



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

COUNCIL — *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, January 27, 2022, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Location:	Open meeting accessed remotely on Zoom by video, or by telephone
Facilitator:	Trevor McDaniel, Chair

COUNCILOR ATTENDEES:

Paul McLatchy, Ashfield; **Heather Butler**, Buckland; **Marguerite Willis**, Charlemont; **Kevin Fox**, Secretary/Clerk, Colrain; **Erica Goleman**, Conway; **Trevor McDaniel**, Chair, Deerfield; **William Bembury**, Erving; **Greg Snedecker**, Vice Chair, Gill; **Dani Letourneau**, Greenfield; **Brian DeVriese**, Heath (left 6:45pm), **Patricia Duffy**, Leverett; **Michele Giarusso**, Leyden; **Steve Ellis**, Montague; **Wayne Hachey**, New Salem; **Bee Jacque**, Northfield (arrived 6:27 pm); **Jane Peirce**, Orange (arrived 5:36); **Janice Boudreau**, Rowe; **Andrew Baker**, Shelburne; **Eric Stocker**, Shutesbury; **Tom Fydenkevez**, Sunderland; **Michael Idione**, Wendell; **Lynn Sibley**, Whately; **Jay DiPucchio**, Regionally Elected; **Bill Perlman**, Regionally Elected; **Julia Blyth**, FRPB.

REGRETS: **Stanley Garland**, Bernardston; **Carla Davis-Little**, Monroe.

ABSENT: **Hussain Hamdan**, Hawley; **Alan Genovese**, Warwick

FRCOG STAFF: **Linda Dunlavy**, Executive Director; **Claire McGinnis**, Finance Director; **Rebekah Boyd**, Admin Services Coord; **Phoebe Walker**, Dir. Community Services **Bob Dean**, Dir. Regional Services

GUEST: **Glenn Johnson-Mussad**, Wendell alternate representative to the Council (non-voting at this meeting); **John DiModica**, affiliation unknown.

1. Call to order and roll call	Chair Trevor McDaniel
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The chair convened the remote meeting at 5:33 p.m. Roll call was taken and both a simple and a financial quorum were met with 23 members and 84.602 % of the weighted vote of the total membership in attendance. Following roll call, the representative from Orange arrived, bringing the count up to 24 and 91.461%

Agenda Changes

Trevor explained that several reps needed to leave early for other municipal meetings, so he will switch the order of the meeting for maximum participation during consideration of and vote on the FY23 budget proposal.

2. Finance & Personnel Committee Updates (Moved to top of agenda so that all attending members could participate).	Michele Giarusso
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Michele reported that at its Jan 19 meeting, the Finance Committee voted to recommend the budget proposal, which totals \$4,541,660 (\$2,618,900 general fund; \$1,922,760 municipal programs) for fiscal year 2023. This proposal reflects the priorities of the Executive and Finance Committees, including:

- No increase in Regional member town assessments, in sum

- \$5,000 of funding to continue providing technical support to First Light Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) re-licensing
- \$8,500 increase in professional development to launch a 4-year succession plan
- \$12,500 capital investment to replace an aged server (use of fund balance)
- \$25,000 for the Covid After Action Review implementation
- Salary increases for all staff equivalent to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of the Northeast, which is currently 6%

Claire presented a slideshow of the proposal, reviewing significant changes to the revenues and expenses in each budget, including the fee-for-service programs. Along with those listed above, other budgetary expenses include rising rent and increases to property, liability, and worker’s comp insurances. Benefits for grant-funded staff are included in the pooled expense budget, which increases with this proposal with the addition of 7.8 full time equivalent positions.

The Cooperative Public Health program proposal includes use of retained earnings to balance its budget, implementation of the first year of a two-year plan to recover from a town exiting the program.

Discussion

Regarding assessments to towns, Jay D. remarked that in the 1990s when commissioners created the charter for the FRCOG, select boards raised great concern about leveling the playing field by laying in the population factor. Claire assisted councilors with understanding the draft assessments chart slide, which includes the new certified Equalized Values (EQV) for the year ending in 2020, figures that result in assessment changes among members. Eric S. asked why the EQV in Rowe changed so drastically. Janice B. answered that in 2019 there was a nearly \$40 MM increase in assessments of the hydroelectric facilities by the town, a figure currently being litigated in appellate court.

Members asked how the fractional staffing works in the Collective Purchasing budget. Claire explained that the budget reflects the costs of the two full-time staff members, as well as a portion of the Department Head’s oversight time. Staff chose to increase the bid participation fee to cover the rise in that department’s expenses because it affects all 54 participating towns in both Franklin and Hampshire Counties, Linda explained.

Michele G. moved to approve the FY23 Budget Proposal of \$4,541,660, of which \$2,618,900 is Regional Administration in the general fund and \$1,922,760 is the sum of the municipal fee-for-service programs, using \$12,500 of general fund balance and \$16,612 of the Cooperative Public Health Service’s retained earnings. Dani L. seconded the motion, which passed with all members in favor, by roll-call vote.

3. Adopt 10/15/21 minutes	Chair Trevor McDaniel
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Bill P. moved to adopt the minutes of the October 15, 2021 meeting. Steve E. seconded the motion, which passed by roll-call vote with 15 members voting yes, and five members abstaining.

4. Council Update	Trevor McDaniel
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Trevor reminded members that the Council will meet on April 21, July 21, and October 20 in 2022 and welcomed new representatives: Eric Stocker, Select board member from Shutesbury; Glenn Johnson-Mussad, Town coordinator in Wendell; Erica Goleman, Select board member from Conway; and

Paul McLatchy, Ashfield town administrator.

Western MA MMA Conference

FRCOG, along with the Franklin County Select Board Association, the Berkshire County Select Board Association, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, is working with the MA Municipal Association to develop a municipal conference for western MA local officials. The conference was scheduled for October originally, but postponed.

5. Executive Committee Update

Bill Perlman

Bill reported that at its monthly meetings since the council last met, the FRCOG Executive Committee:

- Weighed in on FY23 budget priorities
- Accepted and acted on an Erving county road petition
- Approved a match request that would enable FRCOG to secure a 2-year economic resilience grant from the federal EDA
- Considered and approved a 4-part succession plan to prepare for pending retirements of long-time staff and Council members, presented by Linda

6. Executive Director Update

Linda Dunlavy

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

Critical Infrastructure FRCOG and the Berkshire Regional Planning Committee sent a letter to the legislature advocating for implementation of specific recommendations to address the State Auditor’s Office findings in the [“Public Infrastructure in Western Massachusetts: A Critical Need for Regional Investment and Revitalization”](#) That study incorporated the ideas and thoughts generated at the October Council meeting.

Police Reform An earmark secured by Sen. Comerford and distributed by FRCOG has helped to fund police reform training at Bridge Academy for 38 officers across Franklin County. The MOAs were all returned and the money has been distributed.

Commonwealth Interoperable Radio System (CoMIRS) Migration of the public safety radio system to CoMIRS is nearing completion, with 90% of county departments fully transitioned. FRCOG is working with the Executive Office of Technical Services and Security for the next stage of deployment. FRCOG is also close to the end of managing the grant that funded the transition — a significant milestone.

COVID/ Flu Vaccine boosters. FRCOG’s public health service staff worked with school nurses to bring the state-funded Vax Bus to ten locations this winter, delivering more than 5,000 boosters, first and second doses, and pediatric vaccines to local residents. Staff are working with the state and local providers to bring a mobile vaccine clinic to the area this spring.

Steve E. remarked that he has begun asking for an extension to pandemic funding for outdoor dining accommodation costs for food and alcohol establishments, which may not otherwise survive in the region. He asked for FRCOG’s help to know what bills to refer to and who best to contact.

7. Franklin Regional Planning Board Update

Julia Blyth

Julia reported that the planning board enjoyed a presentation on the Franklin County Pedestrian Plan, which identifies tools and strategies for developing pedestrian-related infrastructure improvements in Franklin County. The plan intends to inspire and encourage towns to consider pedestrian accessibility

whenever feasible. The planning board also continues to advise on activities related to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's relicensing of the FirstLight hydroelectric facilities in the county.

8. Special Presentation/Discussion Rural Equity

Linda Dunlavy, Trevor McDaniel

FRCOG is spearheading an effort on behalf of the MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) to advocate for rural equity of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and state surplus spending. Linda is working with the Franklin County legislative delegation to make this argument in front of the legislative Rural Caucus and Statehouse leadership. She shared a slideshow of portions of that draft presentation with the Council. RPAC's goal is to use data to show that rural areas within the Commonwealth were already behind the curve in several economic measures, and that the impact of COVID has worsened these conditions.

ARPA funds are to be dedicated to communities disproportionately impacted by COVID; however, ARPA legislation did not define "disproportionate impact." An equitable distribution of ARPA funds is critical to the full recovery and ongoing resilience of all of Massachusetts. The recent Auditor's report found that there's a critical need for infrastructure revitalization in rural counties in the areas of transportation; broadband; and municipal building, maintenance, and repair. The study recommends state investment, due to aging and under-resourced infrastructure. Western Ma is in particular need of state support. Since the economic pain of the Great Recession of 2008, the MA economy as a whole has grown by 50%, yet the four western MA counties have not experienced that boom.

The Rural Equities/Impacts slideshow laid out clear evidence of these inequities. Once completed, RPAC will bring the presentation to state administration. Presenters will recommend specific measures for increasing state funding for all infrastructure programs, for reforming outdated formulas that disadvantage rural municipalities, and for reducing obstacles faced by small communities in accessing state resources.

Members discussed their impressions of the report and offered a few additional initiatives.

9. Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance

Trevor McDaniel

Greg S. moved to adjourn, Paul M. seconded, and by voice vote, the motion passed with all in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Documents Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft minutes of the October 15, 2021 meeting
- January 2022 FRCOG Council/Programmatic Updates
- *FY23 Budget Proposal*
- *2020 EQVs and 2020 Population changes*
- *Draft FY23 Assessments for Members Towns*
- *Emergency Reserve Account slide*
- *Rural Impacts and ARPA Slideshow*

Minutes taken by Rebekah Boyd.