



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

COUNCIL — *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, January 30, 2019 / 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Location:	William B. Allen Room, Olver Transit Center, 12 Olive Street, Greenfield
Facilitator:	Michele Giarusso, Chair

COUNCILOR ATTENDEES:

Kayce Warren, Ashfield; **Stanley Garland**, Bernardston; **Marguerite Willis**, Charlemont; **Kevin Fox**, Colrain; **John O’Rourke**, Conway; **Trevor McDaniel**, Deerfield; **Bryan Smith**, Erving (6:02 p.m.); **John Ward**, Gill; **Roxann Wedegartner**, Greenfield; **Hussain Hamdan** and **Robert Root**, Hawley; **Brian DeVriese**, Heath; **Patricia Duffy**, Leverett; **Michele Giarusso**, Leyden; **Steve Ellis**, Montague; **Wayne Hachey**, New Salem; **Janice Boudreau**, Rowe; **Andrew Baker**, Shelburne; **Ellen McKay**, Shutesbury; **Tom Fydenkevez**, Sunderland; **Michael Idoine**, Wendell; **Lynn Sibley**, Whately; **Jay DiPucchio**, Regionally Elected; **Bill Perlman**, Regionally Elected; **Jim Basford**, FRPB.

REGRETS: **Gabriele Voelker**, Orange **ABSENT:** **Heather Butler**, Buckland; **Alice Houghtaling**, Monroe; **Alexander Meisner**, Northfield; **Larry “Doc” Pruyne**, Warwick.

STAFF & VISITORS: **Linda Dunlavy**, Executive Director; **Claire McGinnis**, Finance Director; **Rebekah Boyd**, Administrative Services Coordinator; **Megan Rhodes**, Sr. Transportation/Land Use Planner; **Ryan Clary**, Sr. GIS Specialist; **Al MacIntyre**, Wendell Finance Committee; **Philippe Simone**, GCTV.

1. Call to order Roll Call	Chair Michele Giarusso
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The chair convened the meeting at 5:30 p.m. Roll call was taken and a quorum was met with 22 members and 72.78 % of the weighted vote of the total membership in attendance. (At 6:02 p.m., the member from Erving arrived, bringing the weighted vote up to 82.36 %.)

2. Nominating Committee Report and Vote	Chair Michele Giarusso
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With Bill Martin’s retirement, the Council has a vacancy on the Executive Committee: one of the two Council-appointed seats. A Nominating Committee made up of the Council chair, Bill Perlman, and John O’Rourke formed to recommend to the Council a replacement for that vacancy. The Committee recommends appointing Mayor Roxann Wedegartner. Since Greenfield transitioned to a mayoral form of government, the Council has appointed the Mayor to the Committee to ensure that the region’s county seat and largest population and employment center is an active participant in FRCOG activities.

Michele G. nominated Roxann Wedegartner to the Executive Committee. John O. seconded the nomination. There were no nominations from the floor. Trevor M. moved the slate. Bill P. seconded the motion. The motion to appoint the Mayor to the Executive Committee passed with all in favor.

3. Adopt 10/17/19 minutes and Council Updates	Chair Michele Giarusso
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John O. moved to adopt the minutes of the October 17, 2019 meeting. Wayne H. seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor.

Chair Michele Giarusso welcomed FRCOG Council newcomers:

- **Roxann Wedegartner**, Mayor of the City of Greenfield, and **Robert Root**, Hawley selectman.

4. Executive Committee Update Member	Jay DiPucchio, Committee
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In its meetings since July, the FRCOG Executive Committee:

- Learned that after 5 years of work with FRCOG Planners, seven Franklin County towns voted to participate in the activities of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP). The Executive Committee commended the Planning department for its hard work, a sentiment echoed by the MA Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary and the USDA Forest Service Chief in a November ceremony in Charlemont. These state and federal officials signed shared stewardship agreements to provide technical support on natural-resource-based tourism and forest management research and plans.
- Learned of the Census Bureau’s plan to add “noise” to the census data before releasing it in an effort to obscure the identity of respondents. This distortion system can dramatically change the report of demographics, such as population numbers in rural areas, thereby severely affecting state funding shares. On average, rural district demographics can be skewed by + or - 10% with this noise, but some will result in changes as high as + or -25%. The Executive Committee agreed that staff should work with statewide counterparts to learn more and to draft letters of concern to the legislative delegation and the Census Bureau.
- Held public hearings for petitions to discontinue Court Square and Woodard Road in Greenfield. Without public objection, the committee discontinued and transferred both county roads to the City of Greenfield. Following the road actions, the committee bid Greenfield Mayor William Martin *adieu*, and thanked him for many years of service.
- Discussed how to handle the inclusion of information on the demographics of FRCOG Council and staff members required to complete grants offered by the MA Department of Public Health

Marguerite W. noted that she voted in Charlemont to support the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership, allowing that she was pleased that the program will address drought in the forest and work to reinvigorate them.

5. Executive Director Update	Linda Dunlavy
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Linda highlighted FRCOG’s recent work (see *Council Updates* for details), announced upcoming deadlines involving municipalities:

Transportation and Climate Initiative supports states working together to improve transportation, develop the clean-energy economy, and reduce greenhouse gases. One initiative involves decreasing carbon emissions, 40% of which are transportation-related. The group is investigating a “cap and invest” program that generates revenue by capping emissions and investing the revenue in emission reducing efforts, such as use of clean-energy vehicles. A gas tax likely will be collected, so FRCOG is involved to be sure the program addresses rural needs. Look for notice of a March 5 meeting.

The CEDS Committee is creating the 5-years economic development strategy and is in the project solicitation phase now. Submit by March 6.

District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) funding applications were received from all but two towns. FRCOG realizes the timeframe is extremely tight. Staff are given very little time to know what project priorities and grant restrictions will be, which ultimately leaves towns hustling as well.

Staff and the **Franklin County Emergency Communication System (FCECS)** Oversight Committee have plans to develop a grant program for funding the basic costs for town radios. FRCOG will work with all municipalities to create order forms, standardizing the process of ordering radios and equipment at a FRCOG vendor show. Staff had hoped the show could happen before town FY21 budget development, but the state is tweaking and clarifying the terms of the agreements. A reminder that the towns are responsible for the cost of radio upgrades and accessories.

US 2020 Census. Jessica Atwood explained that FRCOG’s Census efforts include promotion and tips on how to participate, and working with a specialist to designate questionnaire centers with broadband accessibility. A training is planned for 2/10 at 9:00 a.m. Promotional materials available. (See handout.)

The **Milepost Renumbering Project** will begin in Franklin County at the Vermont line, moving south and then across Route 2. (See handout)

6. Franklin Regional Planning Board Update	James Basford, FRPB appointee
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Jim reported that the FRPB took in a presentation on solid waste disposal recycling and another on the impacts of large-scale solar development and the challenges to updating solar bylaws.

7. Personnel Committee	Bill Perlman, Committee Chair
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Bill reported that the committee met jointly with the Finance Committee to recommend a 2.5% salary increase for all staff. The FRCOG is falling behind other, similar agencies and needs to be able to retain and attract new staff. The Personnel Committee also supports the FRCOG’s efforts at pursuing an organizational assessment as it has not made changes to that structure in 20 years, and because many senior staffers will retire in the next 3-5 years. Bill reported that the Committee feels now is the best time to take a critical look at the structure of agency to determine if changes can enhance efficiency or program administration.

Second Reading: Out-Of-State Travel Policy

The committee submitted the proposed out-of-state travel section of the *FRCOG Personnel Policy* for a second read. The section addresses preferred times of travel, a cap to number of work hours in a day, and compensated time standards for staff, clarifying that expenses in excess of the standard must be approved in advance. Since the Council’s first read, minor changes were made. He asked if the Council could accept the document as a second read.

Hearing no objection from Councilors, **Bill P. moved to accept the changes to the FRCOG Personnel Policy, as written. Ellen M. seconded the motion, which carried with all in favor.**

8. Finance Committee Update	Lynn Sibley, Committee Chair
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Lynn reported that the Finance Committee voted January 9 to recommend to the Council the FY21 budget distributed in the packet. Claire McGinnis, FRCOG Finance Director, presented the budget, explaining that the FRCOG Council is the appropriating body and that the Finance Committee can amend it mid-year.

FY21 Budget Discussion

Regarding the proposed Miscellaneous & Contingency (M&C) budget and salary comparison survey

Claire explained that M&C is a budget section for unique annual expenses, such as the external audit, and other special projects. Two such projects planned for FY20 are to modernize the FRCOG website and to complete a succession or organization planning project. In FY21, staff is requesting \$35,000 to create a Salary and Recruitment reserve for use in several possible ways:

- After completing a salary comparison of similar organizations in Massachusetts, the FRCOG may need to boost salaries to stay competitive. This data should be available late FY20 or early FY21.
- With knowledge of retirement plans, a portion of this line may be used to pay for recruitment services in the search to replace senior staff. These searches can be expensive. If not used in FY21, the proposed plan is to carry forward unused funds as a reserve account.
- Following retirement and search for new management, some funds may be needed to attract the right staff and to complete salary negotiations. If not used in FY21, setting this up as a reserve would allow the FRCOG to spend it in the year it is needed, down the road

Councilors and staff discussed the storm of approaching retirements throughout municipalities across the county. Within FRCOG, there are several senior staff members with 20+ years at FRCOG approaching retirement age. Staff explained that salary grades (with ranges) are assigned based on supervision given and received, responsibilities of the position, and so on, which provide a basis for comparison to other organizations. Staff plan to observe retirements from comparable positions across the Commonwealth and note replacement wages as part of their information gathering. Several Councilors requested that staff put together a salary schedule so they can understand discrepancies between agencies and be armed with numbers.

Council members disagreed as to whether it was important to include salary figures from outside of the region when conducting the survey, particularly from the more urban areas. Several felt to do so could make FRCOG salaries too costly for towns. Others expressed that competitive salaries are needed to attract highly skilled, experienced people, and voiced that the quality of staff and their project outcomes are factors town officials weigh when deciding whether to use FRCOG services. Staff said the goal is to pay the right amount for the job, and so will include statewide organizations in the survey. Further discussion included the observation that FRCOG assessments to towns have remained low for 20 years. (Between FY20 and FY21 Regional and Statutory, assessments will increase by 1.1 %.)

Regarding the proposed 2.5% wage increase for all FRCOG employees

Several Councilors noted that, in the past, FRCOG has budgeted an increase for employees, while some municipalities did not to offer employee raises. Many Councilors expressed comfort with the wage increases presented in the FY21 budget, particularly given FRCOG's expertise in grant acquisition and project oversight, among other returns realized by towns when salaries are competitive.

Regarding pooled expenses and Other Post Employee Benefits (OPEB)

Councilors asked how much of the budget is allocated for OPEB (answer: projected FY21 costs of retiree insurance, plus 5% of payroll to contribute to a trust for future liabilities) and how that amount is determined. Linda explained that if the Massachusetts State Retirement System (MSRS) ever begins to assess normal costs, as they have threatened to do with legislation, FRCOG will be charged roughly 5% of Payroll. Each year the legislation doesn't pass and they don't charge those costs, FRCOG puts the

funds into an OPEB trust. In FY21 year, FRCOG will support seven retirees, while also contributing to the fund, staff noted.

Questions and Answers Regarding the Municipal Services Budgets

Collective Purchasing *Q. Does it take two full-time staff to run the programs? Can't savings be realized with economy of labor?* The program doubled in size when absorbing the Hampshire Council of Governments' highway services program, which was a good fit with FRCOG's. Expanded capacity was also needed to continue offering specialized procurement, which is in high demand. Staff will examine the budget very carefully following the first year of expansion. So far, the Hampshire County response is good, and staff don't anticipate having to raise fees for FC towns in FY21.

The Cooperative Public Health Service *Q. The wage number is doubling. What's driving that increase?* CPHS added three new full-service towns and expanded services to another. An additional staff member and increased hours were necessary to meet municipal need. User fees increased by 2.0% to participating towns.

Town Accounting Program *Q. People in our town are concerned with delivery of service. What's the plan?* The budget has increased with the hope that the current staffing level can offer the programming towns want and need. The program was understaffed for much of FY19. To attract and retain quality accountants, FRCOG is offering higher salaries. Staff hope to meet regularly with towns to keep track of needs. Municipal feedback regarding the program was heard at a recent stakeholder meeting and improving services is the goal.

Lynn S. made a motion to approve the Franklin Regional Council of Governments FY21 Budget proposal as presented in the packet, totaling \$2,315,014 in the General Fund and \$1,796,072 in Municipal Service programs for a total budget of \$4,111,086. Ellen seconded the motion, which passed with 22 Councilors (79.81 %) in favor and 1 Councilor (2.56%) opposed.

9. Special Presentation

Ryan Clary & Megan Rhodes, FRCOG Planning

- *FRCOG GIS mapping projects for municipal use*

Megan and Ryan presented a slideshow on new technologies available to towns using GIS mapping code. In one such use, FRCOG staff mapped every culvert and draining structure in towns (sometimes 500 or more). Staff go out to the culverts, take photos, observe, and using a standardized assessment tool, rate the relative functionality and condition of the site. When completed, each map includes an assessed visual story of every culvert. This is useful to towns to plan for financing replacement of the structures and to respond to flooding, when structures might break and cause washouts.

Although the project is time-consuming (will take 6-7 years to map the entire county with two staff), it can be done at no cost to the town if they apply for DLTA and/or 3-C funding. FRCOG staff can print maps for town DPWs with insets of the condition reports or the maps can be accessed online, with photos just a click away. Towns can submit hardcopies of changes to FRCOG for updating. This methodology/is excellent for FEMA reporting online, if needed. Bridges also can be assessed.

FRCOG staff are learning about another technology — LIDAR (light detection and ranging) — which uses light in the form of pulsed laser to detect ranging. Aerial imagery placed over data allows people to see 3-D elevation depiction of a property.

10. Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance

Ellen M. announced that the Commonwealth will end the practice of rounding vehicle values to the nearest \$100 when calculating excise taxes. Townspeople will notice the change.

In other tax news, Greg S. cautioned officials about the struggle towns might have attempting to collect taxes from industrial solar developers. Gill assessors await the outcome of a MA Appellate Tax Board hearing, at which the developer contests assessed real and personal property taxes.

Bill P. moved adjournment. Lynn S. seconded. The meeting adjourned at 7 p.m. with all in favor.

Documents Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft minutes of the October 17, 2019 meeting
- January 2020 FRCOG Programmatic Updates
- Out of State Travel Policy — Second Reading of Proposed Revision to the FRCOG Personnel Policy
- FY21 FRCOG Budget
- Draft Program Assessments to Municipalities
- 2020 Census Promotion and Franklin County, MA
- Milepost-based Exit Renumbering

Minutes taken by Rebekah Boyd.