



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

COUNCIL — *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, July 16, 2020/ 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Location:	Open meeting accessed remotely on Zoom by video, or by telephone
Facilitator:	Michele Giarusso, Outgoing Chair; Trevor McDaniel, Elected Chair

COUNCILOR ATTENDEES:

Jennifer Morse, Ashfield; **Stanley Garland**, Bernardston (after roll call); **Kevin Fox**, Colrain; **Trevor McDaniel**, Deerfield; **William Bembury**, Erving; **Greg Snedeker**, Gill; **Roxann Wedegartner**, Greenfield; **Patricia Duffy**, Leverett; **Michele Giarusso**, Leyden; **Steve Ellis**, Montague (after roll call) ; **Wayne Hachey**, New Salem; **Jane Peirce**, Orange, **Janice Boudreau**, Rowe; **Ellen McKay**, Shutesbury; **Lynn Sibley**, Whately; **Jay DiPucchio**, Regionally Elected; **Jim Basford**, FRPB.

REGRETS: Hussein Hamdan, Hawley; Brian DeVriese, Heath; **Robert Manners**, Shelburne; **Larry Pruyn**, Warwick **ABSENT:** **Sarah Reynolds**, Charlemont; **Alice Houghtaling**, Monroe; **Alexander Meisner**, Northfield; **Tom Fydenkevez**, Sunderland; **Bill Perlman**, Regionally Elected.

FRCOG STAFF: **Linda Dunlavy**, Executive Director; **Claire McGinnis**, Finance Director; **Rebekah Boyd**, Admin Services Coordinator; **Tracy Rogers**, Emergency Prep Program Manager; **Phoebe Walker**, Director of Community Services; **Lisa White**; Public Health Nurse; **Lisa Danek Burke**, Regional Health Agent. **VISITORS:** **Omar Meija**, Safe Routes to Schools.

1. Call to order and 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 15 members and 64.461% of the weighted vote of the total membership, in attendance. Two members arrived after roll call, bringing the number up to 17 members present and 77.351%.

2. Reorganization	Chair Michele Giarusso
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Michelle explained that every July, the Council holds its annual reorganization meeting, voting to elect officers for this body and to appoint members to the Executive Committee. The Nominating Committee meets to discuss and recommend members for the offices.

Nominating Committee Report

New this year is the Council’s responsibility to appoint Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) members. The TPO is responsible for overseeing transportation planning activities at the FRCOG, and is comprised of state, regional, and local representation. Local representation includes members representing the western, central, and eastern regions of the county. As Franklin County’s largest municipality, Greenfield holds its own voting seat.

A Nominating Committee made up of Michele (outgoing chair), and the Council’s two regionally elected members, Jay DiPucchio and Bill Perlman, met Monday afternoon to discuss possible nominations. The committee nominated the following slate of officers:

Council Chair – Trevor McDaniel, of Deerfield
Council Vice Chair – Greg Snedeker, of Gill
Secretary/Clerk – Kevin Fox, of Colrain
Council Appointment to Executive Committee – Greenfield Mayor Roxann Wedegartner
Council Appointment to Executive Committee – Kevin Fox, Colrain

West County TPO Appointment – Heather Butler, of Buckland
Central County TPO Appointment – Steve Ellis, of Montague
East County TPO Appointment – Gabe Voelker, of Orange

With no nominations made from the floor, Ellen moved to close the nominations, seconded by Trevor. Michele moved to cast one appointing ballot with the slate of officers, seconded by Jay. The motion passed with all in favor.

Michele thanked the FRCOG and Council members for the opportunity to serve for two years as chair, further expressing her gratitude that the region has a body that serves as a voice for regional services.

3. Adopt 5/21/20 minutes	Elected Chair, Trevor McDaniel
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Trevor, thanked the committee for the appointment, and thanked Michele for her work. **Ellen M. moved to adopt the minutes of the May 21, 2020 meeting. Steve E. seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor.**

4. Council Update	Trevor McDaniel
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Trevor announced the dates of all FY21 Council meetings will be held in Zoom while the Olver Transit Center is closed (or until further notice): October 15, 2020; January 28, 2021; (Snow Date, February 4); and April 15, 2021. New council members will be welcomed at the October meeting when towns have completed appointments. A remote orientation session outlining the responsibilities of the Council and reviewing our operations and finances will be planned. All members are welcome to attend the session.

5. Executive Committee Update	Jay DiPucchio
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In its meetings since January, Jay reported that the FRCOG Executive Committee:

- Convened twice as the Economic Development District Governing Board to review the *Draft* 2020 Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan and then to adopt the final Plan. The new five-year CEDS Plan serves as a roadmap for the FRCOG and strategic partners to advance policies, programs, and projects that support economic opportunity for all and contribute to the wellbeing of Franklin County communities.
- The committee discussed the current and continuing role of the FRCOG during and following the Franklin County Emergency Communication System's (FCECS) transfer to the Commonwealth's interoperable radio system.
- Authorized a letter expressing concerns regarding Trump administration changes to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that significantly reduced the rigor of requirements.
- Met several times jointly with the Finance Committee to deliberate many COVID-related issues, including impacts to FRCOG programs, projects, and services; staffing challenges; regional

collective purchase of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for municipalities, businesses, and non-profit agencies; and convening an emergency Council meeting to discuss funding for the PPE initiative. During these joint meetings, the committees also approved the establishment of a COVID-19 pool of benefit time for staff struggling to meet the demands of the job while working remotely.

6. Executive Director Update

Linda Dunlavy

Linda summarized the latest of FRCOG initiatives and programmatic updates (*See Council Updates*).

Organizational Assessment Study of FRCOG Community Paradigm Associates will conduct the FRCOG's Organizational Assessment to recommend a leadership and staffing structure that matches the FRCOG's evolution and structure, and prepares for upcoming retirements of long-time staff. The team is examining FRCOG documents, including those that review fiscal and programmatic practices and initiatives, the organizational chart, the wage and salary schedule and categorization process, and job descriptions. A staff survey and interviews with the Executive Committee, Town Administrators, and Council members are planned. If you would like to be interviewed, please let Linda know. Staff hopes the study will be completed by Dec 31.

Municipal Advocacy Cooperative Public Health Service's (CPHS) program director, Phoebe Walker, explained that during the pandemic it has become clear that the ability of local health boards and health departments to respond is hampered by the state's fractured, underfunded system. She encouraged officials to advocate for and accelerated state investment in local public health, referencing a link in the *Programmatic Updates* to do so.

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness & Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plans Staff spent much of the spring assessing if we can meet grant requirements for Vulnerability Preparedness & Hazard Mitigation Plans in the time of COVID and have advocated for extensions for both. Both require intensive public policy and involvement, that we felt we needed extension to have meaningful public engagement. Extensions were granted and municipalities should be hearing from planning staff soon.

2020 Census Jessica Atwood reported that despite delays, 2020 Census is still underway with 68% of Franklin County households self-responding – 4 points higher than entire state, and 6% higher than the nation. Top responding towns include Deerfield 78%; Leyden 76%; Bernardston 75%; Leverett and New Salem 74%.

Collective Purchasing FRCOG successfully merged our Collective Highway Bid Program with Hampshire County, expanding from 25 towns to 51. The Collective Fuel Bid program also grew from 20 towns to 33 towns this year, helping to lock in great fuel pricing. Purchasing staff are to be applauded for this expansion.

Water & Sewer Issues The region has observed a scarcity of water and sewer certified operators. Challenging to work on with DEP, as the agency wants to assist, but also is responsible for making sure systems are checked and cared for properly. With DEP and UMASS, FRCOG has expanded opportunities for training and offered scholarships for those willing to take the program, as well as tutoring for testing, in order to expand capacity of water and sewer operators. A result of a UMASS survey is knowing where sharing operators among two water districts in the county might be possible.

Emergency Communication System Migration to State The state has, thus far, expanded the number of channels to solve a previous capacity problem in Franklin County; created and compared maps of existing coverage and presumed coverage; and is prepared to give FRCOG a grant to buy radios for every municipality, (with towns responsible for cost of upgrades.) The pandemic delayed progress, compressing much of the work into FY21. Once coverage maps are fixed, the radio grant is awarded, and Memorandums of Agreement are negotiated, FRCOG will host a CoMIRS migration forum.

Advancing Racial Justice With the help of the Communities That Care Coalition’s Racial Justice Workgroup and the support of school partners, FRCOG wrote and received a 5-year grant for Advancing Racial Justice in Schools, and played a supporting role in Welcoming and Belonging Franklin County receiving a 5-year grant for helping workplaces become more welcoming to people of color.

Transportation MassDOT has launched the Shared Streets and Spaces Program to provide cities and towns with funding to improve sidewalks, curbs, streets, on-street parking spaces, and so on, in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. Every city and town is encouraged to apply. The Valley Flyer is suspended, and the marketing campaign, postponed. Amtrak continues to operate reduced service, with ridership down nationally by 95%. Amtrak will increase service as consumer confidence increases. FRCOG hopes to launch the campaign in April.

Steve Ellis commented that he’d like to remain engaged and apprised of FRCOG activities aimed at advancing racial justice.

7. Planning Board Update

Jim Basford

Jim reported that at its last meeting, the Planning Board endorsed the regional, 5-year, Community Economic Development Plan. Next up, the board plans to explore Tiny Homes zoning so there might be more affordable housing available in the area, and zoning laws related to solar facilities.

8. Finance Committee Update

Lynn Sibley

Lynn reported that the Finance Committee has been analyzing FRCOG’s FY20 end-of-year status, particularly the following:

- The Accounting and Purchasing Programs have overspent, as expected. The committee will rectify these deficits next week.
- Cooperative Inspections is ending the year strongly, with permit revenues for large, future (FY21, FY22) projects arriving at the end of FY20.
- FY21 Regional assessment invoices have been distributed to towns
- FY20 ended with a \$200,000+ general fund surplus, in part due to additional unexpected grants and the indirect rate generated from them. Once the year is officially closed, the finance committee will discuss how to handle the surplus.

Trevor asked if towns could get accounting on money that came from the state for COVID and health programs, as some towns got their money directly, some went to FRCOG.

9. FRCOG COVID Response

Linda expressed pride in FRCOG’s working response to the pandemic and with how all employees reflexively changed course, where needed.

Economic Impact and Recovery Jessica Atwood presented a slide show examining data related to the economic impact of COVID-19 to the region, as well as plans for recovery (*see slideshow*). The presentation included a demographic and economic overview of the area before COVID, and then an account of monthly unemployment rates (March 2.9%, April 14.2%), labor force number decreases, unemployment claims, and possible funding sources available for recovery.

PPE Purchasing Initiative Tracy Rogers reported that to assist with reopening, FRCOG spent \$50,000 in two rounds of PPE for 24 farms, 16 nonprofits; 41 businesses, all five school districts, 2 private schools, and 14 municipalities, assisting more than 100 entities. The team decided not to do round three as FRCOG has not been able to obtain PPE any cheaper or any faster than PPE the entities could purchase themselves. The team created a technical assistance document for anyone who wants to order going forward, which is up on the website for anyone interested. If PPE again become scarce, FRCOG may revisit the program if to do so will make a difference in the community.

FC COVID-19 cases and contact tracing Lisa White and Phoebe Walker presented a slideshow and discussed the CPHS approach to the initial consultation of people first identified with COVID-19 in the region. As of July 15, the CPHS nurses had investigated 194 cases of COVID-19. Among them, 64 were confirmed positives, with 115 close contacts. Sixty-one (61) of the 64 patients recovered (symptom-free after 10 days of isolation, no fever for 72 hours, and 72 hours without medication). The nursing team's work includes collecting data within the health district; interfacing with other districts and entities statewide; distributing funding from the state; COVID case follow up; surveillance reporting; contact tracing; and assisting those with 14-day quarantine orders, helping them with whatever is needed. The CPHS team did not cover complex cases, such as those in congregate settings, hospitals, or great clusters, Lisa said, but did collaborate with health care workers who did.

Health inspections and business reopening assistance Although it at first seemed unlikely that residents would need perc tests and title-five inspections during the pandemic, Health Agent Lisa Danek Burke has remained quite busy. Likewise, Agent Randy Crochier has had to hit the ground running, performing inspections and helping towns and businesses with reopening, and carrying out responsibilities related to enforcement of the state's mask-wearing and building capacity directives in CPHS district towns.

Council members and staff discussed the many unanswered questions regarding safe openings of communities, businesses, and soon enough, schools. Phoebe remarked that she was meeting three times a week with the state Department of Public Health leadership and is happy to bring local concerns to them. Bill Bembury expressed his frustration with the way COVID data is not going to the CDC, but directly to the White House instead. He wants to be sure our county data doesn't get lost at the state level. Phoebe noted that our data is on the state website, which she doesn't believe can be confiscated.

Jane Pierce asked what level of support towns not in the district can expect from FRCOG. Phoebe responded that FRCOG is sharing resources and has provided funding to Orange, among other towns, to support various response and recovery initiatives. She said she was open to hearing about towns' other needs.

Phoebe described current COVID-19 testing opportunities in the region. Trevor M. remarked that testing is very costly and asked how we can bolster support from the state, especially when schools

reopen. Phoebe said towns should be in touch with legislators and the Baker administration, asking, about testing plans, surge capacity, the readiness of private sector labs, and so on.

10. Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance

Linda Dunlavy

No unanticipated business. Wayne Hachey thanked Michelle Giarusso for her service to the Council.

Michelle made a motion to adjourn, Jay seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 6:58 PM.

Documents Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft minutes of the May 21, 2020 meeting
- July 2020 FRCOG Programmatic Updates
- COVID-19 Economic Impacts & Recovery for Franklin County slideshow
- Cooperative Public Health District COVID Response slideshow

Minutes taken by Rebekah Boyd.