

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

**Minutes of Meeting: March 17, 2021**

The March 17, 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
- Philippe Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- Daniel Rourke, Lowell City Council
- Gerard Frechette, Lowell Planning Board
- Chuck Walkovich, Pepperell Planning Board
- Stephen Themelis, Pepperell Alternate
- Anita Tonakarn-Nguyen, Westford Select Board
- Darrin Wizst, Westford Planning Board

Staff

- Beverly Woods, Executive Director
- Jay Donovan, Assistant Director
- Bert Almeida, Financial Officer
- Justin Howard, Transportation Program Manager
- David Righter, Environmental Planner
- Katrina Garavanian, Executive Assistant

**I. Minutes of Meeting: February 17, 2021**

The minutes of the February 17, 2021 meeting were distributed to all Councilors for review. Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Chris Tribou, the Council voted to approve the minutes of the February 17, 2021 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 Darrin Wizst, 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 Jerry Frechette and seconded by Darrin Wizst, 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. Proposed FY2021-2025 TIP Amendment**

Justin Howard informed the Council that the NMMPO voted to release a draft TIP amendment for public review and comment at its last meeting. The amendment addresses project and funding changes for four LRTA projects including the following:

- adding a project in FFY2021 to purchase automated passenger counters for fixed route vehicles;
- moving an existing project to replace five fixed route bus lifts from FFY2022 to FFY2021;
- moving the replacement of four fixed route cutaway vans from FFY 2022 to FFY 2021; and
- moving the replacement of two fixed route 35 foot hybrid buses from FFY 2023 to FFY 2021.

Justin explained the funding sources and matches for each project. Detailed information and spreadsheets were included in the Council packet. The NMMPO will meet on March 24<sup>th</sup> to vote on the endorsement of the amendment.

Based on a motion by Steve Themelis and seconded by Chris Tribou, the Council voted to authorize the Chair to vote affirmatively on the amendment at the upcoming NMMPO meeting.

### **2. FY2022-2026 TIP Programming Scenarios**

Justin Howard provided an overview of the programming scenarios being presented to the NMMPO for the FY 2022-2026 TIP. Under every scenario, the first four years of the TIP are the same. Each scenario includes a different set of projects for FY 2026. A handout was included in the Council packet showing each of the possible scenarios.

Pat Wojtas stated that she would be in favor of programming scenario 3 or 4 in which the Improvements on Chelmsford Street (Route 110) in Chelmsford would be moved into TIP year 2026, and noted that MassDOT has suggested that the other Chelmsford project (signalization at the Route 495 on/off ramps) may be programmed earlier if funds become available.

### **3. Economic Development District Application Support Letter**

Jay Donovan reminded the Council that, as discussed at previous meetings, NMCOG staff has been developing an application to establish an Economic Development District for the Greater Lowell region for submission to the Economic Development Administration. As part of the application process, letters must be submitted from the NMCOG Executive Director, from the NMCOG chair, the Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development, and from the chief elected official in each community, in support of the EDD application. At the appropriate time, the Councilors will be asked to reach out to their City Council or Select Board. Jay stated that following review by the CEDS committee, informational material will be provided for the City Council and Select Boards detailing the benefit of establishing an EDD and providing instructions for the letter. Support from a majority of the NMCOG communities is required.

### **4. COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Discussion**

Beverly Woods updated the Council on the vaccine program which has continued to evolve, with the most recent change being the establishment of a pre-registration process and the inclusion of educators within the eligible population. The Baker Administration has issued a change in eligibility criteria with virtually everyone becoming eligible within the next month or so. Lack of vaccine availability remains a significant issue, although President Biden has announced that the federal government will be purchasing an additional 100 million doses. At the February Council meeting, a request was made for information on transportation to vaccination sites. Beverly stated that transportation to vaccination sites is an issue. Presently, most Councils on Aging are transporting seniors and disabled residents to local vaccination sites, such as Lowell General Hospital's clinic on Pawtucket Boulevard. The LRTA is also transporting people to the Lowell General site. Most residents must find their own transportation to other mass vaccination sites, such as Gillette and Danvers.

### **5. Other Old Business**

There was none.

## **V. New Business**

### **1. Community Reports**

Steve Themelis informed the Council that a Town Meeting vote was recently held in Pepperell to allow a second adult-use recreational marijuana facility. The vote required a two-thirds majority and lost by only four votes. The Town has one facility scheduled to open soon.

Chris Tribou stated that the Billerica Mall project was remanded back to the Planning Board and has been approved, so the Mall will be redeveloped to include retail space and affordable housing, as well as relocation of the grocery store to the front of the property.

Phil Thibault informed the Council that Dracut's new 8,000-square foot Collinsville Fire Station is now open, fully operational, and includes three bays, holds six vehicles, and houses a complement of four firefighters.

### **2. Project Referrals**

David Righter informed the Council that there is one project under MEPA review within our region currently. An ENF for water supply and distribution system improvements in Dracut and Tyngsborough was resubmitted to MEPA in February. The proposed project includes construction of a new manganese water treatment facility to treat up to 2.65 MGD, transmission main improvements, the construction of a redundant water supply well at Well 5a, and the replacement of two water storage tanks in the State Forest (includes areas in both Dracut and Tyngsborough) and K-Street Tanks. The proposed State Forest Water Storage Tank is located within Priority and Estimated Habitat for Rare Species (Blanding's Turtles). A staff comment letter was included in the meeting packet and David requested the Council's approval.

Based on a motion by Phil Thibault and seconded by Chris Tribou, the Council voted unanimously to approve the staff comment letter for the Water System Improvements in Tyngsborough and Dracut.

### **3. Local Rapid Recovery Planning Contract Award**

Beverly Woods informed the Council that on February 25<sup>th</sup> NMCOG was awarded a \$90,000 Local Rapid Recovery Planning contract by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to prepare recovery plans for the communities of Dracut, Pepperell and Tyngsborough. The program will focus on assessing the impacts of COVID to businesses in the areas of Railroad Square and Main Street in Pepperell, the Navy Yard in Dracut, and the Middlesex Road Corridor in Tyngsborough. At least five possible strategies for each community are to be identified to advance recovery efforts for those business districts. Included in the meeting packet was a PowerPoint on the program that was presented to the communities earlier in the week. She stated that the plans must be completed by August 31<sup>st</sup>.

**4. State Guidance on Voting Threshold for Zoning bylaws**

Beverly Woods informed the Council that the recent Economic Development Bill signed by Governor Baker included many changes to Chapter 40A, and reduces the required supermajority vote required for zoning bylaws and amendments to a simple majority for certain zoning measures and actions. Included in the meeting packet was a copy of the most recent guidance issued by the State for the Council's information and reference, along with a redlined version of amendments included in H.5250 (Economic Development Bill). The Council expressed their interest in inviting Chris Kluchman (DHCD) to the April Council meeting for the purpose of outlining the changes and answering any questions the Council may have.

**5. Other New Business**

Andrew Deslaurier mentioned that Billerica's town election will be held prior to NMCOG's April Council meeting and, as he is on the ballot, took an opportunity to thank the Council and express his enjoyment of having served, should he not be re-elected. The Council wished both Andrew and Chris Tribou, who is also up for re-election, the very best in hopes of their re-election and continued service on the Council.

**VI. Announcements**

Beverly Woods noted that the City of Lowell was also awarded an LRP grant. Stantec is the consultant for the City and will be working with the City in recovery plans for the downtown area.

Beverly Woods informed the Council that sadly, Bill Greathead, Pepperell's Select Board representative to the Council, passed away unexpectedly on February 28<sup>th</sup>. A private service was held for Bill. NMCOG will send an arrangement to his family on behalf of the Council.

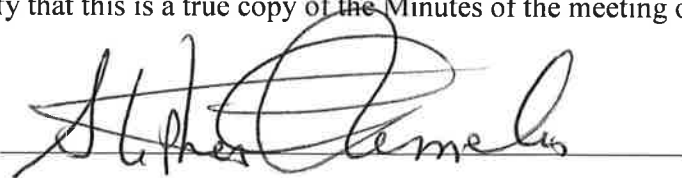
**VII. Adjournment**

Following a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Dan Rourke, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 pm.

**CLERK'S CERTIFICATE**

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of March 17, 2021.

Attest:



Stephen Themelis, Clerk

