



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

COUNCIL — *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, October 21, 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; **Heather Butler**, Buckland; **Marguerite Willis**, Charlemont; **Kevin Fox**, Secretary/Clerk, Colrain; **Philip Kantor**, Conway; **Trevor McDaniel**, Chair, Deerfield; **Bryan Smith**, Erving (arrived at 6:10 p.m.); **Charles Garbiel**, Gill; **Roxann Wedegartner**, Greenfield; **Brian DeVriese**, Heath; **Patricia Duffy**, Leverett; **Michele Giarusso**, Leyden; **Steve Ellis**, Montague; **Bee Jacque**, Northfield; **Jane Peirce**, Orange; **Janice Boudreau**, Rowe; **Andrew Baker**, Shelburne; **Ellen McKay**, Shutesbury; **Tom Fydenkevez**, Sunderland; **Dan Keller**, Wendell; **Lynn Sibley**, Whately; **Jay DiPucchio**, Regionally Elected; **Bill Perlman**, Regionally Elected; **Julia Blyth**, FRPB.

REGRETS: **Wayne Hachey**, New Salem

ABSENT: **Hussain Hamdan**, Hawley; **Carla Davis-Little**, Monroe; **Alan Genovese**, Warwick; **Vacant**, Ashfield.

FRCOG STAFF: **Linda Dunlavy**, Executive Director; **Claire McGinnis**, Finance Director; **Rebekah Boyd**, Admin Services Coord; **Phoebe Walker**, Dir. Community Services **GUEST:** **Philippe Simon**, GCTV

1. Call to order and roll call	Chair Trevor McDaniel
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The chair convened the hybrid meeting at 5:31 p.m. Roll call was taken and a quorum met with 23 members and 86.067 % of the weighted vote of the total membership, in attendance.

2. Adopt 7/15/21 minutes	Re-elected Chair Trevor McDaniel
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Ellen M. moved to adopt the minutes of the July 15, 2021 meeting. Michele G. seconded the motion, which passed by roll call vote, with five members abstaining.

3. Council Update	Trevor McDaniel
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Trevor reminded members that the Council will meet on January 27, 2022 (snow date Feb 3, to vote on the FRCOG FY23 Budget Proposal. The final quarterly meeting of FY22 is scheduled for April 21.

Trevor welcomed new Councilor, Alan Genovese, Warwick select board member, and Northfield’s Julia Blyth, the newly appointed Franklin Regional Planning Board rep. He also greeted first-time alternate members: planner Joel Cole from Bernardston; Marcella Stafford-Gore, Monroe’s town coordinator; Patricia Lussier, select board member from Orange; and Rita Farrell, Shutesbury select board member.

4. Executive Committee Update	Bill Perlman
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Bill reported that the Executive Committee held a special meeting in September to discuss the future and priorities of the FRCOG as the retirements of long-time FRCOG staff loom ever closer. Two long-

time staff have informally announced their intentions to retire in September 2023 and September 2024. Priorities include:

- Review and development of a FRCOG Mission statement
- Assess organization and financial structure to consider development of a Deputy Director position and/or other structure change as a result of retirements
- Conduct a salary review to determine competitiveness of FRCOG salaries with peer organizations (other RPAs and COGs)
- Create more professional development opportunities for staff

5. Executive Director Update

Linda Dunlavy

Linda updated the Council on the following recent FRCOG projects and initiatives:

School Improvements Linda has a seat on the legislative Rural Schools Commission, which will provide recommendations for improvement of rural school conditions and funding to the Legislature and DESE. She asked members to contact her to be part of the discussion

Local Rapid Recovery Planning Program Six municipalities in Franklin County took part in the MA Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD)'s new Local Rapid Recovery Planning program. The purpose of these plans is to better understand the current challenges in downtowns/village centers and to propose recommendations that can help these business communities recover more quickly from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deerfield River Recreation Study FRCOG will receive \$100,000 to hire a professional consulting firm to assess existing conditions on the Deerfield, and to recommend strategies to establish sustainable river access; improve parking for recreation companies and individuals; develop tourism infrastructure; coordinate signage and marketing; enhance public safety; and foster new business development.

Federal Funding Opportunities FRCOG is working to pursue ARPA funding for a cybersecurity application and for two advanced manufacturing applications. Staff also are providing technical assistance on potential funding opportunities to leaders of local and regional projects.

COVID After-Action Review (AAR) Ardent Decision Group was selected to conduct the FRCOG COVID AAR. The goal is to examine the response coordination efforts of the FRCOG, and to recommend the principles, agreements, structures, plans and policies that should be in place for regional response coordination needed during emergencies in the County, including the defined role of the FRCOG.

Commonwealth Interoperable Radio System (CoMIRS) Migration of the public safety radio system to CoMIRS is well underway, with over 95% of radios programmed and delivered to FC agencies. Roughly 45% of agencies are fully migrated, 33% are partially migrated with portables in use and awaiting mobile radio installation, and 22% have not migrated yet for various reasons.

Local Officials Workshops Attendance at virtual workshops has been so much higher than was in-person attendance, FRCOG continues to offer workshops online, accessible to people from every part of the county. All workshop details are listed on the calendar on the FRCOG's website.

COVID Vaccine boosters Vaccine activity in the county is daily updated on the FRCOG website. Staff are working with the state and local providers to bring a mobile vaccine clinic to the area.

6. Planning Board Update

Julia Blyth

Julia reported that the Franklin County Regional Planning Board is advising on activities related to the FERC relicensing of the FirstLight facilities in the county and on regional Brownfield’s assessments. The Board continues to review and guide outcomes outlined in the CEDS report, and recently enjoyed a FRCOG presentation of a newly created story map of Conway’s South River, which illuminated flood map zoning in the area.

7. Finance Committee Update

Michele Giarusso

Michele explained that the Finance Committee supported creation of a reserve fund, collected from the medical insurers of people vaccinated at FRCOG clinics in the spring 2021, and set aside for future county emergency response. In consult with FRCOG external auditor, this fund is now set up in the fiscal records of the organization within Council review, and as such, will follow normal budgeting, approvals, and spending process. Collections through mid-September amount to approximately \$61,700. Original estimates of the size of the reserve were overly optimistic.

In July, Council first considered the definition of “emergency,” as it relates to this fund, but because a COVID AAR is underway, staff would like to wait for its results and for better understanding of total reimbursement before moving forward. Review of a revised definition is planned for January or April.

Fiscal Review

Claire walked members through the *FRCOG Fiscal Review*, the publication that outlines detailed financial information about the previous fiscal year, highlights changes to the current budget, and projects conditions and needs into the coming fiscal year.

Steve E. asked how FRCOG provides increased services without an increase to member assessments. Claire explained that grants subsidize the assessments programs. Steve remarked that the revenues-by-source graph speaks well to any concerns he might have.

Asked why clinic revenues were lower than expected, Claire suggested that perhaps staff had been overly optimistic or that many more people were uninsured than expected. Quite possibly, she added, with so many volunteers making appointments for others to be vaccinated, insurance card numbers were not taken or accurately added to online scheduling forms. Trevor asked if this would be studied, but learned from Claire that the billing service doesn’t provide that sort of work and that FRCOG may not have the tools to develop such a study. Claire added that the vaccine clinics were paid for with the previous year’s revenues. All reimbursements go into the reserve, so however much is reimbursed will make up the reserve fund. Only ½ of the reimbursement period has passed.

8. Personnel Committee Update

Bill Perlman

Juneteenth

Bill P. presented the proposed *FRCOG Personnel Policy* change to the Paid Holiday Leave Benefits for a Council second reading, explaining that the Personnel Committee recommends adoption of June 19, or “Juneteenth”, as a paid holiday, in place of previously observed Patriot’s Day.

Marguerite W. stated that she would be voting no, explaining that with so many competing groups, she advocates for no more detailed holidays, just additional personal days. Phil K. expressed his feeling that to replace the state holiday with a federal one was a good solution. Steve E. called the vote apolitical, and one that would result in a net maintenance. Trevor allowed that Deerfield added the holiday at its annual town meeting feeling it was an important day of service.

Bill P. made a motion to adopt replacement of Patriot’s Day (third Monday in April) with Juneteenth (June 19) in the “Paid Holiday Leave Benefits” section of the FRCOG Personnel Policy. Kevin F seconded the motion, which passed with Marguerite W. of Charlemont opposed, and all other councilors voting in favor.

9. Special Presentation/Discussion Infrastructure Funding

Linda Dunlavy, Trevor McDaniel

Linda opened a discussion on how to leverage state auditor Bump’s recent infrastructure report, for more, local funding for priority projects. The report, *Public Infrastructure in Western Massachusetts: A Critical Need for Regional Investment and Revitalization*, documents what local officials have long known – rural municipalities struggle to maintain public infrastructure and municipal buildings, finding many state programs and funding formulas inaccessible, and inequitable to rural municipalities. The report comes as the state considers how to spend and prioritize \$5+ billion of ARPA funding allocated to it (in addition to the municipal allotment). Linda asked members to offer up their infrastructure needs and priorities, and how municipalities can work together to advocate for collective needs.

Together, members can up with the following list of needs:

- A separate fund for bridges
- An end to “over-engineering,” and the ability to procure value engineering, perhaps using engineering templates
- Funding for unpaved roads
- A public safety building in Northfield
- Value engineering/templates for energy efficiency in building projects
- A lawyer to help with a transition to fiber

10. Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance

Trevor McDaniel

Stan G. commended FRCOG’s chief procurement officer, Andrea Wood, for her extensive knowledge and for thoughtful time spent in Bernardston walking town officials through a current project.

Dani L. moved to adjourn, Ellen M. seconded, and by voice vote, the motion passed with all in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:12 PM.

Documents Distributed:

- FY22 Council Membership Contact List
- Agenda
- Draft minutes of the July 15, 2021 meeting
- October 2021 FRCOG Council/Programmatic Updates
- *FRCOG Fiscal Review*
- *FRCOG Fiscal Review Highlights Slideshow*
- *Emergency Reserve Account* slide
- Personnel Policy Proposed Revision, Second Reading: *Juneteenth*

Minutes taken by Rebekah Boyd.