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

**Minutes from Council Meeting November 21, 2023**

**I.** The November 21, 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
* Mary McBride, Clerk, Billerica Alternate
* Pat Wojtas, MPO Rep, Chelmsford Select Board
* Douglas Bruce, Chelmsford Alternate
* Philippe Thibault, Dracut Alternate
* Gerard Frechette, Treasurer, Lowell Planning Board
* Chuck Walkovich, Pepperell Select Board
* Stephen Themelis, Vice Chair, Pepperell Alternate
* Chris Barrett, Westford Select Board

Staff:

* Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director
* Kelly Lynema, Deputy Director
* Sara Paz, Finance and Benefits Manager
* Lesley Shahbazian, Executive Assistant
* Christopher Glenn Hayes, Housing and Economic Development Manager

**II. Welcome and Introduction of NMCOG Council Member**

Chris Barrett introduced himself. He is a Westford Select Board member and our newest designee to the NMCOG Council.

**III. Approval of Minutes**

The Minutes of the October 18, 2023 meeting were distributed to all Councilors for review. Stephen Themelis had one correction – Andrew was not at the October 18th meeting so his name was deleted from the attendees. Based on a Motion by Gerard Frechette, seconded by Mary McBride on a roll call vote, the Council approved the Minutes of the October 18, 2023 meeting.

**IV. Financial Report and Warrant – Income and Expense Statements 10/19/2023 – 11/20/2023**

Ms. Paz, Finance and Benefits Manager, presented the Financial Report and the Warrant for review and approval. Based on a Motion by Stephen Themelis, seconded by Mary McBride, following a roll call vote, the Council unanimously approved the Financial Report and Warrant.

**V. Report of the Executive Director, October 2023**

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

* NMCOG officially kicked off the Greater Lowell Vision Zero plan by hiring a consultant – WSP. They have a lot of experience working in the realm of vision zero planning. There is an advisory committee, which includes many people from our surrounding communities. We anticipate that there will be two public forums as well as other opportunities for outreach and engagement that are part of the overall plan.
* NMCOG has been working very hard on reestablishing our relationship with the LRTA. Ms. Raitt is working with Paul Christner, NMCOG’s Transportation Planning Program Manager, on NMCOG’s traditional cycle of getting the Council’s authorization to sign the contract. She is hoping this will be worked out by the December Council meeting
* Weights and Measures is incredibly busy. We have increased Ricardo Machado’s hours from 20 hours per week to 30 hours per week. This has been very helpful to Mark Normandin.
* NMCOG did not receive one of the grant sources that we had requested for At Home in Greater Lowell. But we are still moving forward in earnest with UMDI. They are really good at specific kinds of data collection and analysis and understanding housing trends in a manner that NMCOG does not have the staff capacity for right now. This would give us the room to be able to focus on the policy recommendations, the toolkit, and other things that are components of this regional housing strategy. Kelly and Chris are working on finding a consultant who can help us with what we're calling “storytelling”. It is another way of sharing data and information about housing issues across the region. Telling stories is a better way to go. We are working to find support in order to get there. We are planning a January kickoff summit.
* We did put in for an EDA grant. Thanks very much to Chris Hayes for continuing to keep that rolling.
* NMCOG has done a lot with MBTA communities. In some cases we have submitted to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to get them to review for compliance what we've already started to model in each community. That is a key step in the process because then it leads to the actual drafting of things and further engagement with each community. We really need you to be communicating with your respective boards and bodies the importance of these planning processes and the importance of what we've been continuing to communicate about the need to be compliant with these rules.
* NMCOG has been doing a lot of really great and interesting work with Dunstable. Jason Silva is the Town Administrator, The Clerk, the “everything” in Dunstable. As a result of that, he does need a lot of support from NMCOG and we've been happy to be able to provide it. One of the things is this Union Building rehab process that's being funded by the DLTA program. Chris Hayes and Kelly Lynema are very engaged in that - also a Walk Audit. They received a very modest grant from AARP. Kelly Lynema and Isabel Emmett have been working on that. Today Ms. Raitt worked with them as well as Pepperell on an EV charging station project, which is funded by a special appropriation from the governor’s office.
* NMCOG is hosting a citizen planner training collaborative webinar on December 14th at 5:30pm on Zoom. It is about decisions by planning boards on ZBA’s.
* NMCOG is moving on Friday, December 1st and it has been all consuming.

**VI. Community Exchange**

**Dracut –** Philippe Thibault, Dracut Alternate – Dracut held their town meeting which lasted a little over an hour. There were a few budgeting items discussed. There were a number of zoning articles – most were positive. Some mixed feelings on them.

They are in the process of advertising for an OPM for our feasibility study for the Campbell school. They should be received by the end of December. There will be an interview process in January and hopefully a selection made sometime in February and then to MSBA for the decision to bring on the OPM.

**Lowell –** Gerard Frechette, Treasurer, Lowell Planning Board – Jerry has worked on the Rourke Bridge Advisory Committee. There was a meeting on November 15th in preparation of the public meeting on December 6th at 6:00. It was a good meeting. They should be going out for procurement next year and then putting a shovel in the ground in third quarter of 2025 with a completion date of 2028. The cost is $190.

**Chelmsford -** Pat Wojtas, MPO Rep, Chelmsford Select Board - Last month Chelmsford finished their town meeting and the second night they passed the specialized energy code. It applies to residences over 4,000 square feet, but it also applies to new commercial construction and multifamily.

The other big news from Chelmsford from last month was that finally after working two years without a contract, the Board decided to give our town manager a four year contract.

Douglas Bruce, Chelmsford Alternate added that this year – high school football rivalries Chelmsford and Billerica are playing their Thanksgiving Day game at Fenway Park.

**Westford –** Chris Barrett, Westford Select Board - Westford had their special town meeting last month. It turned out to be a bit of a disaster. The big ticket item on the agenda was gun bylaw that the town had been working on for the past several months. It brought out more people than we anticipated. We ran out of space in terms of parking and in the main auditorium at the high school. There were also technical difficulties so it was a poor showing from the town not being prepared for town meeting. People were disillusioned and unhappy. Westford plans on bring back the gun bylaw in a special town meeting in the Spring.

The gun bylaw is a little complex, but Westford is trying to implement some safeguards regarding buffers so that we don’t end up with a situation similar to what happened in Littleton where you had lots of gun shops in one location. There would be a minimum buffer between establishments as well as buffers between gun shop establishments and things like schools, daycare centers, etc. We went back and forth trying to decide how to limit the number of establishments in the community. We had a fairly complicated formula to do that in an effort to try to appease both sides of this discussion. That may have complicated matters, but we are bringing it back without the numbers this time and just the buffers and we'll see if that makes it a little easier for folks to approve.

**Pepperell** - Stephen Themelis, Vice Chair, Pepperell Alternate - The Pepperell Planning Board approved a gluten-free bakery, first of its kind in Pepperell at the 49 Main Street Rotary which was the old gasoline station at the junctions Rt. 111 and 113. It's also the same site that Pepperell is going to be doing the redevelopment of the rotary project with Complete Streets which they received $400,000 grant from MassDOT. The project at Railroad Square was started and that was another MassDOT $200,000 grant - Safe Streets. They started working on widening the sidewalks - putting the curbs in and trying to wrap up before winter comes.

Steve Themelis thanked Austin Torres Davis for supplying him with traffic counts last month for the Pepperell Rotary.

Chuck Walkovich, Pepperell Select Board - There was a town meeting last week. Besides a lot of housekeeping issues of moving money from one fund to another Pepperell had one major topic to discuss - a citizens petition for a rate of development to limit the housing to 10 units per year and only two units per individual. The Select Board and the Planning Board strongly recommended against voting for this bylaw and was successful. That bylaw was defeated which is very good for Pepperell.

There was also a major site review for a warehousing complex, which will be going in toward Nashua and Pepperell. They are sending out three areas for peer review, soil management, waste mortar management, and noise.

**Billerica -** Mary McBride, Clerk, Billerica Alternate - Elements of the Middlesex Turnpike are being finished.

Andrew Deslaurier, Chair, Billerica Select Board mentioned the major accident that happened on Route 3. Thirty thousand gallons of fuel were on a truck that tipped over and only five thousand stayed in the truck. Every one of our surrounding communities had some sort of asset covering this accident from tanker trucks to first aid to hazmat crews, which were on Route 3 for 20 hours. There were no injuries. Andrew thanked everyone for all the support their communities provided.

Exciting things happening with a $20 million Common project. It is going to expand pedestrian bike walking and make the area safer.

A $60 million new DPW facility was passed at Town Meeting. It is going to bring our engineering and all DPW assets under one roof.

**Lowell -** Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director - The city of Lowell received a $200,000 Safe Streets for All Grant for safety action planning in the Church Street neighborhood which is one of the highest, most dangerous intersections in the entire region.

Ms. Raitt also added the rate of development bylaw in Pepperell failed by 82%.

**X. Reminders and Announcements**

1. NMCOG Council Meeting – December 20, 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**

None

**XIII. Adjournment**

Following a motion made by Mary McBride and seconded by Gerard Frechette on a voice vote the Council unanimously adjourned the meeting at 8:08 pm.

**CLERK’S CERTIFICATE**

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of November 21, 2023.



Attest:

**Mary K. McBride, Clerk**