for planned Digital Equity funding.

Northern Middlesex Stormwater Collaborative

The upcoming NMSC quarterly meeting will take place on March 22nd, 2023. This hybrid meeting will focus on green infrastructure and low impact development for stormwater management. Guest speakers will include Dr. Elisabeth Hamin, a professor of planning at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and MassDEP Staff in the Non-Point Source Section and Wetlands Program.

Regional Energy Planning Assistance

February 23rd, NMCOG hosted a Regional Clean Energy Workshop titled “Net Zero: from Inventory to Implementation.” Attendees heard from Talia Fox, the Town of Arlington’s Sustainability Manager, on developing a net zero plan and lessons on implementation. Additionally, staff from MAPC’s Clean Energy Department provided a training on their GHG inventory tool to help our communities identify, track, and target the largest sources of GHG emissions and develop ambitious net zero plans. A recording of the virtual workshop is available on NMCOG’s YouTube. Additionally, Staff have been coordinating with the towns of Pepperell, Chelmsford, and Westford to provide technical assistance in the advancement of the town’s respective net zero activities. On March 16th, NMCOG staff and the Pepperell Climate Change Committee will be hosting a Net Zero Action Plan Engagement Kick-off Meeting. The meeting will be hosted at the Albert Harris Center, and will begin at 7 PM. Attendees are invited to learn about net zero planning and current energy efficiency projects in Pepperell. They will also be invited to provide their insights on the best strategy for engagement in the development of the net zero plan scope of work.

Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) Filing

NMCOG staff have reviewed the updated Environmental Monitor and identified projects within the NMCOG region. This update of the EM included the Secretary’s certificate for the Asset Conditioning Refurbishment project along the 339/349 Transmission Line right-of-way (ROW) between the towns of Tewksbury and Saugus, which determined that the project requires a single Environmental Impact Report. The monitor also included filing of the final Environmental Impact Report for NMCOG #690 Alexan Chelmsford, a proposed multi-family development in Chelmsford.

Please see the following table for additional details. Please note that the **Priority Rankings** are defined as follows:

- A** Major regional project to be reviewed by the Officers
- B** Regional project to be reviewed by staff and approved by Executive Director
- C** Local or regional project to be tracked by MAPC; no MEPA review needed.

PROJECT REFERRALS UNDER THE MASSACHUSETTS ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT - 3/9/2023

FILING NUMBERS/ MEPA STATUS	PROJECT NAME AND LOCATION	APPLICANT	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	PRIORITY RANK
EEA #16647 Secretary's Certificate	339/349 Line Asset Refurbishment (ACR) Project; Tewksbury, Wakefield, Wilmington, Saugus, Lynnfield, Andover, North Reading, Reading (Power Company Rd. in Tewksbury to Howard St. in Saugus)	New England Power Company, Waltham, MA	Asset Condition Refurbishment activities along the 339/349 transmission line right-of-way between Tewksbury and Saugus. Project includes complete refurbishment of existing transmission line for a more reliable, climate-ready, and resilient transmission system that can withstand more extreme weather events.	C
MEPA #16547 Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR)	Alexan Chelmsford, 225 Princeton Street (Route 3A) Chelmsford, MA	Maple Multi-Family Land SE, LP Newton, MA	Multi-family development with approximately 340 residential units, 54 age-restricted affordable units, and associated parking and residential amenities.	C

ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITIES

Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA Communities

All seven municipalities that were required to file Action Plans in the NMCOG region filed by the required deadline to the MA Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). DHCD approved Action Plans submitted by Dracut, Lowell, Tewksbury, and Westford. Additional approvals are anticipated for Billerica, Chelmsford, and Tyngsborough. NMCOG assisted with reviews and development of Action Plans for Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, and Tyngsborough. NMCOG recently kicked off the next phase of MBTA Communities planning work with Tyngsborough funded by a \$20,000 planning technical assistance grant from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership.

Lowell Housing Production Plan

The Lowell Forward city-wide comprehensive planning process kicked off in early February. NMCOG's role in the process will be to focus on the Housing section of the plan to develop a Housing Production Plan for the city. NMCOG formed the Lowell Forward Housing Subcommittee, which is advising and guiding the HPP, and at their first meeting the group discussed data needs, outreach, and past and current plans to incorporate into NMCOG's development of existing conditions. NMCOG is now working with Lowell Senior Planner Fran Cigliano to arrange 10 focus groups/individual interviews with housing stakeholders such as affordable housing nonprofits, mortgage providers, developers, and human service agencies. NMCOG staff are also collecting Census and other data for the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

Tewksbury Housing Production Plan

NMCOG staff developed fourteen housing production goals based on the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, 113 survey responses, and the results from the first community workshop. NMCOG staff are now working with Assistant Town Manager Steven Sadwick and Community and Economic Development Planner Alex Lowder to complete strategy recommendations and prepare for a public workshop on Thursday, March 16.

Dracut HPP Zoning Recommendations

NMCOG is working with the Dracut Affordable Housing Partnership and Town staff to create alternative inclusionary zoning scenarios that could inform new zoning amendments, including a March 11, 2023 Housing and Community Workshop and Listening Session. The final deliverable will be recommendations based on the results of this workshop.

Dracut Open Space and Recreation Plan

NMCOG staff with expertise in land use, open space conservation, community engagement, and mapping are providing technical assistance to the Town of Dracut in the completion of an update to their Open Space and Recreation Plan. The kick-off meeting took place on February 23rd and staff are working with the Town to coordinate next steps, which will include a meeting with the involved committees, a presentation of updated environmental conditions, and preliminary visioning.

Pepperell Subdivision and Site Plan Review Amendments

In early February, staff presented an overview of subdivision regulations and the goals of this update to Pepperell's Conservation Commission, Board of Health, Climate Change Committee, and the Department of Public Works. Feedback from these groups will be used to guide additional revisions to the draft subdivision amendments.

Westford Brownfields and Potentially Contaminated Sites Inventory

Staff are engaged in the research phase of the project. NMCOG efforts are being supported by the University of Connecticut Technical Assistance for Brownfields Municipal Assistance Program (TAB MAP). NMCOG staff have met with TAB MAP team members to identify tasks that require assistance and discuss the potential for a longstanding partnership to complete redevelopment visioning and community engagement. NMCOG staff and UConn TAB MAP will continue to research site land use history to provide recommendations on redevelopment. NMCOG staff are working on preparing an interim deliverable for the Town to review.

GIS AND DATA SHARING

The contracting phase of NMCOG's regional imagery program has concluded - all seven

communities contracting for new Eagleview/Pictometry or Nearmap imagery this spring have completed agreements. The spring aerial imagery flyovers will likely take place in April. Eagleview/Pictometry imagery will be available in June and Nearmap subscriptions will start July 1. NMCOG GIS also provided Eagleview Connect Explorer parcel loading and configuration training to town GIS staff so staff can maintain up-to-date parcel and Assessor's data in the web imagery viewer.

Phase I maps for MBTA Section 3A multi-family zoning analysis projects were delivered to Billerica, Dracut and Tyngsborough. The series of large-format maps includes existing built density estimates, undeveloped or vacant lands, housing development opportunities, neighborhood amenities such as public utilities, transit services, and retail businesses, and an overlay analysis ranking areas by the proximity of amenities. To support ongoing work, revised Compliance Model data was uploaded to NMCOG's web services and community staff were provided with a custom set of GIS layers on request.

Other GIS project completed in February include: a web map of potential brownfields properties in Westford's Graniteville neighborhood for project team review; multi-unit properties data for the Dunstable HPP committee review; updates to the Regional Trails Network data reflecting recently completed trails in Lowell; and the final revisions of NMMPO Title VI report maps.

Quotes for NMCOG's new file server were received from multiple vendors and we will be working with the IT consultant on the migration timeline to minimize staff disruption over the next few weeks. Other IT work includes onboarding and equipment configuration for one new employee and support for offsite hybrid meetings.

REGIONAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Northern Middlesex Municipal CEO Group

Town/ City Managers and Town Administrators in the region met in February hosted by Manager Richard Montuori at Tewksbury Town Hall to continue the January discussion about regional homelessness. The group also heard presentations by Community Teamwork, Inc. and the Southern Middlesex Opportunities Group and discussed tools to address regional homelessness, including the development of a regional housing strategy.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The NMCOG Council approved a strategic planning process. The next step is to form a Strategic Planning Committee to assist with the process, including stakeholder engagement and strategy development. There is space on the committee for one additional staff and two additional Council members.