



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Executive Committee —*MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, March 11, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.
Location:	Remote meeting using videoconferencing technology
Facilitator:	Jay DiPucchio, Chair

Executive Committee Representatives Present:

- Jay DiPucchio, Regionally Elected
- Jim Basford, FRPB Appointee
- Kevin Fox, Colrain Representative
- Bill Perlman, Regionally Elected

Staff Members and Guests Present:

- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director
- Claire McGinnis, Finance Director
- Rebekah Boyd, Admin Services Coordinator

1. Review and adopt 1.14.21 Executive Committee meeting minutes

Jay D. convened the meeting at 5:00 p.m. **Bill P. moved adoption of the 1.14.21 minutes as presented. Jim B. seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor.**

2. Vaccine clinics update

Linda reported on the success of vaccination clinics recently provided by the FRCOG and the Regional Boards of Health, and listed the locations and timing of clinics to be offered throughout the month of March. FRCOG is working collaboratively with Greenfield, Deerfield, Buckland, Bernardston, Montague, and Orange. The biggest challenges to serving the county include insufficient vaccine allotments and the requirement that FRCOG open the clinic to all Massachusetts residents on the state website, where people from across the commonwealth can select up to 75% of the slots, with only 25% allowed to be reserved for county residents. Staff outreach to citizens announcing the times when clinics will go live on the state site have helped FRCOG serve county citizens. Clinics, staffed by local volunteers and FRCOG’s Public Health and Emergency Prep employees, ran efficiently, and were well-received by the public, despite hassles inherent in the state’s scheduling system, and a few minor glitches along the way.

The Commonwealth alerted FRCOG that staff should plan for the following number of vaccine doses, to be split with Greenfield (and including second doses for folks who have received their first shot already):

- March 15 – 2100 dose
- March 22 – 2100 doses; all Moderna, second shots
- March 29 – 2800 doses
- April 5 – No word on amount yet, but likely will be the Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

Because medical insurance information is collected for each insured person vaccinated, Claire believes FRCOG might be reimbursed for COVID-19 clinics gradually through the already established, qualified billing service used for our annual Flu clinics. Applying for FEMA reimbursement would then be the secondary method for cost recovery. Several program managers and department heads have been staffing the clinics, thus incurring a significant cost, Linda told the committee. Jay asked that staff keep the chair of the Finance Committee informed of the accruing costs.

In another pandemic recovery matter, FRCOG's Washington lobbyist relayed to Linda that the county will receive upwards of 13 million in funding from the COVID Relief bill, which passed into law by Congress this week. Preliminary wording indicates the funding must be used for COVID-related expenses, but includes categories such as Broadband and water costs, among others, which have not typically been in emergency funding grant language. Details about distribution to municipalities and the county are still unclear.

3. Commonwealth of MA Interoperable Radio System (CoMIRS) update

The contract between the state's Executive Office of Technology and Security (EOTTS) and FRCOG has arrived. The contract contains the agreed-upon number of radios to be distributed to public safety facilities across the county. Most towns completed their radio orders by the deadline. Last year EOTTS wanted all radios in the hands of the responder units before June 30, but the agency has since come to realize this would be too challenging for all municipalities, and has dropped that criterion from the contract. Bill reported that the Oversight Committee is working to train responders on basic use of these complex radios.

4. Discussion of staff returning to the office

Staff are wrestling with expectations regarding the employees' return to the office once the emergency declaration is lifted and many are vaccinated. Governor Baker's Reopening Guidelines currently allow 50% of FRCOG's March 2020 population to work together in the office, but a considerably smaller percentage have returned. Linda has not required staff to meet that 50% capacity mark, as state guidelines also urge remote work when possible. The concern is that some staff will resist returning to the Olver Center, even when it's deemed safe to do so. Some have reasoned that they can work at home just as efficiently, with no change to their productivity; that they have concerns about health risks; that remote work is better for the environment, and so on. Although the agency has not missed any deadlines or failed to meet expected deliverables, Linda does not agree that the productivity is unchanged. She also conveyed that relationships among staff and the community culture have suffered under pandemic separation, and asked for guidance from the committee for how to proceed.

Members discussed the above arguments for remote work; the optics of fewer staff in the office, especially to municipalities without high-speed internet; the changes in technology that make remote work possible, and whether using it is detrimental to FRCOG and office communities in the same predicament; the importance of human and community connection, particularly for newcomers to the agency; the inadequacy of comparing FRCOG operations to that of the towns; the opportunity for FRCOG to lead in this new age of remote work possibilities; and the vitality and professionalism lost when staff don't spend time together or congregate in space open to the public.

While the Council will ultimately make the decision regarding required work location, consensus among members was that administration should take a wait-and-see stance. Members directed Linda to learn what RPAs and other agencies across the state will require of vaccinated employees before setting workplace policy for FRCOG staff.

5. Discussion of advocacy issues

Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) Letter

Committee members reviewed and agreed to support the draft RPAC letter to the Legislative Rural Caucus, in which RPAC outlined bills to be considered this year by Commonwealth lawmakers [see *letter*]. Linda reported that she, the RPAC chair, plans to edit the letter before sending. She will add to the bills listed for support, Senate Docket No. 1334, which seeks to keep Regional Planning agencies and Councils of Governments free from any annual assessment of normal cost or liability gap billing to the State Retirement Systems (free from billing outside the contributions of payroll deductions).

6. Business not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of meeting

Members asked about FRCOG website meeting postings, to be sure timing and access complied with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Bill P. moved committee adjournment. Jim B. seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:00 PM.

Documents Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft 1.14.21 Executive Committee minutes
- Senate Docket, No. 1334, Filed on 2/16/2021 by Anne M. Gobi: An act relative to regional planning agencies.
- Draft letter to the Legislative Rural Caucus from the Rural Policy Advisory Committee, dated March 9, 2021, regarding legislative priorities for the year.

Minutes taken by Rebekah Boyd.