

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

Minutes of Meeting: August 18, 2021

The August 18, 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
- Phil Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- 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
- Jim Silva, Westford Alternate

Staff

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

I. Minutes of Meeting: June 16, 2021

The minutes of the June 16, 2021 meeting were distributed to all Councilors for review. Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Mary McBride, the Council voted to approve the minutes of the June 16, 2021 meeting. Chris Tribou and Chuck Walkovich abstained as they were not present for the June 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.

III. Financial Report and Warrant

Bert Almeida presented the Financial Report and the Warrant for review and approval. Based on a motion made by Darrin Wizst and seconded by Chuck Walkovich, 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 Amendment of the FY 2021-2025 Transportation Improvement Program – Route 113 Improvement Project in Dunstable

Justin Howard provided a summary of the draft FY 2021-2025 TIP Amendment that will be considered for endorsement at the upcoming MPO meeting on August 25th. The amendment involves a cost adjustment for the Route 113 improvement project in Dunstable. The total federal participating cost estimate for the project has increased from \$4,500,531 to \$5,211,383, a difference of \$710,852. The amendment was released for public comment on July 28th and is currently under public review until August 23rd. A summary of the amendment was included in the Council packet. Justin requested the Council authorize the Chairman and the MPO Representative to vote in support of endorsing the amendment at the August 25th MPO meeting.

Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Chris Tribou, the Council voted unanimously to authorize the NMCOG Chair and MPO Representative to vote in favor of endorsement at the upcoming MPO meeting.

2. Results of the 2021 Nomination Process for the September Election of NMCOG Officers

Steve Themelis informed the Council that, to date, there have been seven nomination forms received. Steve stated that he and Mary McBride will contact nominees to ascertain their interest in having their name on the ballot for officer elections at the September Council meeting.

3. Other Old Business

There was none.

V. New Business

1. Community Reports

Chuck Walkovich noted that Pepperell has a new Town Planner, Jennifer Gingras, who will be replacing Lisa Davis who has moved to Vermont. Jennifer's position will be full time. Chuck is hoping that Jennifer will attend an upcoming Council meeting for introductions to the Council members.

Jerry Frechette informed the Council that the City of Lowell has been searching for a Traffic Engineer since early 2020 and requested Council members direct any potential candidates to the City.

Chris Tribou updated the Council on the Billerica Mall redevelopment project, stating that the court case relative to the project has been dismissed allowing the redevelopment project to begin in the near future.

2. Project Referrals

There were none.

3. Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) issued by EDA under ARPA

Jay Donovan gave a short presentation to the Council stating that, under the American Rescue Plan Act, EDA was allocated \$3 billion in supplemental funding to assist communities nationwide with their economic recovery from the coronavirus, and with building local economies that will be resilient to future economic shocks. EDA published the following funding opportunities, as described in a recent email Jay provided to the Council:

- Economic Adjustment Assistance
- Travel, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation
- Indigenous Communities
- Build Back Better Regional Challenge
- Statewide Planning, Research and Networks
- Good Jobs Challenge

A handout was distributed via email prior to the Council meeting describing these programs. Jay also provided information on ongoing discussions between the regional planning agencies and the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development regarding the use of the planning funds that are coming to the state.

4. BRIC NOFO Announcement / Hazard Mitigation Grant Application Process

Beverly Woods informed the Council that the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) has announced the availability of three Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Assistance Programs. She provided a description for each of the following:

- **FY 2021 Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program - \$1 Billion is available nationwide.** The priorities for the program are to incentivize natural hazard risk reduction activities that mitigate risk to public infrastructure and disadvantaged communities; mitigate risk to one or more community

lifelines; incorporate nature-based solutions; enhance climate resilience and adaptation; and to increase funding to applicants that facilitate the adoption and enforcement of the latest published editions of building codes. BRIC encourages mitigation projects that meet multiple program priorities.

- **FY 2021 Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program - \$160 Million available nationwide** - The priorities for this program are to incentivize investments that reduce risk and increase pre-disaster mitigation, including expanding the use of insurance to manage risk through funding flood mitigation projects for properties insured through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).
- **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) - \$110,760,576 available statewide** - In alignment with the “State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan (SHMCAP)” mission statement, the Commonwealth prioritizes projects that reduce loss of life, and protect natural resources, property, infrastructure, public health, and the economy from natural hazards and climate change impacts through the development of integrated hazard mitigation and climate adaptation projects.

She added that the official state Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) will be issued later in August and will be posted on the state’s website. Grant information webinars have been scheduled and potential applicants are encouraged to participate or view a recorded session. The sessions are scheduled for:

- Tuesday, August 31: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM
- Thursday, September 9: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Links to the sessions were included in the handout and a copy of MEMA’s grant announcement was included in the Council packet. Beverly encouraged council members to look at their community’s already approved hazard mitigation plan as a starting point and to complete and submit a statement of interest to MEMA to begin the grant application process.

5. Report of the Executive Director Search Committee and Hiring Process for the Assistant Director Position and the Housing / Economic Development Planner

Andrew Deslaurier updated the Council on behalf of the Executive Director Search Committee, stating that two meetings have been held to date to discuss the process for finding NMCOG’s next director. He explained that the Committee will head the search and interview process for the Executive Director, while the Personnel Committee will continue their traditional process for hiring the Assistant Director and Housing/Economic Development Planner, as well as a Transportation Planner as NMCOG’s current Transportation Planner has accepted a position with MBTA. The job descriptions for the all four positions were distributed with the meeting packet and ads are set to be posted to job boards effective August 19th.

Beverly Woods requested authorization from the Council to proceed with hiring of a Housing and Economic Development Planner as soon as possible, to facilitate overlap and training prior to Jay Donovan's retirement. The Council agreed that moving forward with the candidate hiring process was in NMCOG's best interest.

6. Other New Business

Beverly Woods updated the Council that she, along with two other regional planning agency directors, recently provided testimony on the proposed retirement legislation and she understands that Senator Brady, committee co-chair, has indicated that the legislation will be reported out of committee favorably. The bill is expected to then be sent to either House or Senate Ways and Means. Beverly will keep the Council informed of any new developments.

VI. Announcements

There were none.


VII. Adjournment

Following a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Mary McBride, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:43 pm.

CLERK'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of August 18, 2021.

Attest:



Stephen Themelis, Clerk