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

**Minutes of Meeting: August 17, 2022**

1. The August 17, 2022 meeting of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments was held in hybrid form via Zoom and in person at the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments office at 40 Church Street, Lowell, Massachusetts. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. with Chair Andrew Deslaurier presiding. The following were in attendance:

Councilors

* Andrew Deslaurier, Chair, Billerica Select Board
* Chris Tribou, Billerica Planning Board
* Mary McBride, Asst. Clerk, Billerica Alternate
* Pat Wojtas, Chelmsford Select Board
* Paul McDougall, Chelmsford Planning Board
* George Zaharoolis, Chelmsford Alternate
* Phil Thibault, Dracut Alternate
* Kieran Meehan, Dunstable Board of Selectmen
* Daniel Rourke, Lowell City Council
* Gerard Frechette, Treasurer, Lowell Planning Board
* Joyce Morrow, Pepperell Planning Board
* Stephen Themelis, Clerk, Pepperell Alternate
* Jayne Wellman, Asst. Treasurer, Tewksbury Select Board
* James Duffy, Tewksbury Planning Board
* Darrin Wizst, Westford Planning Board

Staff

* Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director
* Justin Howard, Assistant Director / Transportation Program Manager
* Bert Almeida, Financial Officer
* Chris Curry, Transit Manager / Associate Planner
* Christopher Hayes, Housing and Economic Development Planner
* David Tilton, Transportation Planner / Sealer of Weights and Measures
* Shravanthi Gopalan Narayanan, Transportation Planner
* Katrina Garavanian, Executive Assistant

**II. Minutes of Meeting: June 15, 2022**

The minutes of the June 15, 2022 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 June 15, 2022. Chris Tribou, Joyce Morrow, Jayne Wellman and Darrin Wizst abstained, as they were not present for the June meeting.

**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 Jayne Wellman, the Financial Report and Warrant were approved. Abstention by Joyce Morrow as she is new to the Council and had not yet had an opportunity to review the Report. The Financial Report is included as Attachment #2.

**IV. Report of the Executive Director**

Jenny Raitt thanked the Councilors for their attendance and provided an update on staff work since the June Council meeting as well as upcoming projects. She informed the group that NMCOG is embarking on the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan (RTP) led by Justin Howard which will be completed in spring 2023 but is an in depth process. Ms. Raitt stressed the importance for all communities to participate in getting their projects listed in the RTP. In order for a project to be funded through the region’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), it must also be identified in the RTP. She stated NMCOG staff are looking into updating community engagement techniques and planning with the intention of not only better engagement in our own region but also cross-engagement with neighboring regions, including the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission.

Ms. Raitt gave an update on the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), stating that staff led by Chris Hayes are updating the CEDS annual plan. The CEDS Committee and staff are currently listening to community business leaders to gain a sense of priorities and to receive feedback on the Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan (ERRP). The ERRP will be included in the September Council Meeting Packet for review.

As NMCOG is searching for a Sustainability Planner, Ms. Raitt has been working to maintain momentum in all categories related to Environmental Planning. Staff are scheduling a quarterly Northern Middlesex Stormwater Collaborative (NMSC) meeting in September. Ms. Raitt encouraged Councilors to let her know if they have any interest in also joining with the NMSC efforts.

Ms. Raitt stated that NMCOG staff have been working to determine next steps for proceeding with technical assistance as part of the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) Regional Energy Planning Assistance (REPA) funding received in the fall of 2021. REPA includes everything from helping with Green Communities reporting, tracking and monitoring Mass Energy Insight, and coordination with the DOER. NMCOG will plan a Regional Energy Workshop soon. Ms. Raitt would like to obtain a sense of what communities need in regards to training around clean energy.

There is much project work that NMCOG does in communities around zoning amendments and preparation for local plans. Ms. Raitt highlighted the Westford Housing Production Plan which is now wrapping up and thanked Chris Hayes for his efforts in completing. NMCOG is meeting with the Affordable Housing Committee who will recommend the Planning Board and the Select Board adopt the plan. The plan has been in progress for some time but with great community input has been able to get near finalization.

NMCOG is beginning a Housing Production Plan with Lowell and are excited to work with the City on housing availability and affordability. Additional details will be forthcoming in a future Director’s report.

NMCOG staff have been working with the Town of Pepperell on their 40R Zoning District Proposal. The Zoning Overlay District warrant article will be decided at fall Town Meeting.

Ms. Raitt noted that NMCOG has completed the migration of traffic counting data to an accessible app on both iPads and smartphones which makes working with data not only easier but more accurate. Many staff hours will be spared in the new format. Carlin Andrus, GIS Specialist, has been an asset on IT for the group.

Funding updates and upcoming opportunities denote a need to embark on a strategic planning exercise following the election of officers, and creating a subcommittee to get a sense of the planning and programming direction for the organization. This would potentially be a series of retreats, interviews, and data collection, ultimately culminating in strategic planning objectives for councilors and staff, as well as others in the region.

The Council agreed that they like the Executive Director’s Report format as it encompasses items beyond the standard agenda.

**V. Community Exchange**

Steve Themelis introduced Joyce Morrow of the Pepperell Planning Board, also Economic Development Advisory Committee Clerk, and new appointee to NMCOG. Joyce provided a brief background of her experience, and the Councilors welcomed her warmly.

Jayne Wellman informed the group that Tewksbury is scheduled to open its $98.5 Million school in January 2023, on time and under budget. This leaves two school properties vacant and the Town is in the process of determining how to use the former school spaces. On the October Special Town Meeting agenda is an initiative for a new DPW and combined school facilities building which will be in the $26M range, funded within the Town’s levy limit. Jayne thanked NMCOG for attending the HPP meeting last week. She also stated that she is pushing for economic development infrastructure in multi-family development projects in an upcoming Zoning Bylaw article.

Chris Tribou stated that the Billerica Planning Board is working to clean up zoning definitions in their Zoning Bylaws and eventually planning to work with Erika Jerram to have a consultant conduct a more comprehensive review of the overall zoning. The Billerica Mall project is getting underway. State Senator Cindy Friedman recently secured bond bill funding for the Town Center project.

Andrew Deslaurier informed the group that the Boston Road North project is in the beginning stages. The Peggy Hannon Rizza Park Project is also underway and should be completed in October three months ahead of schedule.

Darrin Wizst stated that Westford will hold its Annual Strategic Planning Retreat at Kimball Farm this September and plans to obtain input from residents. This is the Town’s first retreat since the pandemic began.

**VI. Reminders and Announcements**

Steve Themelis reminded the Council that NMCOG officer elections will be held during the September Council meeting. Nomination forms were mailed in July and were due back August 15th. Steve and Mary McBride will be contacting the nominees to ascertain their interest in serving and allowing their name on the ballot. Nominations will be accepted from the floor prior to the vote in September.

Ms. Raitt stated that the Community Compact Cabinet program opened August 15th and if assistance is needed filing applications, please reach out to her.

Ms. Raitt also mentioned that she is working with a team of staff who will be meeting with the MBTA communities to discuss scopes of work. She called attention to the September 8th training webinar link in her email to the Councilors. There is also a registration link on the MBTA Communities site. She is happy to add this to a future meeting agenda if desired. Steve Themelis requested the item be added to the September meeting Agenda.

**VII. Date of Next Council Meeting**

The next Council meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 21st at 7 PM.

**VIII. Date of Annual Meeting**

Ms. Raitt informed the Council that the Annual Meeting will be held Wednesday, October 19th, at UTEC in Lowell. The event will consist of the Council meeting, refreshments, a guest speaker, and will be a time to celebrate accomplishments of the past year as well as talk about future direction. If there are items the Council would like to add to the Agenda please let her know.

**IX. Other Business Not Known at the Time of Posting of This Agenda**

George Zaharoolis inquired into the one year renewal of the NMCOG office space lease. Ms. Raitt stated that the lease will be an agenda item within a few months.

**X. Adjourn**

Following a motion made by Daniel Rourke and seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 pm.

**CLERK’S CERTIFICATE**

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of August 17, 2022.





Stephen Themelis, Clerk