



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

COUNCIL — *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, January 28, 2021/ 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Location:	Open meeting accessed remotely on Zoom by video, or by telephone
Facilitator:	Trevor McDaniel, Chair

COUNCILOR ATTENDEES:

Jennifer Morse, Ashfield; **Stanley Garland**, Bernardston; **Heather Butler**, Buckland; **Sarah Reynolds and Marguerite Willis** Charlemont; **Kevin Fox**, *Secretary/Clerk*, Colrain; **Philip Kantor**, Conway; **Trevor McDaniel**, *Chair*, Deerfield; **Bryan Smith**, Erving; **Greg Snedeker**, *Vice Chair*, Gill; **Roxann Wedegartner**, Greenfield; **Hussein Hamdan**, Hawley; **Brian DeVriese**, Heath; **Michele Giarusso**, Leyden (after roll-call); **Steve Ellis**, Montague; **Wayne Hachey**, New Salem; **Bee Jacque**, Northfield **Gabriele Voelker**, Orange (after roll-call); **Janice Boudreau**, Rowe; **Andrew Baker**, Shelburne; **Ellen McKay**, Shutesbury; **Tom Fydenkevez**, Sunderland; **Lynn Sibley**, Whately; **Jay DiPucchio**, Regionally Elected; **Bill Perlman**, Regionally Elected; **Jim Basford**, FRPB.

REGRETS: **Patricia Duffy**, Leverett

ABSENT: **Alice Houghtaling**, Monroe; **Larry Pruyne**, Warwick; **Michael Idione**, Wendell

STAFF: **Linda Dunlavy**, Executive Director; **Claire McGinnis**, Finance Director; **Rebekah Boyd**, Admin Services Coordinator; **Phoebe Walker**, Director of Community Services; **Tracy Rogers**, Emergency Prep Program Manager. **VISITORS:** Charlemont alternate, Sarah Reynolds, accompanied Councilor Willis.

1. Call to order and roll call

Chair Trevor McDaniel

The chair convened the meeting at 5:38 p.m. Roll call was taken and a quorum met with 23 members and 87.909 % of the weighted vote of the total membership in attendance. Two members arrived after roll call, bringing the number of attendees up to 25 members and 95.787% of total membership.

2. Adopt 10/15/20 minutes

Trevor McDaniel

Greg S. moved to adopt the minutes of the October 15, 2020 meeting. Ellen M. seconded the motion, which passed by roll call vote, with one abstention and all other members voting in favor.

3. Council Update

Trevor McDaniel

Meetings

Trevor reminded councilors that all FRCOG Council meetings will be held via Zoom until we can safely meet again in the Olver Transit Center. Upcoming meetings: **April 15, 2021** and **July 15, 2021** at 5:30 p.m. Mark your calendars.

FRCOG Price Is Right

On November 19th, new, and a few seasoned Council members played the *FRCOG Price is Right*, a game that provided a fun and informative way to learn about the FRCOG.

Elections Result

Congratulations to Jay DiPucchio, re-elected as the regional representative to the FRCOG Executive Committee in November's state election, with 30,802 votes throughout Franklin County.

4. Executive Committee Update

Jay DiPucchio

Jay reported that since the last Council meeting, the FRCOG Executive Committee:

- Held the first-ever remote public view and hearing to consider a petition from the Town of Buckland for relocation of the county layouts of Conway, Summer, and South Streets; and Conway Road. Buckland seeks state funding and assistance to rectify public safety and storm-water drainage issues along these roads, and to bring the route up to ADA compliance with newly constructed sidewalks and other improvements. The committee signed the order of layout and taking, approving the engineer's relocation plan, which will result in a single continuous route.
- Appointed three members to the Franklin/Hampshire Housing and Redevelopment Authority Board of Commissioners.
- Learned of the progress of the Franklin County migration to the Commonwealth's interoperable Radio system (CoMIRS). Was briefed on the quickly evolving plans for FRCOG's role in dispensing the COVID-19 vaccine; the planning department's involvement with FERC's relicensing of FirstLight hydroelectric facilities in Northfield and Montague; and the initiation of a FRCOG Organizational Assessment study.

5. Executive Director Update

Linda Dunlavy

Linda briefed the Council on recent FRCOG programmatic initiatives (*See Council Updates for details*), including the following:

DLTA — Surveys went to all towns so officials can choose traditional planning and regional projects they would like FRCOG to work on. Housing initiatives and COVID response are also being funded.

Organizational Assessment — The effort to have an outside consulting agency recommend a leadership structure is ongoing, but acting on preliminary recommendations is on the back burner while sorting out COVID vaccination logistics.

Economic Resiliency — Staff have surveyed businesses and organizations asking the how the region can be more resilient to economic shock. The result of the work will be an Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan. The Council would like to discuss economic resiliency next meeting.

Water/Wastewater Systems — A outcome of our recent Water/Sewer Event is funding to hire a consultant to study existing water/wastewater systems and areas identified as in need. They will then make recommendations to improve the operational efficiency and to prioritize investments.

Regional IT/Cybersecurity — FRCOG will engage a consultant to conduct a series of municipal leader workshops, with the goal of enhancing capacity for regional solutions to IT/cybersecurity challenges.

FERC Relicensing — First Light (FL) submitted an application to continue to operate their two hydropower facilities in Franklin County for 50 years, without upgrading for accessibility or recreation, or taking measures to combat streambank erosion. FRCOG staff is talking with towns to coordinate

projects and with MassDEP to determine most important conditions to be included in FL's water-quality certificate. The FY22 budget includes \$10,000 for consultant work on this project.

Rideshare Pilot – Senator Comerford has earmarked funding to explore thinking about providing transit services in a different way in Franklin County, such as using LIFT to transport clients to social service agencies and schools.

6. Planning Board Update

Jim Basford

Jim reported that the planning board has focused recently on the FERC relicensing referenced in the Executive Director's update.

7. Personnel Committee Update

Bill Perlman

Bill reported that at its late December joint meeting, the Personnel Committee (PC) recommended to the Finance Committee a 2.5% Competitive Market Increase (CMI) in salaries. Members felt it important to keep FRCOG competitive with other agencies state-and region-wide. The PC also recommended the proposed OPEB contributions, as budgeted, and that a public relations officer be added to the budget.

Marguerite W. asked why FRCOG is proposing a salary increase, and Phillip K. asked why the agency is hiring for a new position, both members referring to the current financial struggles of their towns.

Bill explained that hiring for new positions and offering a salary increase does not, in essence, come out of the pockets of the towns. Employees do not get merit pay, (the recommended 2.5% is the only cost of living increase), and FRCOG must compete with larger cities, and other regional planning agencies and councils of government to attract and retain the brightest and best experts to the county. He pointed out that the budget proposal includes a decrease in member town assessments because the FRCOG has other funding sources.

Phillip K. said he felt the FRCOG's budget should reflect some measure of belt-tightening during the pandemic, stating he felt the public relations position was luxury, not a necessity.

Members agreed to continue this discussion after the budget proposal presentation, when the 5.5% reduction to assessments will be detailed.

Note: The second reading and vote on the FRCOG Personnel Policy proposed "workplace location" language was passed over inadvertently.

8. Finance Committee Update – Budget Review and Vote

Chair, Lynn Sibley & Claire McGinnis

Lynn reported that the Finance Committee met in concert with both the Executive and Personnel Committees to discuss the budget proposal, and working with a preliminary figure of 1% increase to health insurance costs, all agreed upon the following:

- To decrease to regional services assessments to towns by \$30,000 (5.5%)
- A 2.5% Competitive Market Increase in salaries
- 5% of payroll budgeted as a contribution to the OPEB fund, which is projected to be funded by FY25

Claire walked the Council through a FY22 Budget Proposal slideshow and presentation, detailing the following contained in the budget:

- A reduction to member town assessments of \$30,000;
- An addition of a part-time, benefitted public relations or public information officer position
- Contribution to the Salary and Recruitment reserve
- A 2.5% salary increase for all employees
- Allocation of \$17,000 to the Emergency Communication System migration effort for staff oversight
- FRCOG ended FY20 with a surplus; currently has 1.1 million in the general fund
- FRCOG saw an employee increase of 3.6 FTEs in FY20 and the first half of FY21
- **Collective Purchasing** budget increased by 1.8%, with no assessment increase.
- **Cooperative Public Health Service (CPHS)** budget increased by 10%, resulting in a 20% increase to assessments to towns, which was CPHS Oversight Board approved.
- **Town Accounting** program budget is up 3.8%; 3.8% assessment increase
- **Cooperative Inspections** Program budget is up 1.2%, assessments are level
- **Emergency Communication System (FCECS)** end-of-life budget is down 2.8%; level assessed

Claire explained that member town assessments make up only 7% of organization-wide revenues. Administrative indirect makes up the largest percentage; 75% of total revenue in FY20. The funding of the public information position and website overhaul emerged as an area for improvement from the early draft of the Organizational Assessment Study.

Phillip K. asked about the reasoning behind the decision to include funding for a Public Relations Officer. Linda explained that the lack of such a role was correctly identified by the Organizational Assessment consultant group; for several years, staff have felt the need for someone to provide consistent messaging in print, on the website and social media, and across all programs at the FRCOG.

Marguerite W. mentioned that one issue is no common way to communicate, with many elderly folks not owning a computer and younger folks not reading newspapers. Trevor M. agreed that to communicate effectively, entities must do so on many platforms. Roxann W. described the success of Greenfield's decision to hire one person to create press and media releases, reaching across all platforms and to all cohorts. The position promotes the work of staff members and provides greater transparency, while referring calls for detailed information to program managers. Greg S. referred to the type of work as a communications aggregator, consolidating information into concise bites, and directing people to the proper spokesperson for the topic at hand. Hussein H. expressed his support for funding the position and Lynn S. described her experience of how challenging and inefficient it can be when multiple people do the work rather than one concise and consistent person. Andrew B. asked for a follow-up evaluation of the position, and asked that reporting back to Council become a general practice, when requested. Steve E. allowed that he disliked second-guessing the FRCOG's ability to determine its needs, but did express some uncertainty as to what the role would look like, suggesting a job description would have been helpful.

Regarding the CPHS budget, Trevor M. referred to the immense amount of work nurses are doing in the towns, noting that it is likely to increase as the vaccination plan rolls out. He called the 24/7 work heroic, and expressed his hope that the federal and state governments will allocate money to offset

the FRCOG costs. He said that while the increase in assessment for CPHS is large, it is not a lot when the outcome is considered. Now is the time to spend money on public nursing, he added.

Lynn S. moved to accept the FRCOG FY22 Budget Proposal in the amount of \$4,252,144, as presented. Michele G. seconded the motion.

Stan G. moved to amend the budget by decreasing the salary earmark from 2.5 % to 2.0 %. Marguerite W. seconded the amendment.

Hussain H. expressed his support for the amendment, saying 2% is a decent, generous reflection of pandemic times. Upon hearing that FRCOG staff members are not eligible for step scales or merit pay, Steve E. remarked that if Montague had a department that produced the volume and quality of work that cost the town the amount of FRCOG's member assessment, he would be quite pleased.

Philip Kantor asked what the savings would be if budgeted salary increase was adjusted from 2.5% to 2.0. Claire said the savings would be \$10,995, but added that there would also be a net loss of revenue because indirect revenues would subsequently decrease. Bill said that an increase in salaries actually benefits the FRCOG because there is an increase in indirect revenue. For every hour billed to grants, an indirect rate is also billed to the grant. Higher salaries produce more indirect revenue. Trevor remarked that to drop the salary increase would be cutting off the nose to spite the face. Stan said the bottom line for him was that all municipal services have gone up, and salary effects the costs of services. Linda reiterated that while some expense budgets have increased, only two programs are proposing an assessment increase – Accounting and CPHS. Four budgets are level assessed – Purchasing, FCCIP, REPC and FCECS. And the Regional Services Assessment is decreasing by 5.5%.

Council voted by roll call on the amendment to decrease budgeted staff raises by .5% (from 2.5% to 2.0%). Ashfield, **NO**; Bernardston, **YES**; Buckland, *left early*; Charlemont, **YES**; Colrain, **NO**; Conway, **YES**; Deerfield, **NO**; Erving, **NO**; Gill, *left early*; Greenfield, **NO**; Hawley, **YES**; Heath, **NO**; Leyden **NO**; Montague, **NO**; New Salem, **YES**; Northfield, **NO**; Orange, **YES**; Shelburne, **NO**; Shutesbury, **NO**; Sunderland, **NO**; Whately, **NO**; FRPB, **NO**. **With 74.79% of the total membership of the Council voting NO and 15.695% voting YES, the amendment did not carry.**

Gabriele V. moved to amend the budget proposal by making the part- time public relations officer fulltime. Ellen M. second the motion.

Members discussed the value of a fulltime position, and the possibility of waiting to change it to fulltime position using another revenue source at the April meeting. Gabriele V. said she finds the quality of applicants to be better if the position is full-time, and that deciding to go part-time to save such a small amount (\$28,000 more for fulltime) is penny wise, but pound foolish. Steve E. understood the logic but felt it might be best to send the question of full- or part-time back to the Personnel Committee, where they can conceptualize the position in a way that reflects the FRCOG's needs.

Council voted by roll call to amend the budget proposal by revising the public relations officer position from a half-time position with benefits to a full-time position with benefits: Ashfield, **NO**; Bernardston, **NO**; Buckland, *left early*; Charlemont, **NO**; Colrain, **NO**; Conway, **NO**; Deerfield, **NO**; Erving, **NO**; Gill, *left early*; Greenfield, **YES**; Hawley, **NO**; Heath, **NO**; Leyden **NO**; Montague, **NO**; New Salem, **NO**; Northfield, **NO**; Orange, **YES**; Shelburne, **NO**; Shutesbury, **YES**; Sunderland, **NO**; Whately,

NO; FRPB, NO. With 65.891% of the total membership of the Council voting NO and 27.118% voting YES, the amendment did not carry.

Phillip K. moved to amend the budget by removing the public relations officer position funding from the budget proposal completely, reducing the budget by \$49,000. Gabrielle V. seconded the motion.

Claire reiterated that to reduce that funding would not produce a savings and would not reduce assessments. She reminded members that FRCOG has faithfully kept assessment increases under 2.5% annually, and in the current proposal actually reduces the core cost to towns by \$30,000. To then take money away from the proposed funding for the public relations officer would double the impact of the reduction in general assessment. Staff were confident that they had revenue enough to support the budget, she said, which included that decrease in assessment, but this motion would change that. Lynn S. and Ellen M. added that the motion would not decrease the amount towns would pay in assessments. In response, several members discussed possible options: Postponing a budgetary vote to allow staff to rethink the budget in a “responsive” way; funding the position, but not hiring in FY22; including the funding but not deciding how to spend it until later; and canceling the plan to hire, and reducing the assessments by \$49,000.

Phillip K. and Gabriele V. withdrew the amendment to remove the public relations officer position from the budget proposal completely, reducing the budget by \$49,000.

With the motion to accept the FRCOG FY22 Budget Proposal in the amount of \$4,252,144, as presented, still on the table, Roxann W. called the question.

By roll-call, members cast their votes: Ashfield, **YES**; Bernardston, **NO**; Buckland, *left early*; Charlemont, **YES**; Colrain, **YES**; Conway, **NO**; Deerfield, **YES**; Erving, **YES**; Gill, *left early*; Greenfield, **YES**; Hawley, **ABSTAIN**; Heath, **YES**; Leyden **YES**; Montague, **YES**; New Salem, **YES**; Northfield, **YES**; Orange, **YES**; Shelburne, **YES**; Shutesbury, **YES**; Sunderland, **YES**; Whately, **YES**; FRPB, **YES**.

With 85.527% of the total membership of the Council voting YES and 5.427% voting NO, and with 1 abstention, the motion passed and the Council adopted the FY22 Budget.

9. Special Projects Presentation

Linda Dunlavy

County Vaccination Rollout

Staff presented a brief slideshow of preliminary, evolving plans for the collaborative vaccination rollout, discussed possible vaccine sites, answered questions about distribution and the pooling of vaccine supply, and heard about Greenfield’s success with its first responders’ clinic. Members expressed their eagerness to assist with the effort and their hope that vaccine will flood the region.

CoMIRS Equipment Grant & Migration

Because of the late hour and the complexity of the evening’s many previous discussions, the Chair and members decided to postpone this Emergency Communications System discussion.

10. Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance
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Linda Dunlavy

No unanticipated business was discussed.

Wayne H. moved to adjourn, Ellen M. seconded, and by voice vote, the motion passed with all in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:19 PM.

Documents Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft minutes of the October 15, 2020 meeting
- January 2021 FRCOG Council/Programmatic Updates
- Personnel Policy Second Reading: Work Location Language
- *FRCOG FY22 Budget Proposal*
- *County Vaccination Rollout* slideshow

Minutes taken by Rebekah Boyd.