



NORTH COUNTRY COUNCIL ANNUAL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

**AHEAD Conference Room Mt Eustis Commons | 262 Cottage Street Littleton
Wednesday, June 21, 2023 | 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.**

Representatives Present: Carl Martland, Vicki DeLalla, Sandra Butson, Jon Swan, Mark Decoteau, Michele Cormier, Ben Gaetjens-Oleson, Paul Robitaille, Ray Gorman, James Gleason, Gil Rand

Staff Present: Michelle Moren-Grey; James Steele; Kaela Tavares; Nick Altonaga

Call to Order & Welcome

Michelle Moren-Grey called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m.

Ms. Moren-Grey welcomed and thanked everyone for their participation. She explain that this meeting came with a fair amount of pre-meeting work which was distributed in several ways via links in the agenda, on the website, SharePoint, and Google Docs.

A round table of introductions was made.

Ms. Moren-Grey provided an overview of the agenda.

Ms. Moren-Grey asked for a moment of remembrance for longtime Representative and CEDS Committee member Steve Knox who passed away on May 28, 2023. Steve’s dedication, futuristic thought, and wild passion will be deeply missed.

Highlights Year to Date

Mr. Steele reviewed the financial dashboard of the Council’s financials as of the year to date (May 2023). Overall, the Council is still trending in a positive direction. He noted that there is currently a \$32,689 profit resulting in an increase of the net position to \$283,054. The operating account showed a \$10,948 decrease from the beginning of the year. Mr. Steele commented that this results from cash flow as we currently have \$70,000 in accounts receivable. Mr. Steele discussed the current ratio, operating expenses to revenue, and liabilities to net position.

Mr. Steel asked for questions – none.

Minutes from January 18, 2023

MOTION Representative Chair, Robitaille moved to approve the minutes. It was seconded by Representative DeLalla. No discussion. All in favor. Motion Carried

Regional Housing Needs Assessment Adoption

Ms. Moren-Grey commented that the updated RHNA was included in the meeting materials and gave a brief overview of the process. She reminded the group that the data was presented to the Commission in 2022 and January 2023.

Ms. Moren-Grey introduced Ms. Tavares, Planning Director and lead staff on the RHNA, and asked for questions.

Question regarding if there is funding or assistance to help towns connect with developers – Ms. Tavares, we are hopeful that assistance will come through the Housing Ready project when it launches, and AHEAD is now offering consultations, whether they will be the developer or not.

Where in the process are the other RPC's – majority are adopted or will be in the near future. Invest NH was discussed any future information regarding this program will send out via the newsletter.

MOTION Representative DeLalla moved to approve and adopt the 2023 Regional Housing Needs Assessment. It was seconded by Representative Butson. No discussion. All in favor. Motion Carried

North Country Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Ms. Moren-Grey commented that the updated CEDS was included in the meeting materials and gave a brief overview of the CEDS & process. The North Country Rising Plan completed through COVID with EDA ARPA funds was incorporated into the CEDS. The CEDS was adopted by the CEDS committee in February of 2023 and reviewed by the BOD in March.

Ms. Moren-Grey introduced Ms. Tavares, Planning Director and lead staff on the CEDS, and asked for questions.

Ms. Tavares added that there was a tremendous amount of work on this. We worked hard to use the great outreach and work from North Country Rising Plan as a backbone of this update, and our goal was to make the action plan in the CEDS nimble and able to adjust to the projects and ideas that people are coming up with, instead of being rigid.

Questions / Comments

Representative Swan commented that in the SWOT the mention of the proposed Granite State Landfill location of Dalton was not mentioned in the treats. Ms. Moren-Grey responded that the SWOT was developed through various outreach methods, taking those SWOT components mentioned more often. Representative Martland pointed out how nimble the goals are and usable. Ms. Moren-Grey added that when communities or entities are seeking funding or implementation, they are asked by the funder how the proposed project aligns with the goals of the regional strategy or plan. This nimbleness allows a variety of projects to align vs. being ridged, limiting a future regional or local project to align.

Representative Martland, the data regarding wages vs. displaying mean average wage while in the future mean average wage can be incorporated into the CEDS. The group was reminded that this wage data shows a difference between the state and the region. The group was also reminded that the data is for the economic development district, which reflects all of Grafton County. Mr. Martland also asked about the percentage of single-person families - those numbers are from NH Employment Security and are accurate.

MOTION Representative Decoteau moved to approve and adopt the 2023 – 2028 CEDS. It was seconded by Representative Gaetjens-Oleson. No discussion. All in favor. Motion Carried

Regional Transportation Plan RTP

Ms. Moren-Grey commented that the updated RTP was included in the meeting materials and gave a brief overview of the process. She reminded the group that the last plan was updated in 2015 and that the current update for the majority occurred through COVID. Once the plan is adopted, staff, with the assistance of the TAC and input from the region, will go into a cycle of annual maintenance, much like the CEDS. In FY24 we will begin with updating the data sheets for each corridor.

Ms. Moren-Grey introduced Mr. Altonaga, Transportation Planner, and lead staff, to the RTP.

Mr. Altonaga confirmed the process and added that the plan is ideally used by communities to support local and regional projects. He also confirmed the annual update of the plan, starting with the data sheets.

Questions – Representative Swan asked if there was a consideration in the RTP for the increase in truck traffic in the surrounding towns, such as Whitefield, if the proposed Granite State Landfill in Dalton was to come online. – There was discussion at TAC meetings regarding this but not specifically looked at. The goals/objectives are broad, so varied projects can use the plan to support implementation, initiatives, and visions. Representative Martland commented that in the RTP goals/objectives, maintaining the local character and keeping freight traffic off local roads are included.

MOTION Representative Gaetjens-Oleson moved to approve and adopt the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan RTP. It was seconded by Representative Gill. No discussion. All in favor. Motion Carried

Regional Transportation Improvement Program

Ms. Moren-Grey provided an overview of the RTIP, including the TYP process. Highlights of the TYP process included 10 projects submitted, 8 were eligible. The 8 were ranked by staff and approved by the TAC the top 4 moved to engineering scoping. Ms. Moren-Grey noted that the total cost of the top 4 is \$17.5. The TAC in March approved the final ranking and moved to submit the top 2 to NHDOT (Shelburne & Gorham). The top 2 projects' total cost is \$8.7m, which is \$1.5 over the regional allocation. In May, the TAC agreed to work with NHDOT for excess funds, including allocating a portion of next year's funds to 2025-2034 to cover the overage.

Ms. Moren-Grey asked for questions – none

MOTION Representative Robitaille moved to approve and adopt Regional Transportation Improvement Program RTIP . It was seconded by Representative DeLalla. No discussion. All in favor. Motion Carried

Ms. Moren-Grey provided a review of FY 2023 project, either in progress, completed, or wrapping up, some of which were mentioned prior, such as CEDS, RTP, RHNA, and RTIP. Council staff will continue to work on:

- Municipal Housing Opportunity Planning / HOP Grants – Council staff is currently contracted in partnership with Tara Bamford (regional planning consultant) by 6 municipalities to analyze and upgrade land use regulations specific to housing.
- NH Employer Workforce Through NHFA funding, the Council can support and facilitate moving groups of employer housing conversations toward action. Currently working with 3 employer groups.
- Engaged with the first community project for on-call engineering services – Sugar Hill
- June 2023 launched a new website
- Collaborated with Saco Headwaters Alliance, NH Fish & Game, New Hampshire Geological Survey of DES and Green Mountain Conservation Group and NH Association of Conservation Commissions to for the Saco River Watershed Stream Crossing Assessment Project
- Provided coaching assistance to over 15 NBRC applicants, assistance to 10 new NBRC grantees in getting NTP, technical assistance to NHBEA Capacity Consultant ADG for statewide program support to over 20 NBRC active grantees
- Wrapped up the Dalton Master Plan
- Administered 3 CDBG Grants and wrote 2 CDBG grants
- Visited over 25 communities & entities to discuss opportunities
- Placed over 150 traffic counts for data collection
- Participated in the Northern Collaborative Economic Development Region, providing support to stand-up resource assistance and Collaborative Capacity Workshop Series

Ms. Moren-Grey thanked the staff for all their hard work – the work of FY2023 and the upcoming year could not have happened without the dedicated and talented team. Ms. Moren-Grey said it is a pleasure and privilege to work with such an incredible team.

Approval of FY24 Draft Budget & Work Plan

Mr. Steele presented the proposed FY 2024 budget

- There are 45 projects active or proposed in the draft budget
- Federal and state projects total \$923,111 with 71% secured, local grants and agreements total \$338,238, 85% secured, dues a total of \$70,000, 50% secured to be used as a match and miscellaneous increase of \$25,000. Miscellaneous is greater than FY23 to cover unanticipated expenses
- 75% of the budgeted revenue is secured, totaling \$1,010,414
- Direct labor increased due to 5% cost of living and \$5,000 of merit raises
- Other direct expenses increased from consulting services included in projects i.e on-call engineer and housing CDS grant
- Employee benefits – 16.7% health insurance increase and increasing the employee health option buy-out from 25% to 50%
- Equipment maintenance increased as a result of the cost of fuel and van maintenance.
- Interest expense increased because of interest on rental lease requirements.

Overall secured funding covers 94% of the budgeted expenses. FY20 to FY24 Proposed Revenue to expenses were reviewed. Ms. Moren-Grey reviewed the revenue funding sources; Mr. Steele

added that the Council has been able to increase local contracts from 11% if FY 20 to 25% in the upcoming year (FY24).

Mr. Steele asked for questions – clarification was made between the FY23 YTD dashboard and the proposed FY24 budget.

Direct and indirect salaries differ because direct is billed to projects while indirect is non-billable.

MOTION Representative Decoteau moved to approve the FY2024 Budget as presented. It was seconded by Representative Martland. No discussion. All in favor. Motion Carried

Bylaw Review & Recommended Changes

Ms. Moren-Grey referenced the meeting materials made available prior to the meeting. Over the last few months, there has been discussion regarding bylaws changes. At the 05/18/2023 Board of Directors meeting, these revisions were reviewed, discussed and approved for recommendation to full commission for adoption.

Ms. Moren-Grey presented the proposed changes:

- **Overall**

- Proposed** formatting update – reason for readability and Councils updated brand

- Proposed** alignment with RSA 36 – reason - Before the 2016 revision of NCC bylaws, those appointed by member municipalities were titled “representatives” In 2016, the North Country Council Commission changed this to “commissioners,” proposing changing back to a representative to align with RSA. There was clarifying discussion regarding methods of becoming a “commissioner,” Commission meetings, and the current title.

- Office of Energy and Planning is now Office of Planning & Development – change

- Proposed** Clarifying language - The area served by the Economic Development District, as authorized by the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration, includes the **remainder of Grafton County municipalities not included within** ~~entirety of~~ the Regional Planning Commission **area.** ~~in addition to all of Grafton County.~~

- **Quorum**

- Ms. Moren-Grey provided the background that, over the years, it is has been a challenge to meet the quorum requirement for a Commission meeting. Before the 2016 bylaw revisions, no quorum was required, and that business could be conducted with 51% of the qualified voting members in attendance.

Ms. Moren-Grey also again reminded the group that the revision proposed was approved by the Board of Directors and recommended to the full Commission on 05/18/2023.

Ms. Moren-Grey reviewed the materials, including the current quorum requirement, proposed revision, and alternatives looked at. She also noted that in doing research, staff reviewed other RPC's requirements, and the major difference was specifically calling out the member municipalities with appointed representatives.

Currently, the Council has 35 members, which requires 10 commissioners to be present. On average, there are 15 appointed representatives from those 35 member municipalities.

Ms. Moren-Grey also commented that in July, the Council will be conducting an outreach campaign to connect with towns hoping to increase participation in areas of Council work.

She reviewed the current and proposed quorum language.

Current - A quorum for NCC Commission Meetings will be met when 25% of the member municipalities are represented and two of the Commissioners are also Board members.

Proposed Change - Quorum for NCC Commission Meetings will be met when ~~25%~~ **51%** of the member municipalities **with appointed representatives** are represented and two of the Commissioners are also Board members.

Ms. Moren-Grey asked for questions & discussion.

Discussion

The group discussed the process of being appointed for clarification, some members had specific questions regarding their appointment.

The number of appointed representatives per municipality was discussed – each member municipality can have two (2) appointed representatives if the municipalities population is over 10,000, then three (3) can be appointed.

A question was raised concerning the number of votes each municipality can have. As the bylaws currently read, it is one vote; prior to the 2016 revision,

each appointed representative could have a vote. Further discussion included if all appointed members could vote, there could be a balance issue with larger communities having a larger vote and appointed representatives from the same municipalities voting opposite each other.

The group discussed that the revised language, including appointed representatives, was of value so that business could get done and not negatively impact those participating regularly.

One Commissioner felt that the 51% proposed at the moment lowers the quorum if, through the outreach campaign, if participation is increased, it will have the potential to raise that number and be a challenge again to meet. It was proposed that the quorum requirement could be a fixed number i.e. 10 or a lower %. The group was reminded that the Board of Directors looked at 25% vs. 51% and concluded it was too low. In addition, there is a potential with a fixed number that, if due to membership or appointed commissioner representation only a lower number could be met, leaving no possibility of meeting a quorum.

MOTION Representative Decoteau moved to approve the quorum revision language as a Quorum for NCC Commission Meetings will be met when 51% of the member municipalities with appointed representatives are represented and two of the Commissioners are also Board members. Representative Robitaille seconded it. Discussion continued revisiting points made above. Representative DeLalla asked to amend the motion to include that the Commission let the revision stand for one year before revisiting or making revisions. **Representative Decoteau rescinded the first motion and made another MOTION** to approve the quorum revision language as a Quorum for NCC Commission Meetings will be met when 51% of the member municipalities with appointed representatives are represented and two of the Commissioners are also Board members. This revision would stay in effect for one year before revising again. Representative Robitaille Seconded it. All in favor. Motion Carried

- **Article VII. Officers**
Proposed – elimination of board position secretary – reason the position is not utilized and limited to no responsibilities
- **Article VIII. Board of Directors | Section VIII.02 f) & i)**

Proposed – f) Approve contracts over ~~\$10,000~~ **\$25,000** that were not approved by the ~~Commissioners~~ Representatives as part of the Annual Budget and Work Plan. – reason cost of doing business has increased since 2016

Proposed – Complete Removal i) Authorize sole source contracting for purchases consistent with the Council’s Financial Policy. – reason this is in the financial policy

- **Article IX Committees | Section IX.02**

Proposed - Complete Removal Committees may have members who are not NCC Commissioners as long as two members are from the Board of Directors – reason this is a barrier to participation requiring individuals to be on both.

- **Article XI Annual Meeting**

Proposed - The Annual Meeting of the Council shall be held in the fall, **late spring early summer** of the year at a time and place to be selected by the Board of Directors – *the* reason this aligns with the Council’s fiscal year.

MOTION Representative Decoteau moved to approve revisions as presented to formatting, alignment with RSA (retitle Commissioner to Representative), Article III. Area Service (clarifying language added for EDD), Article VII. Officers elimination of Board of Directors position secretary, VIII.02 f) increase amount from \$10,000 to \$25,00, VII.02 i), IX.02 removal, and Article XI revision annual meeting to be held in late spring or early summer. Representative Gaetjens-Oleson seconded it. No discussion. All in favor. Motion Carried.

Representative Decoteau recognized and expressed appreciation for the work and effort Mr. Steele & Ms. Moren-Grey has put into the council’s work.

Public Comment

none

MOTION Representative Decoteau moved to adjourn. Representative Martland seconded it. **No discussion. All in favor. Motion Carried**

The meeting Adjourned 6:05 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Michelle Moren-Grey, Executive Director
