The January 15, 2020 meeting was held at the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments office, 40 Church Street, Lowell, Massachusetts. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. with Chair Pat Wojtas presiding. The following were in attendance, as indicated in Attachment #1:

Councilors

- Pat Wojtas, Chair, Chelmsford Board of Selectmen
- S. George Zaharoolis, Chelmsford Alternate
- Phil Thibault, Dracut Alternate
- Stephen Themelis, Pepperell Alternate
- Jayne Wellman, Tewksbury Board of Selectmen
- Rick Reault, Tyngsborough Board of Selectmen
- Darrin Wizst, Westford Planning Board

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: December 11, 2019

The minutes were distributed to all Councilors for review. Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Council voted to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2019 meeting. George Zaharoolis and Darrin Wizst abstained as they were not present for the December 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 Rick Reault, 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 signature. Based on a motion made by Rick Reault and seconded by Steve Themelis, the Financial Report and Warrant were unanimously approved. The Financial Report is included as Attachment #3.

IV. Old Business

1. Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Proposed Amendment to address a cost increase for the Andover Street and River Road intersection project in Tewksbury

Justin Howard reminded the Council that the NMMPO voted to release a TIP amendment for public comment in December. The amendment addresses a cost increase for the Andover Street and River Road intersection project in Tewksbury. The project is now at 100% design and the estimated cost had increased from $3,518,633 to $5,390,721, with the added cost to be covered by available NMMPO Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) target funds. Over the past week, MassDOT, the Tewksbury Town Engineer, and the project consultant revisited the cost estimate and arrived at a new cost of approximately $4,600,000. The new cost estimate will be discussed at the January 22nd NMMPO meeting. (A description of the proposed amendment was included in the Council packet).

Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Council voted unanimously to authorize the Chair to vote in favor of endorsing the Proposed TIP Amendment at the January 22nd NMMPO meeting.

2. DLTA XIII RFP Process

Jay Donovan informed the Council that NMCOG distributed an RFP to the Chief Administrative Officers, Planners, Community Development Directors, and the NMCOG Council members to solicit project proposals for funding under the DLTA XIII program. Proposals should be submitted to NMCOG no later than Tuesday, January 21, 2020, so that the projects can be initiated no later than January 27, 2020, assuming NMCOG has a signed contract with DHCD in place by that date. Regional DLTA funds have been directed to the RECC project, the regional Weights and Measures program, the Regional Stormwater Collaborative, Regional Energy Efficiency Initiatives, and Housing Choice initiatives. There is currently $143,000 available in DLTA funds for local projects. All projects funded under this grant program must be completed by December 31, 2020.

3. Advertising of Transportation Planner Position

Beverly Woods informed the Council that the open Transportation Planner position has been advertised, with a response deadline of January 24th. She expects that the interviewing process will begin the first week of February, with a goal of providing a hiring recommendation at the
February Council meeting. A copy of the Transportation Planner job description was included in the meeting packet.

4. Other Old Business

There was none.

V. New Business

1. Community Reports

Steve Themelis informed the Council that the Town of Pepperell recently appointed an Economic Development Advisory Committee. The seven-member committee will work closely with NMCOG in developing the town’s Master Plan chapter on Economic Development. The Town is looking forward to filling vacant business locations and fostering a more favorable business environment.

Rick Reault stated that the Town of Tyngsborough anticipates the opening of its first cannabis retail and medical facility next month.

Phil Thibault stated that the Town of Dracut has begun its search for a new Town Manager with hopes of having the person onboard by mid-March 2020.

2. Project Referrals

Beverly Woods informed the Council that the only project under MEPA review at this time is the River Road and Andover Street Intersection Improvement project in Tewksbury. A copy of the staff comment letter for this project was provided to the Council for review.

Based on a motion by Darrin Wizst and seconded by George Zaharoolis, the Council voted unanimously to the staff comment letter as submitted. APPROVED.

3. Second and Third Public Input Sessions for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update

Jay Donovan informed the Council that NMCOG is in the process of updating the region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). When complete, the Greater Lowell CEDS will summarize the economic resources of the region, establish an economic development vision for Greater Lowell, identify goals, and establish a regional Five-Year Action Plan containing priority projects to foster continued economic growth and vitality. The CEDS must also incorporate the concept of economic resilience, e.g. the ability to withstand and recover from economic shifts, natural disasters, and the impacts of climate change. The CEDS must be updated every five years in order for communities to qualify for EDA assistance under the Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs.
The development of the CEDS document is guided by grassroots public input and stakeholder feedback. The Town of Tewksbury and NMCOG will be hosting a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis at the Tewksbury Public Library on Tuesday, January 21st to receive input from business owners, residents, workers, local officials and property owners. The SWOT session is one of three sessions that NMCOG is holding across the region to receive public input. The first session was held in Lowell on November 21st. In addition to the Tewksbury session, a session is also scheduled for February 4, 2020 at the Chelmsford Police Department Community Room.

There are two CEDS surveys available online, one for businesses and another for residents. An informational flyer was included in the Council packet.

4. Development Schedule for the FY2021 UPWP and FY2021-2025 TIP

Justin Howard informed the Council that the NMMPO has begun work on the development of the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Each year MassDOT provides the MPOs with financial targets for each of the documents, as both the documents must be financially constrained in order to receive federal approval.

Justin outlined the preliminary schedule for the Council, stating that NMCOG staff will participate in a conference call with MassDOT staff on February 12th, to review the status of candidate projects for the upcoming TIP. MassDOT will provide their opinions on when they believe each project will be ready for advertising. A schedule of development for the TIP and UPWP was included in the meeting packet.

5. Upcoming MPO Federal Certification Review Process

Justin Howard advised the Council that Federal regulations require that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) jointly certify the metropolitan transportation planning in Transportation Management Area (TMAs), at least every four years. A TMA is an urbanized area, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, with a population of over 200,000. The Planning Certification Review consists of three primary activities: a site visit, a review of planning products (in advance of and during the site visit), and preparation of a report that summarizes the Review and offers findings. The Review focuses on compliance with Federal regulations, challenges, successes, and the cooperative relationship between the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), MassDOT, and LRTA in the metropolitan planning process.

The Certification Review process is one of several methods used to assess the quality of the metropolitan planning process, compliance with applicable statutes and regulations, and the level and type of technical assistance needed to enhance the effectiveness of the process. The results of
this process are documented within a Certification Review report prepared by the federal transportation agencies.

The certification process for the NMMPO is about to get underway, with a site visit scheduled for March 4th. Documentation has been sent to the federal partners for review.

6. EPA Five-Star Urban Waters Grant Application

Beverly Woods explained that NMCOG is working with Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust, the City of Lowell, AMC and U.S. Fish and Wildlife on a Five-Star Grant proposal. Lowell General is also offering its support for the project. Applications are due on January 30th. The scope is still being finalized, however, a three-phase program is envisioned:

- a one-day trash cleanup along the Merrimack River, from the Concord River to Burnham Road, using volunteers;
- a one-day “habitat restoration” (removal of non-native invasive plants) with FedEx volunteers behind Stackpole Street (primarily on Lowell General’s property and right of way across the street from the former Saints building), and initiation of a “visioning process” for creating a public/private-partnership park in this area for people and urban wildlife (particularly birds); and
- Outreach to abutters along the Pennacook Trail, from Nesmith Street to Burnham Road, with the intent to create a long-term vision for the trail and to educate residents in the hopes of creating a more formalized trail that is respectful of neighbors, provides habitat for wildlife, and helps protect water quality in the Merrimack River. There is also interest in creating a more formal maintenance plan for the right of way, in partnership with the Lowell Water/Wastewater Utility.

A 1:1 match is required but can consist of in-kind contributions. If successful, it is anticipated that $30,000-50,000 would be awarded.

7. Other New Business

There was none.

VI. Announcements

There were none.

VII. Adjournment

Following a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Jayne Wellman, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:45 pm.
CLERK’S CERTIFICATE

I certify that this is a true copy of the Minutes of the meeting of January 15, 2020.

Attest: _____________________________

Stephen Themelis, Clerk