



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

COUNCIL — *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, July 15, 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:

Stanley Garland, Bernardston; **Sarah Reynolds**, Charlemont; **Kevin Fox**, *Secretary/Clerk*, Colrain; **Philip Kantor**, Conway; **Trevor McDaniel**, *Chair*, Deerfield; **Bill Bembury**, Erving; **Greg Snedeker**, *Vice Chair*, Gill; **Dani Letourneau**, Greenfield; **Michele Giarusso**, Leyden; **Steve Ellis**, Montague; **Wayne Hachey**, New Salem; **Bee Jacque**, Northfield; **Jane Peirce**, Orange; **Janice Boudreau**, Rowe; **Andrew Baker**, Shelburne; **Ellen McKay**, Shutesbury (left before final vote); **Michael Idione**, Wendell (5:47 p.m.); **Jay DiPucchio**, Regionally Elected; **Bill Perlman**, Regionally Elected; **Jim Basford**, FRPB.

REGRETS: **Brian DeVriese**, Heath; **Patricia Duffy**, Leverett **ABSENT:** **Jennifer Morse**, Ashfield; **Heather Butler**, Buckland; **Hussain Hamdan**, Hawley **Alice Houghtaling**, Monroe; **Tom Fydenkevez**, Sunderland; **Larry Pruyne**, Warwick; **Lynn Sibley**, Whately;

STAFF: **Linda Dunlavy**, Executive Director; **Claire McGinnis**, Finance Director; **Rebekah Boyd**, Admin Services Coordinator; **Phoebe Walker**, Director of Community Services. **GUEST:** Carolyn Shores Ness

1. Call to order and roll call	Chair Trevor McDaniel
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The chair convened the meeting at 5:34 p.m. Roll call was taken and a quorum met with 19 members and 81.975 % of the weighted vote of the total membership in attendance.

2. Reorganization and Report of Nominating Committee	Chair Trevor McDaniel
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Trevor explained that every July the Council holds its annual reorganization meeting, voting to elect Council officers and to appoint members to the Executive Committee. Jim Basford gave the Nominating Committee report, recommending the following slate of officers:

- Chair of Council – Trevor McDaniel, of Deerfield
- 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

No nominations were made from the floor and Trevor closed the nominations.

Ellen made a motion to appoint the slate of officers recommended by the nominating committee. Daniele L. seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor by roll call vote.

3. Adopt 4/15/21 minutes	Re-elected Chair Trevor McDaniel
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Steve E. moved to adopt the minutes of the July 15, 2021 meeting. Michele G. seconded the motion, which passed by roll call vote, with two members abstaining.

4. Council Update

Trevor McDaniel

Trevor welcomed new members Charles Garbiel, new Gill Select board member and Sarah Reynolds, Charlemont town administrator. Upcoming meetings: **October 21, 2021**, when Councilors will begin to discuss the FY23 budget, and **January 27, 2022**, when Councilors will vote on the Budget Proposal. All meetings start at 5:30 p.m. Trevor asked members to please state their names and the town they represent when addressing the Council, so that staff and councilors might get to know each other.

Councilors discussed whether to meet in person, to gather remotely, or to use a hybrid model in October. Trevor voiced his hope for a return to an in-person meeting, acknowledging that, in Deerfield, hybrid meetings are difficult. Others liked the idea of a hybrid meeting where they could join in person if they wanted, but didn't have to drive at night or in the snow to attend. Linda explained that FRCOG has new tech equipment. The panoramic view, when attending remotely, has drawn mixed early reviews, but the audio is good, she said. Although the group acknowledged that many COVID-related unknowns existed for the next quarter, they agreed to give a hybrid meeting a try, if possible.

FRCOG currently has openings on the Finance and Personnel Committees. Trevor urged folks who may not have yet volunteered for Council committees to step forward, as it's a good way to get more involved with Council operations.

5. Executive Committee Update

Jay DiPucchio

Jay reported that since the last Council meeting, the FRCOG Executive Committee has taken up the following:

American Rescue Plan The committee learned of the parameters of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding mechanism, which is providing federal stimulus funding to address the impacts of COVID-19. Members endorsed the writing of a FRCOG letter that asks the state to stay aware of rural issues and to use some of the money to promote rural projects.

COVID After Action Report Members discussed the scope and cost of a regional COVID-19 After Action Report (AAR) to analyze not only how the FRCOG performed in response to the pandemic, but also how the county and region responded, and to ready all for the next emergency event. Staff is drafting a request for proposals -- from a third, uninvolved, unbiased party -- to conduct the AAR and write an improvement plan. They expect the process to take approximately one year. Phase two of the project will involve a strategic planning process, thus turning the improvement plan into actionable items for implementation over the next five years.

Deerfield River Wild and Scenic Designation The committee endorsed the Franklin Regional Planning Board's recommendation to support a feasibility study that would consider and evaluate the Deerfield River as a federally designated Wild and Scenic River. Charlie Olchowski, who is leading the effort, explained that the designation, which could take years, presents no federal limitations on an abutting private owner's use of their land but does come with the promise of federal funding for river protection and other activities.

Economic Development District (EDD) This spring, the committee convened in its role as the EDD Governing Board to review, oversee community engagement with, and adopt the *2021 Comprehensive*

Economic Development Strategic (CEDS) Annual Performance Report. Members also appointed three new CEDS committee reps.

Emergency Communication Migration to CoMIRS Members were regularly updated on the progress of emergency response radio purchases and distribution to the County's response units.

Redistricting With population declining, we now have 5 senators for Western Mass, with only 4 ½ districts of people. The committee supported Linda's attendance at the Congressional Redistricting hearing, at which she testified that our legislators now serve communities with similar interests and asked that congressional and state legislative districts stay as close to what they are now as possible.

6. Executive Director Update

Linda Dunlavy

Linda reported on the following recent FRCOG projects and initiatives:

Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) Activity Linda sits on the legislative Rural Schools Commission, which is charged with providing recommendations to the legislature and DESE for how to improve rural school conditions and for funding. Recommendations focus on five topic areas: the costs of health insurance and post-employment benefits (OPEB); local aid issues, including minimum contribution and "hold harmless"; school choice issues, including charter and vocational school formulas; special education; and regionalization. Listening sessions and at least one formal hearing will be part of the accelerated study process. The final report will be submitted in March 2022.

Organizational Assessment FRCOG determined that an organizational assessment was needed when administrators realized several long-term leadership and technical staff hope to retire in 2-5 years. Community Paradigm Associates (CPA) conducted a remote study with the goal of analyzing FRCOG's current structure and comparing the agency to similar organizations. CPA was charged with identifying gaps in management; considering how to restructure internal operations to be more productive and efficient; assessing how to share positions and tasks with neighboring organizations; reviewing Council and public engagement processes; and recommending improvements, if needed.

The completed study recommended that FRCOG:

- Create a mission statement that reflects its values and focus
- Actively involve new government leaders, especially town administrators
- Be aware of the propensity to grow for growth's sake but also avoid becoming stale
- Begin succession thinking now
- Create a deputy director position, a communications position, and an HR position
- Strengthen personnel management systems, and compensation and employment policies
- Consider new programming that meets the current needs of municipalities

Franklin County Sustainable Stormwater Management Plan This recently completed plan includes a full project report and a technical report that documents 18 stormwater site assessments and conceptual designs for best management practices in nine pilot-communities.

American Rescue Plan (ARP) ARP funding is to be used to solve long-standing problems. FRCOG is already talking to Greenfield and Montague about building a facility to handle sludge so that the area's sludge will not have to go to Blackstone Valley in Eastern MA.

Municipal Accountant Training Joyce Muka, former program manager of the FRCOG Town Accounting Program, is the instructor for the five-week, online, municipal accountant training course at GCC, which began last month. The goal of the course is to address the shortage of accountants in the

state, by preparing students to do the job. The course quickly filled, and the waiting list for the next session is long! FRCOG is considering another course for municipal employees.

Public Safety Radio System Migration to the Commonwealth Interoperable Radio System (CoMIRS)

Most of the new CoMIRS radios have arrived, and were programmed and distributed to departments. The project is proceeding relatively smoothly, with credit going to Deerfield, which is storing the radios and helping to program them; to Kurt Seaman from Greenfield Fire for programming; and to the FRCOG finance team, for managing \$3 million.

Passenger Rail Passenger rail services have picked up after nearly a year and a half of limited service and extremely low ridership during the pandemic. Amtrak reports that ridership numbers are higher than most others in the Northeast Corridor. On July 26, the second weekday roundtrip will resume service and the Vermonter will resume service on July 19, 2021.

7. Planning Board Update

Jim Basford

The Planning Board received support for a feasibility study for designation of segments of the Deerfield River as a National Wild and Scenic River, Jim reported.

8. Finance Committee Update

Michele Giarusso

After thanking chair Lynn S. for her years of leadership, Michele G. reported that at its last meeting the Finance Committee reviewed the FY21 year-end report and made minor budget amendments. Members also approved: carry-forward requests for unspent money from the organizational assessment for implementation of some of the study's recommendations; for the website overhaul project (delayed due to COVID-related workloads); for the capital reserve account; and for the FCECS capital reserve account. The committee also reviewed the FY22 budget and was pleased to see it was on track.

Emergency Reserve Account

The Finance Committee reports spending time discussing the following three topics related to the emergency reserve account created at the last Council meeting:

- *The second and third amendments that passed at the April 15 Council meeting.* The outcome of the Council discussion and vote to place conditions and thresholds on use of the emergency reserve account was a revision to the originally proposed motion. These edits, while well intended, resulted in a lack of clarity.
- *Review by the FRCOG auditor.* In January, the Finance Committee conceived of the account as a refilling/revolving account. However, because future use of the fund may not have an eventual reimbursement source, the auditor suggested FRCOG is not creating a "special activity" or "revolving" account, but rather, a "reserve fund."
- *Definition.* The request at the last Council meeting to define qualifying uses of the fund.

The Committee recommended that the Council amend the vote taken at the April Council meeting, renaming the fund "Emergency Response Reserve Account;" and recommends a review of the defined uses for the Emergency Reserve at the full Council. Michele explained that the Finance Committee does not expect to break even for another four months or so. The committee hopes that waiting until October to create the account correctly and to finalize definitions ensures the comfort of the Council.

The motion that passed at the April meeting read:

To establish the Finance Committee as the primary approving authority for budget authorizations of the Regional Emergency Revolving Account (as established by COVID-19 Vax Clinic operations and reimbursements), and to require full FRCOG Council approval of spending in excess of 75% of the fund's balance.

Trevor moved to amend the vote taken at the April 15, 2021 Council meeting, renaming the “Regional Emergency Revolving Account” the “Regional Emergency Response Reserve Account.” Wayne seconded the motion, which passed with all in favor by roll-call vote.

Staff shared a slide with the full Council defining “emergency,” which proposes when and how the clinic-generated funds should be used. The list of emergencies includes specific natural and man-made weather events, violence, disease, and governor-declared emergency events, as well as specific FRCOG emergency response activities. *(See Power Point Slide.)*

Philip K. asked about use of the fund to repair or purchase anew such things as roadside guardrails and homeowners’ property in the wake of a storm, such as the tornado that hit Conway several years ago. In response, the general consensus from members present was that type of individually owned property repair would not qualify.

Andrew B questioned the words in the definition are “but not limited to” as possibly too broad, and requested a narrowing of scope. Phil K. agreed that using limiting parameters would clarify.

Jane P. suggested that one emergency would wipe the fund out. She urged staff to work on parameters to be sure not to set FRCOG up for failure.

No vote was taken on the definition, which will have to return at a future meeting for a 2nd reading.

9. Personnel Committee Update

Bill Perlman

Juneteenth

Bill P. presented the proposed FRCOG Personnel Policy change to the Paid Holiday Leave Benefits for a Council first reading. If approved at the next meeting, FRCOG will adopt June 19, or “Juneteenth” (the date celebrating the official end of slavery), as a paid holiday, in place of previously celebrated Patriot’s Day. Council will entertain a second reading, discussion, and vote at the October meeting.

Communications Manager

Linda briefed the Council on plans to hire a Communications Manager, outlining the general scope of the work to be expected of the role. Interest in the position arose among Councilors during a budgetary vote at the previous meeting.

Bill P. reminded councilors that the hiring would have no financial impact or burden on the towns. He explained that the Personnel Committee approved the creation of the position, and reviewed and approved of the job description. He further explained that creation of FRCOG jobs is not generally the Council’s decision. The executive director identifies the need and brings the need to Council committees for guidance.

10. Special Presentation: Aerial Mosquito Spraying Bee Jacque, Northfield; Trevor McD., Deerfield

Bee J. and Trevor M. led a discussion regarding the challenging decision of towns to opt in or out of the Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District (PVMCD) membership. To join the district and select from its surveillance, testing, and educational assistance services, costs towns \$5K and must be approved at town meeting. However, the state reclamation board has to approve of the towns joining. If a town does nothing, the state may conduct aerial spraying.

Bee's research found that mosquito control is a year-round endeavor, and aerial spraying is costly. Northfield boards learned that mosquito varieties — of which there are more than 50 — are adaptable, active all day and night and in wet and dry conditions, and spread diseases (Zika, EEE) that, like the mosquitos, are migrating into our region. The town discovered that to manage effectively the health risks and to handle state decisions, multi-year species and location data is needed. The boards of health need funding to manage and adapt a plan, and to educate the public, she said. Funding for the highway department also is needed to apply measures such bactericide rings. Northfield chose to join the district, even without the data, fearing the risk not to join outweighed the cost, but her town's boards seek more information. It's easy, she noted, to get caught up in the risk of spraying, and lose sight of disease risk. She asked for the opinions of Councilors/select boards regarding the PVMD opt-out, hoping to learn more about district policies, and to know how to further develop PVMD expertise and support. She also wondered how FRCOG could help.

Trevor explained that with the risk of mosquito-borne disease growing, the Deerfield Board of Health was concerned, and local interest grew in developing the mosquito district, to know more about what mosquitos are present in the region and what they were carrying. They felt it didn't make sense to opt out, and was surprised when the state gave municipalities that option, as they understood that aerial spraying is only an emergency response. They also hoped additional towns would help fund for needed trapping and testing.

Philip K. said Conway townspeople were fiercely opposed at their town meeting, and opted out. Andrew B. reported that Shelburne joined the district with a 2:1 vote in favor, despite hearing the argument that aerial spraying is not effective. New Salem's Wayne H. said his town was denied the opportunity to opt out, (after six deaths in MA in 2019, and with EEE found in collection samples in both New Salem and Wendell in 2020). Montague received approval to opt out, Steve E. reported, given that if an emergency occurs, the state will spray regardless. He proposed that FRCOG convene a session with many of the mosquito control reps. His take away from the recent state letter ordering all municipalities to submit a plan within two weeks, he added, was that Montague was okay opting out this year, but that the bar will be raised next year.

PVMCD commissioner and Deerfield Select Board member Carolyn Ness told the committee that spraying must be applied correctly, and in a targeted way to be effective, adding that the district is not automatically pro-spraying. She explained that five Western MA towns received a state efficiency and regionalization grant to create the district and to gather as much data as possible on the 52 state species, the numbers of species present regionally, and the disease load they carried. The district has grown from five to 20 towns, and for the first time in 10 years, the town is free from West Nile.

Phoebe W. explained that issues regarding the opt-out policy came to light when staff began to realize that half of the towns in FRCOG's Health District had done so, and half had not. Carolyn N., she said, will come to the health district oversight board to talk about how the two districts can work well

together. One staff member is tabling at public events to educate residents about both ticks and mosquitos. Additionally, public health roundtables occur every fourth Monday of the month, and the plan is to have this discussion in July or August, she said. Carolyn reported on PVMCD efforts to garner more state funding. She encouraged Councilors and select boards to contact legislators.

11. Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance

Trevor McDaniel

No additional business was discussed.

Trevor M. moved to adjourn, Dani L. seconded, and by voice vote, the motion passed with all in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:10 PM.

Documents Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft minutes of the April 15, 2021 meeting
- July 2021 FRCOG Council/Programmatic Updates
- *Emergency Reserve Account* slide
- Personnel Policy First Reading: *Juneteenth*

Minutes taken by Rebekah Boyd.