



# Franklin Regional Council of Governments

## Executive Committee — *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, March 12, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.
Location:	FRCOG, 12 Olive Street, Greenfield MA, First Floor, Allen Room
Facilitator:	Jay DiPucchio, Chair

### Representatives Present:

- Jay DiPucchio, Regionally Elected
- Bill Perlman, Regionally Elected
- Jim Basford, FRPB Appointee

### Staff Members Present:

- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director
- Claire McGinnis, Finance Director
- Bob Dean, Director of Regional Services
- Rachel Stoler, Partnership for Youth

### 1. Review and adopt 1.9.20 Executive Committee Minutes

Jay D. convened the meeting at 5:00 p.m. **Bill P moved adoption of the minutes of the 1.9.20 meeting as presented. Jim seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor.**

### 2. Welcome Mayor; discuss roles and responsibilities

Mayor Roxann Wedegartner sent regrets, as this meeting conflicted with Greenfield’s Public Safety Building Committee meeting.

### 3. 2019 Audit

Claire presented an overview of the 2019 audit. There were no findings or management letter issues by Melanson-Heath, FRCOG’S auditors. The Executive Committee members thanked Claire and the Finance Department for their careful oversight of the COG’s finances.

### 5. Advocacy - Census Differential Privacy update, NEPA changes letter

#### Census

Linda offered an overview of the status of the US Census. Members discussed the effect of COVID-19 on census efforts and whether door-to-door canvassing of households could be carried out. This is still an unknown. The Census Bureau has acknowledged that their Differential Privacy formula is resulting in too much skewing of the raw data in some instances. From Census experts, the Bureau still intends to use the method but is more open to improvements to the formula. More on that as it is learned.

#### National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The Trump administration has recommended major changes to NEPA that significantly reduce the rigor of the requirements. Comments regarding the changes were due before this meeting. Jay authorized a letter expressing FRCOG’s concerns that Linda forgot to bring to the meeting to share with the Committee but will send a copy in advance of the April meeting.

## **COVID-19 Open Meeting Law (OML)**

Members discussed quorum requirements for remote participation. Most towns are planning to delay town meetings until as late as possible. The question for everyone is how to get work done when officials must meet, if no one wants to be in the room. Members learned that the governor could change remote participation requirements using his emergency powers. They discussed possibly canceling the April Council meeting if no votes are required. All felt it would be helpful to have definitive guidelines from the state and federal governments. Members asked staff to send a letter requesting emergency relaxation of OML remote participation quorum requirements to reduce the need to have potentially infectious people meeting in person.

### **6. FRCOG Wellness Committee**

Rachel presented information about the Wellness Committee (*see handout*), organized at the FRCOG more than 10 years ago. She offered a range of examples of the kinds of healthful activities and equipment made available for staff explaining that the workplace wellness committee receives many grants from the Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust (HCGIT) --- about \$1K per year. She added that the committee would be delighted to have more staff involved on a regular basis.

### **7. Business not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance**

#### **COVID-19 Response Plan (*See handout*)**

Linda reported that the governor issued a statewide emergency declaration this week. Some guidance was offered, but FRCOG will need to figure out the best operational plan, one wherein social distancing is being encouraged and unnecessary meetings canceled, postponed, or held virtually. Linda feels the FRCOG should prepare for closure and remote work, and gave an overview of her handout. Things seem to be changing on an hourly basis, she said. Staff already are engaged in asking for extensions to grant deadlines.

Department Heads have been discussing a possible work-at-home plan. If the organization is not required to close, what is the responsible thing to do? Some other Regional Planning Agencies are telling staff to work from home. Linda sent out a survey earlier this week and determined that, if required to work at home, staff are concerned about using personal phones to make work calls and about their access to office equipment and supplies. We have some staff who will have difficulty working at home for various reasons including lack of access to high-speed internet. Others will have to stay-at-home with kids if schools are closed.

Members considered and discussed the following:

- Staff using a unique phone number to address the concerns of giving out personal phone numbers for work business.
- The office layout, which is conducive to social distancing.
- Creating a staggered schedule of in-office and at-home work.
- A possible pool of funds staff can dip into when a full work schedule is hard to manage or complete either because job responsibilities can't be done from home or because the home situation is challenging. This could be similar to hazardous weather time during the winter, allowing employees to be frank with grantors about actual working time. Once that time is exhausted, staff must use personal benefit time.

Staff requested that the Executive Committee approve of a pool of COVID-19 time (details in the handout). Members wondered if work at home should be made voluntary or mandatory; if the fact that not everyone does a good job working at home could make it more challenging for supervisors to ensure work is getting done; and if a staggered schedule would allow for staff to be in the office at the same time and teamwork to be scheduled.

Jay felt favorably about the COVID-19 FRCOG plan and the creation of a pooled expense line as outlined by Linda. Jim offered that the federal administration is considering legislation that may make legal changes to help the can't-work-from-home staff. Members agreed that if it came to a need for a full Council vote, asking for additional funding will be hard, as towns and private industry likely won't have extra funds available to them. Members agreed this is an opportunity for the FRCOG to lead by example.

**Bill P. made a motion to authorize the creation of a COVID-19 pool, not to exceed \$30,000 without coming back for an additional discussion. Jim seconded the motion.** Claire outlined some options for additional funding if necessary. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Members discussed travel restrictions. Unnecessary travel is banned at FRCOG.

**Bill P. moved to adjourn the meeting. Jim B. seconded. Meeting adjourned at 5:57 p.m.**

**Documents Distributed:**

- Agenda
- Draft minutes from 1-9-20 minutes
- COVID-19 FRCOG Response
- Meetings Scheduled at the FRCOG (as of March 11, 2020)
- The Benefits of Workplace Wellness at the FRCOG, a sampling of activities Wellness equipment and locations with relevant web links