



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
Suite 200
Lowell, MA
01852-2686

TEL: (978) 454-8021

FAX: (978) 454-8023

www.nmcog.org

The next meeting of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) will be held on **Wednesday, October 18, 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=MII4dEhJaXFHZERLNHlxZzNOZHN6dz09>. 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. **Welcome and Introductions to new Council and staff members**
- III. **Approval of Minutes – Minutes from September 20, 2023 (Vote Required)**
- IV. **Financial Report and Warrant - Income and expense statements 9/21/2023-10/16/2023 (Vote Required)**
- V. **Strategic Planning Committee – Update**
- VI. **Report of the Executive Director, September 2023**
- VII. **Community Exchange**
- VIII. **Reminders and Announcements**
 1. NMCOG Council Meeting – November 15, 2023 at 7:00 PM
 2. NMCOG Council Meeting – December 20, 2023 at 7:00 PM
- IX. **Other Business not known at the time of posting of this agenda**
- X. **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 September 20, 2023

I. The September 20, 2023 meeting of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) was held hybrid at 40 Church Street, Suite 200, 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
- Christopher Tribou, Assistant Clerk, Billerica Planning Board
- Mary McBride, Clerk, Billerica Alternate
- Pat Wojtas, MPO Rep, Chelmsford Select Board
- Annita Tanini, Chelmsford Planning Board
- Heather Santiago-Hutchings, Dracut Select Board
- Philippe Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- Jim Wilkie, Dunstable Planning Board
- Chuck Walkovich, Pepperell Select Board
- Joan Ladik, Pepperell Planning Board
- Stephen Themelis, Vice Chair, Pepperell Alternate
- Alex Lowder, Tewksbury Alternate
- Jayne Wellman, Assistant Treasurer, Tewksbury

Staff:

- Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director
- Kelly Lynema, Deputy Director
- Sara Paz, Finance and Benefits Manager
- Lesley Shahbazian, Executive Assistant

II. Election of NMCOG Officers

Mary McBride read the 2023 nominations for the election of NMCOG officers. The following people have been elected to serve as NMCOG officers:

Andrew Deslaurier – Chair

Stephen Themelis – Vice Chair

Gerard Frechette – Treasurer

Jayne Wellman – Assistant Treasurer

Mary McBride – Clerk

Christopher Tribou – Assistant Clerk

Pat Wojtas – Town Representative to the MPO

Andrew Deslaurier thanked everyone for choosing to serve and making NMCOG a stronger organization.

III. Welcome and Introductions to new Council and staff members

Ms. Raitt noted that there will be a new Council member from the Westford Select Board. He was unable to attend this evening and will be introduced at the next Council meeting.

NMCOG's new staff member is Paul Christner who is our new Transportation Program Manager. He was also unable to attend this evening and will be introduced at the next Council meeting.

IV. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the August 2, 2023 meeting were distributed to all Councilors for review. Based on a Motion by Pat Wojtas, seconded by Mary McBride on a roll call vote, the Council approved the Minutes of the August 2, 2023 meeting.

V. Financial Report and Warrant – Income and Expense Statements 08/02/2023 – 09/18/2023

Ms. Paz, Finance and Benefits Manager, presented the Financial Report and the Warrant for review and approval. Based on a Motion by Christopher Tribou, seconded by Jayne Wellman, following a roll call vote, the Council unanimously approved the Financial Report and Warrant.

VI. Contract Signatory Authorization between City of Lowell and NMCOG for FY24 Weights and Measures Services

Ms. Raitt reviewed the order to sign the Weights and Measures contract with the City of Lowell for this current fiscal year. The City would like the Council to vote on authorizing Ms. Raitt as an appropriate signatory on behalf of the Council. This requires a vote and requires Mary McBride to sign off on the vote.

Jayne Wellman asked if NMCOG is required to advertise the changes in Weights and Measures fees. Ms. Raitt explained that Lowell met at their Council level and updated their fees. NMCOG is not responsible for advertising fee changes. Each municipality would be responsible for any advertising or outreach necessary prior to a vote in their respective communities and contingent upon their community charter.

VII. Strategic Planning – Update

Ms. Raitt updated the Council on the Strategic Planning process. She is awaiting the results of various surveys from the Strategic Planning Committee who reached out to different communities/individuals and has also engaged NMCOG staff to take the survey.

Ms. Raitt is also completing a scan of other regional planning agencies on their work so we can understand how other agencies are structured and operate along with their programs and services they provide.

The next Strategic Planning Committee meeting is Tuesday, September 26, 2023.

Stephen Themelis asked if the Council was asked to complete the survey and Ms. Raitt explained that they were asked, but she will prompt them to do so again if they have not done so.

VIII. Report of the Executive Director, August 2023

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

- The most significant highlight is Envision 2050 was endorsed by the MPO and is now our long-term transportation plan. Ms. Raitt thanked Shrvanthi Gopalan Narayanan, Kelly Lynema, and Jessica Boulanger for their leadership and efforts in helping to get it completed.
- Austen Torres Davis, our new staff member, is working on traffic counting. We have been able get a couple of months of traffic counts. This is the first report out for traffic counts for the season.

- The Tewksbury Housing Production Plan, which was adopted locally by the Planning and Select Boards respectively, has now received approval from the State. This is the last step for a full and complete housing production plan.
- MBTA Communities work is starting to pick up and we have had a lot of interesting conversations at the local level with our communities. Tough choices ahead, but hopefully we can have new housing opportunities in greater Lowell. Kelly Lynema has played a key role working with Chris Hayes and Michael Asciola on local work with MBTA communities.
- NMCOG still has a Transportation Planner position open and now with Paul Christner on board we will begin the first round of interviews.
- We have a fully executed lease to move to 672 Suffolk Street, Wannalancit Mills. Ms. Raitt thanked Kelly Lynema, Lesley Shahbazian, and Carlin Andrus on leading the way with all the logistics of the move.
- NMCOG has been notified by the Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs that we have been awarded the \$125,000 grant we applied for to jumpstart the regional housing strategy ("At Home In Greater Lowell"). NMCOG will make a presentation at a future Council meeting.

IX. Community Exchange

- **Pepperell** – Steve Themelis reported that Pepperell is in the process of hiring a Town Planner. Chuck Walkovich continued that the Town received three applicants for the position – one withdrew and interviews for the other two applicants are in process. Joan Ladik expanded on this update, adding that she is on the interview committee and the interviews will start soon.

Additionally, Pepperell received a Complete Streets grant to support the downtown area. The Town anticipates that work will begin in October.

- **Chelmsford** – Pat Wojtas reported that the Town was awarded a \$30,000 grant to update the Open Space Plan. The Select Board will be running with four members. The Chair unexpectedly resigned. Annita Tanini noted that the Planning Board held their first public meeting for the MBTA Communities on 9/19. She thanked NMCOG for a great interaction with the community. The second meeting will be held on 9/21. There will be more public outreach in the future.

- **Dracut** - Heather Santiago-Hutchings explained that there are currently two large Comprehensive Permit developments before the Zoning Board of Appeals in the public hearing phase. Both are being met with opposition from neighbors. Both will have their second hearing on 9/21. Additionally, zoning bylaw review changes are still in discussion and the Town is preparing for the next Town Meeting in November. The MSBA feasibility study agreement has been executed for an updated Campbell Elementary School. NMCOG is going to Dracut on 9/26 for continued discussions on the Open Space and Recreation Survey and Planning.
- **Dracut** - Philippe Thibault shared that the Zoning Bylaw Review Committee began discussions about MBTA Communities zoning. The Town Planner provided an overview of the process and asked each member of the committee to look at the Town map and give their opinion of possible locations for zones. Regarding the MSBA update, Phil noted that the Building Committee has initiated the Owners' Project Manager (OPM) process.
- **Tewksbury** - Jayne Wellman thanked Ms. Raitt and NMCOG staff on their work on the Migrant Community Housing Crisis call that they organized last month. Tewksbury has 11 families housed in hotels at this time. They do not need any Town services at the moment. One of the Town's elementary schools will be reviewed by the Select Board for a potential Town Meeting article that will lead to a 99-year lease for future housing development. There will also be a request to bond \$30 million for a combined DPW/ School Facilities Building.

Alex Lowder gave a detailed overview of her work, in collaboration with Kelly Lynema and Michael Asciola, to help Tewksbury in their efforts to work toward a compliant district for an MBTA Communities.

- **Billerica** - Christopher Tribou mentioned that Town Meeting will consider two significant Articles; one for the Town Center and another to advance DPW renovations. Also, the Planning Board will be engaging community members on MBTA communities' discussions beginning on October 19.
- **Dunstable** - Jim Wilkie shared that the Town celebrated their 350th Anniversary as a town. He stated that development has tapered off. A Town Center overlay, which allows the town to convert old barns into businesses, is being discussed. Two developments are beginning, including 44, all affordable homes and a 156-home development; both are being advanced through a Comprehensive Permit process. The second development has not been well received and has not received favorable comments from the Select Board through the project eligibility review process.

X. Reminders and Announcements

1. NMCOG Annual Meeting – October 18, 2023 at 7:00 PM. This will be a regular Council Meeting in a hybrid format on Zoom and at the NMCOG office. An open house will be scheduled in the new office space for early next year to celebrate the move and new beginnings.

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

XIII. Adjournment

Following a motion made by Jayne Wellman and seconded by Mary McBride on a voice vote the Council unanimously adjourned the meeting at 8:02 pm.

CLERK'S CERTIFICATE

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

Attest:



Mary K. McBride, Clerk

WARRANT

DATE: October 18, 2023

AMOUNT: \$ 232,843.56

SIGNED: Jenny Raitt
Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director

Signed:

Christopher Strahan
Par Weytas
Paul J. ...
Theresa ...
Ray Bruce

Representing:

DRAVOT
Billerica
Chelmsford
Lowell
Billerica
Chelmsford

**Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
BALANCE SHEET
COUNCIL MEETING 10/18/2023**

CURRENT ASSETS:

CASH IN BANK AS OF 10/16/2023:

Enterprise Bank - Investment Acct	\$ 318,881.05
Enterprise Bank - Operating Acct	\$ 98,232.27
Washington Savings - Investment Acct.	\$ 536,131.14
Salem Five 36 MO.CD *	\$ 173,154.00
Restricted Cash Account OPEB (VantageCare RHS-EIP:Vantagepoint MP Trad Growth Dedicated Retirement Health Savings Plan)	\$ 323,376.40

TOTAL CASH IN BANK **\$ 1,449,774.86**

ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE as of 10/16/2023:

National Fish Wildlife Foundation	\$ 32,156.31
FY24 Q1 Sealers W&M	\$ 13,125.00
FY24 Q2 Sealers W&M	\$ 37,375.00
FY24 Stormwater	\$ 4,800.00
Dracut OSRP	\$ 10,473.85
Tyngsborough 3ATA	\$ 16,375.00
Chelmsford 3ATA	\$ 8,275.00
LRTA Q3	\$ 24,525.97
MassDOT August 2023	\$ 86,941.94

TOTAL ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLES: **\$ 234,048.07**

TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS: **\$ 1,683,822.93**

CURRENT LIABILITIES:

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE :

Outstanding A/P CHECKS	\$ (98,232.27)
ANTICIPATED EXPENSES / INVOICES PENDING	\$ (38,151.83)
ANTICIPATED PAYROLL & TAXES (Through November 9, 2023)	\$ (96,459.46)

TOTAL ACCOUNTS PAYABLE: **\$ (232,843.56)**

Other Outstanding Payables:

Contract Advance-DLTA XV	\$ (54,807.00)
Due to/from Grantor-MHD Contracts FY94 - FY22	\$ (125,827.00)

Total Other Outstanding Payables: **\$ (180,634.00)**

TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES: **\$ (413,477.56)**

TOTAL CURRENT FUND BALANCE: **\$ 1,270,345.37**

Northern Middlesex Council of Governments

WARRANT

October 18, 2023

Outstanding Check Listing:

Enterprise Operating Account	\$	10.74	Checks dated 5/2023 presented for payment
Enterprise Operating Account	\$	909.00	Checks dated 6/2023 presented for payment
Enterprise Operating Account	\$	199.00	Checks dated 8/2023 presented for payment
Enterprise Operating Account	\$	36,867.35	Checks dated 9/2023 presented for payment
Enterprise Operating Account	\$	60,246.18	Checks dated 10/2023 presented for payment
Total	\$	<u>98,232.27</u>	

ANTICIPATED EXPENSES / INVOICES PENDING

Atlantis Ventures	\$	8,399.75	November Rent
Canon Financial Services	\$	682.83	October Copier Lease
Comcast	\$	631.59	November Service
GMS	\$	250.00	Service for September 2023
Guardian Life Insurance	\$	315.28	November Life Insurance
MIIA	\$	26,135.97	<u>Est</u> November Health & Dental Insurance
National Grid	\$	691.41	Electric Service Sep 10 - Oct 12, 2023
Topaz Engineering	\$	995.00	Service Agreement for GIS Printer (12 Month)
Verizon	\$	<u>50.00</u>	October Service
	\$	<u>38,151.83</u>	

ANTICIPATED PAYROLL & TAXES

Paydates: October 26, 2023 &
November 9, 2023

\$ 96,459.46

TOTAL WARRANT

\$ 232,843.56

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

REGIONAL PLANNING ACTIVITIES

- **Transportation/ Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO)**
 - **SS4A Regional Comprehensive Safety Action Plan "Greater Lowell Vision Zero Plan"**

NMCOG received six proposals in response to the RFP for the Greater Lowell Vision Zero Plan; review of the proposals and contracting is underway. Staff continue to reach out to communities to identify members for the Advisory Committee. The project website is live and will be updated as engagement opportunities and project milestones are planned and achieved. Visit the site at www.nmcog.org/glvisionzero.
 - **2023 NMCOG Traffic Counting Program**

NMCOG's consultant, Southern Traffic Services + Rekor (STS), continues to assist with the 2023 Traffic Counting Data Collection Program. In total, traffic counts are planned for 76 locations during the 2023 traffic counting season. Data collection started in July and is continuing through October. NMCOG staff received data for 57 counts conducted during the months of July, August, and September. This data is being processed in order to be uploaded to MS2, the transportation data management system utilized by MassDOT. Remaining counts for the 2023 season are scheduled for October 23 through 27. Coordination with STS to gather and process data will continue through November.

Data collected during the 2023 traffic counting season will inform regional traffic volume reports that address topics such as average daily traffic, regional traffic volume trends, traffic growth, and heavy vehicle monitoring.
- **Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) Planning Support**

NMCOG has a longstanding and ongoing relationship to provide transit planning support to the LRTA and the region. In August, staff met with LRTA staff, Chris Curry and Meaghan O'Brien to determine how NMCOG can best support LRTA's initiatives. Additionally, staff calculated Directional Route Miles for LRTA's annual NTD report.

- **Weights and Measures**

During the month of September, NMCOG’s Weights and Measures program conducted 23 inspections in the communities of Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Littleton, Lowell, Tewksbury, and Westford. Of the 23 inspections conducted during that period, 20 were annual inspections and three were price verifications. The outcome of these inspections resulted in 201 devices being inspected and sealed and three businesses verified for price accuracy. Overall numbers were reduced in September due to inclement weather and scheduled vacations.

- **Regional and Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program**

The Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC), supported by NMCOG as a subcontractor, has begun the planning process for the Regional Digital Equity Plan. NMCOG and MAPC also worked with Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) to assist MBI in publicizing and presenting at its Merrimack Valley listening session, held in Lowell on September 20, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm. This listening session was for the separate, but related, statewide digital equity plan, and was attended by approximately 30 total community members between the virtual and in-person sessions.

- **“At Home in Greater Lowell” Regional Housing Strategy**

NMCOG was awarded a \$125,000 Land Use Planning Grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to fund work on At Home in Greater Lowell, a regional housing strategy. The funding will support NMCOG’s planning efforts to respond to the regional housing shortage and will support the nine communities in Greater Lowell in advancing locally specific policies to increase housing choice.

Staff met with municipal CEOs and their staff to discuss the project to better understand how the plan can be responsive to each community. NMCOG staff also began outlining the role of the advisory committee and are actively seeking suggestions for possible committee members, with the goal of starting the Regional Housing Strategy project shortly, now that funding has been secured.

- **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Economic Development Administration (EDA) Grant**

The Greater Lowell Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for 2020-2024 expires May 30, 2025. This document is critical both for allowing NMCOG and its member communities to receive grants from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and for coordinating and prioritizing the activities of NMCOG; local, regional, and state economic development agencies; and municipalities.

At their quarterly meeting on September 11, the CEDS Committee reviewed and

approved NMCOG’s grant application proposal for the EDA to fund a data collection and public outreach process to create a CEDS for 2025-2029. The process would kick off in early 2024 for a year-long process with a goal of acceptance in March 2025. At that meeting, the CEDS committee also heard updates on the 2023 Schedule of Goals. NMCOG has also consulted with partner agencies to refine the proposal.

- **Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG)**

NMCOG is working closely with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to coordinate efforts to advance the regional climate planning effort funded through the CPRG, funded by the US Environmental Protection Agency. Currently, Daniela Garcia Moreno is serving as a part of the Regional Planning Agency Steering Committee, which will be in charge of leading outreach and engagement effort in our region and coordinating with MAPC. Efforts are anticipated to start this fall and wrapping up in spring 2024.

- **Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Updates**

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs has published a Secretary’s Certificate for the Talbot Mills Dam Removal in Billerica, MA, stating that the Project will require a Single Environmental Impact Report. This certificate was published on. No additional certificates or projects were published as of this time.

MEPA NUMBER AND TYPE OF DOCUMENT FILED	PROJECT NAME AND LOCATION	APPLICANT NAME AND ADDRESS	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	PRIORITY RANK	COMMENT DEADLINE AND STAFF REMARKS
EOEEA #16731 EENF	Talbot Mills Dam Removal	CRT Development Realty, LLC 80 Washington St, Norwell, MA 02061	Removal of Talbot Mills Dam, an approximately 127-foot-long, 10-foot-high former mill dam on the Concord River, about 4.76 miles upstream of its confluence with the Merrimack River. The project is pursued as the best alternative to restore migratory	A	Secretary’s Certificate Issued September 1, 2023

			fish passage and connectivity for resident aquatic species; decommission aging infrastructure; eliminate ongoing maintenance and repair obligations; reduce flood hazards and increase resilience; and improve water quality, habitat, and natural river functions.		
--	--	--	---	--	--

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 NMCOG; no MEPA review needed.

For any questions regarding either project undergoing MEPA review, please contact Dany Garcia Moreno at dgarciamoreno@nmcog.org.

ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITIES

- **Multi-Family Zoning for MBTA Communities – Compliance Activities**

NMCOG continued MBTA Communities planning work with Tewksbury and Westford for mapping GIS boundaries and reviewing proposed districts against the EOHL’s compliance modeling tool. Work with Tyngsborough focused on refinement of the state’s model zoning to reflect decisions by the Town’s Zoning Review Committee. Staff worked with Chelmsford to conduct two neighborhood meetings on September 19 and 21, and are working with Billerica to plan an MBTA-Communities focused Open House on October 19.

NMCOG also hosted a monthly technical support conference call with all seven participating MBTA Communities from the NMCOG region on September 12.

- **Housing Production Plans**

- **Dunstable Housing Production Plan**

The Town of Dunstable Affordable Housing Committee finalized review of the Dunstable Housing Production Plan, which was provided to the Town in late August. The Town and NMCOG have a goal of adoption at the Planning Board and Select Board in October 2023.

- **Lowell Housing Production Plan**
 NMCOG and the City of Lowell received more than 800 responses to the Housing, Homes, and Community Survey and are now creating a report based on those responses, in addition to other public outreach conducted throughout the summer. Staff are also completing the comprehensive housing needs assessment, anticipating a completion in early October. Key findings and goals will be presented at a meeting of the Lowell Forward Housing Subcommittee on October 10, and revised goals will be presented at the Lowell Forward Citywide Workshop, open to the public, on October 25, 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm, at the Lowell Senior Center.

- **Dracut Open Space and Recreation Plan**
 Dany Garcia Moreno worked closely with the Town’s Conservation Agent and Assistant Planner, Jackie Anderson, to plan a second Public Forum in the planning process, which was held on September 26. The forum provided an opportunity for the public to hear about plan updates and participate in a visioning session to identify priorities to improve open space and recreation in Town. Meetings to discuss the five year action plan and revise draft strategies developed through feedback collected at the public forums are scheduled with the Open Space Committee, Conservation Committee, and Recreation Committee on October 12 and 18 and on November 6.

- **Lowell Open Streets Project**
 NMCOG and City staff have been working together on a preliminary report to assist in determining the location and other details of a pilot study of closing a portion of Downtown Lowell to vehicular traffic. This would create a pedestrian mall, including additional space for events, programming, and al fresco dining. City staff have targeted 2024 for the pilot program, and NMCOG staff are finishing a report with case studies, turning movement and traffic count analysis, parking analysis, and pilot layout alternatives targeting October for a final draft.

- **Pepperell Subdivision Regulations Ordinance**
 NMCOG staff worked with the Town on drafting a new ordinance for subdivision regulations. Staff reviewed public comments on the newest draft, many of which were incorporated into the final document. Staff coordinated with the Town Administrator to put together a short presentation summarizing the proposed draft changes based on the comments. The updated draft and presentation was brought to the Pepperell Planning Board at a meeting in early September; the Planning Board will be holding an official public hearing on the regulations in October.

- **Dunstable Walk Audit**
 NMCOG held a senior-focused walk audit in Dunstable on September 13, and

prepared for a public meeting and walk audit on October 4. These audits were designed to analyze potential improvements to walkability and safety in Dunstable Town Center. Participants discussed how residents and visitors travel on foot, which places were ideal for sidewalk development, destinations that people want to be able to walk to, and what challenges would need to be addressed to make downtown Dunstable more pedestrian-friendly. Staff are synthesizing feedback from the three walk audits into a final report, which will be presented to the Town for review in November.

GIS AND DATA SHARING

Transition to the new IT managed services provider has progressed smoothly was completed in early September. Other IT tasks included onboarding, procurement, and equipment configuration for new employees and public records retention archiving.

The GIS and Data Program Manager met with ZS Consultants to learn more about the Massachusetts Zoning Atlas project and to provide zoning data to support the effort. Law students from Suffolk University and community volunteers are collecting and coding zoning data for all 351 Massachusetts cities and towns which will become part of the National Zoning Atlas. When completed, the Zoning Atlas will enable comparisons across jurisdictions, illuminate regional and statewide trends, and strengthen national planning for housing production, transportation infrastructure, and climate response.

NMCOG GIS staff provided mapping and data support for a range of ongoing agency projects as well as managing IT planning and coordination for the upcoming office move. Among other tasks, GIS staff prepared draft Dracut Open Space inventory data and poster-sized maps for the September 26th public meeting, provided recommendations for the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) RFP, set up GIS project files for housing and transportation planners to complete mapping and analysis, and reported trail data loading issues in the Boston MPO Bicycle/Pedestrian Count Database. Thanks to a tip from an agency planner, NMCOG planners now have free licensing for Esri Community Analyst software through a staff member's APA membership.

REGIONAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

- **Northern Middlesex Municipal CEO Group**
Following a break over the summer, the group met in September in Pepperell. Updates were provided on the Regional Homelessness Summit that was hosted by the City of Lowell and NMCOG in August and the Governor's Emergency Declaration on Migrant Housing needs. Discussions continued on opportunities for regional collaboration, including approaches to FY24 Community Compact funding to support regional collaboration activities.
- **Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) Trainings**
The City of Lowell Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals requested NMCOG's

assistance with a training on fair housing laws to ensure that their board members understand the laws and their role in the process to affirmatively further fair housing. Jennifer Raitt delivered the first training through CPTC's On-Demand program on September 25th. The second session will be provided on October 2nd.

In December, NMCOG will host the CPTC webinar on Writing Reasonable and Defensible Decisions.

GENERAL UPDATES

- **Office Move Update**

The owner of 40 Church Street provided a letter to allow NMCOG to remain a tenant through the month of November.

The staff moving team made significant progress in planning the new office floor plan and workstation layouts at Wannalancit Mills as well as in the selection of a moving company from multiple bids. Network and electrical outlet locations were mapped over the proposed layouts to facilitate planning and communication with contractors throughout the process. NMCOG's IT consultant provided recommendations that will guide the design of the new phone system and network utilizing both new and existing infrastructure.

- **Personnel Updates**

NMCOG welcomed the following three new staff to the Transportation Planning team in August and September:

Paul Christner - Transportation Program Manager

Paul started in September of 2023 and is responsible for all highway and transit planning services for the agency and oversees the transportation planning contracts with local, state, and federal agencies and the Lowell Regional Transit Authority. He assists in the preparation and development of regional transportation planning studies, transportation programs and assists in planning, organizing, and directing the transportation/transit planning activities and programs for the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

Paul previously worked at the Boston Region MPO, where he served as the Manager of Transit Analysis and Planning. He has nearly two decades of experience in transportation planning, having worked previously at Longwood Collective (formerly MASCO), the Massachusetts Port Authority, the City of Boston, and the USDOT Volpe Center.

Paul earned a Master of City Planning degree and a Bachelor of Arts degree in French Language and Literature, both from the University of Pennsylvania.

Blake Acton - Regional Transit Planner II

Blake started in August 2023 and his primary responsibility is to support the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA). This includes maintaining transit system data, ensuring compliance with federal and state requirements such as Title VI, Federal Transit Administration, Americans with Disabilities Act, and National Transit Database reporting. He also conducts analyses of ridership trends and operations and serves as a liaison with municipalities, regional partners, and advocacy organizations.

Before joining NMCOG, Blake was a transit analyst at the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization. There, he led projects on curb management and assisted the MBTA with updating their Title VI policy and conducting equity analyses.

Blake holds a B.A. in geography from the University of Missouri, earned in 2018, where he specialized in GIS, planning, and transportation. He later completed his M.A. in transportation geography in 2020 at The Ohio State University. During this period, he researched and published on the impact of bus rapid transit on property values.

Austen Torres Davis - Transportation Planner II

Austen started in August 2023 and provides support to the MPO to advance goals and performance measure requirements of US DOT and MassDOT. His work includes monitoring and assessing pavement conditions, safety and security, as well as system performance of the regional transportation network. This work guides infrastructure project prioritization, safety improvement strategies and emergency management, as well as congestion mitigation.

Prior to joining NMCOG, Austen was a Planner for the City of Portland, Maine, where his duties included reviewing development and re-zoning proposals for compliance with Portland's Land Use Code, as well as data visualization and outreach to facilitate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects. He also managed the City's program for temporary public art, assisting in the installation of sculptures, murals and other artwork throughout the city.

Austen received a B.A. in Geography and Urban Studies from Temple University and a Master's in Regional Planning from Cornell University. His studies at Cornell included researching the impacts of urban greenway development along disused rail corridors, and the intersections between adaptive reuse and active transportation.