

# Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee Meeting

Friday, July 15th 2016 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Strafford Regional Planning Commission  
150 Wakefield Street, Suite 12, Conference Room 1A  
Rochester, NH

Draft Minutes

## 1. Introductions

**Members Present:** Bill Connor (Somersworth), Tom Crosby (Madbury), Jon Hotchkiss (Middleton), Suzanne Huard (Rollinsford), Robert Jaffin (Rochester), Sandra Keans (Rochester), Tony McManus (Dover), Peter Nelson (Newmarket), Judy Nelson (Rollinsford), Kenn Ortmann (Rochester), Victoria Parmele (Northwood), Sam Reid (Dover), Brian Tapscott (Somersworth), Tim White (NHDES),

**Staff Present:** Cynthia Copeland (Executive Director), Rachel Dewey (Data Analyst), Lynn Cherry (Regional Planning and Communications Assistant), Rachael Mack (GIS Planner), Natasha Leuchanka (Regional Planner), Colin Lentz (Regional Transportation Planner), Mathew Sullivan (Sr. Regional Planner)

**Guests:** Shanna Saunders (Somersworth),

*The meeting began with a quorum at 9:05am*

## 2. Staff Communications

C. Copeland announced that Natasha Leuchanka would be resigning her position on July 21, 2016 and pursuing a PHD at the University of New Hampshire. She thanked Natasha for her diligent work and contributions to SRPC and highlighted Natasha's efforts in helping SRPC lead a statewide effort on performance based planning.

## 3. Action Item(s)

### 3.1. Minutes from June 17<sup>th</sup> 2016

Motion was made to approve the minutes by K. Ortmann

Seconded by J. Hotchkiss

Vote: All in favor;

B. Tapscott, T. Crosby, and T. White abstaining

## 4. Discussion Item(s)

### 4.1. Improving Project Solicitation for FY2017

- Future Policy Implications

C. Lentz gave a presentation on how a performance-based planning approach would affect the statewide project selection process and how SRPC is working to adapt project solicitation in order to increase the number of local and regional projects in statewide plans. He reviewed the project solicitation process completed in spring of 2015 and explained that his focus for the upcoming project solicitation round in fall 2016-winter 2017 would be to assist municipalities in developing standardized project scopes and

cost estimates to increase their preparedness for inclusion in the statewide Ten Year Plan. C. Lentz presented several questions to develop discussion and get feedback from committee members:

- How should SRPC present information about transportation improvement projects to enable the Policy Committee to make informed decisions?
- How to ensure performance-based planning approach integrates policy areas such as
  - Complete Streets
  - Climate change resilience
  - Public health
- How can SRPC adapt/implement project solicitation process to ensure that regional projects are funded in statewide plans?
- How could SRPC communicate with you (committee members) on the programs, plans, and processes so that committee members can make informed decisions?

T. White agreed that getting an early start on the project solicitation process was important and said planning staff should meet with all communities and explain 10-year process with them so that they can be involved with the TIP. C. Lentz said he will be meeting with each community to accomplish that goal.

P. Nelson said there is room for improvement in the process by embracing new tools that foster collaboration and communication. He suggested that there are multiple online resources that can be used for collaboration between communities and make it easier to engage with members of the community on issues and publicly discuss topics online. C. Lentz agreed and said SRPC is looking to utilize such web-based tools, but it will be a long-term effort to implement them.

K. Ortmann noted that it is important to keep in mind that certain business [such as transportation planning using federal funds] needs to be done in a public setting, and an online forum may not be appropriate. He added that it is important to ensure that communities understand criteria for the selection of projects. C. Lentz agreed and noted that the project solicitation process is for projects on state-owned routes. He added that selection criteria used in the previous round would likely change.

C. Copeland summarized current discussion points and suggested that a two-step process could be used for project solicitation: initial outreach and education to communities, followed by face-to-face meetings to refine scopes and cost estimates.

W. Connor asked what causes locally proposed projects to not be included in the Ten Year Plan. C. Lentz explained that the project solicitation and selection process is designed to be objective and quantitative (based on common criteria), and that performance-based planning will ultimately direct the state's planning priorities in the future. C. Copeland noted that SRPC has fiscal capacity to propose and program projects based on the regional share of federal funding allocated to the State. She said this is especially important given that the Newington-Dover project will be completed within the next few years. V. Parmele said the project solicitation process could help towns stay engaged over the long timescales required for projects to move from vision to construction.

P. Nelson said that it would be helpful for communities to have knowledge of coastal sea-level rise so that they could make informed long-term decisions about future transportation needs and propose projects. He said it would be great if areas vulnerable to sea level rise could be viewed online as maps, and if there could be a single source of information about available funding. J. Nelson agreed that projections of future changes (including climate change, traffic patterns, and demographics) are going to be critical for long-term planning at the local and regional level.

B. Connor asked whether projects proposed by non-dues-paying member municipalities would be docked points in the project scoring process. C. Lentz said that had not been discussed for the fall 2016 project solicitation round, but he said points were NOT docked from non-dues-paying municipalities in the 2015

round and he was not aware of any plans to do so in the upcoming round. This decision was made by the SRPC Policy Committee.

C. Lentz explained that in the coming months he would be working to design a standardized template or spreadsheet to help municipalities develop scopes and cost estimates for proposed projects.

V. Parmele asked how the education step in this process would work. C. Lentz explained that during the previous round both steps were completed at the same time at face-to-face meetings. He said he will be working to send information to local staff and boards much earlier in order to facilitate project development. C. Copeland explained that this will require a careful and flexible process for coordinating project solicitation with continuing development of the performance-based planning approach.

J. Nelson said that it would be great to have more online tools and resources, but emphasized the large amount of time and energy that would be required of SRPC staff in order to accomplish such goals. C. Copeland explained that SRPC would shortly be publishing standardized maps online after they have been reviewed and approved by municipalities.

P. Nelson said he would like to see more readily available information about the progress of local projects so that community members can be more informed about current project costs and status. C. Lentz said state-managed projects have detailed pages on the NHDOT website. He said he was currently developing an SRPC project portfolio with other staff that would be a central source for updated project status.

K. Ortmann referenced the Granit State Future project and suggested that special attention be paid to specific phrasing in project scope language. B. Conner added that municipal staff and representatives will pay close attention to how project solicitation questions are phrased.

## **5. Project Update(s)**

### **5.1. Performance-based Planning - SHRP2 Update**

N. Leuchanka updated the committee on the progress of the SHRP2 project. She said the agreement made the Governor and Council agenda on June 29, 2016 and SRPC had received a notice to proceed from NHDOT. She said sub-agreements have been sent out to MPO and RPC partners and that she was working with L. Cherry and R. Dewey to prepare for the SHRP2 kickoff workshop in July.

## **6. Other Business**

### **6.1. Outline of summer-fall statewide planning schedule**

- 2017-2020 STIP – August review

C. Lentz explained that he had just received the new draft of the STIP update and will be working on that to have it available for TAC and Policy review during a public comment period. He said SRPC was waiting for important information from NHDOT, but that they were working to have a draft TIP ready for August and a 20-day public comment period.

- Transportation Alternatives Program process

C. Lentz explained that three letters of interest had been submitted for TAP projects by communities in the Strafford region: Dover, UNH/Durham, and Somersworth. He explained the estimated schedule of the TAP project selection process. TAP applicants will next be attending one of two available mandatory meetings (on August 10, 2016 or August 27, 2016). Full applications are due to NHDOT by September 2<sup>nd</sup>, and they will be reviewed and distributed to representative RPCs between September 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. C. Lentz said at the August TAC meeting he will be requesting volunteers for a Subcommittee of the TAC to help review and score applications. SRPC has till October 28<sup>th</sup> to get rankings reviewed and approved by

committees. The state will then review projects and send award letters out to awardees by the end of December.

- FHWA & FTA National Proposed Rulemaking – MPO planning area and coordination reform

C. Lentz explained that FHWA and FTA recently published a national proposed rulemaking (NPRM) concerning MPO coordination and planning area reform could have significant implications for SRPC. He provided an overview of the implications of the NPRM which seeks to improve inter-MPO coordination and formally require MPO boundaries to coincide with census designated urbanized areas. The NPRM requires a single MPO to encompass a single urbanized area. This could require hundreds of MPOs throughout the country to adjust their boundaries. However, the NPRM also specifies that multiple MPOs can share an urbanized area if they share one Metropolitan Transportation Plan, one Transportation Improvement Program, and a shared set of performance goals, measures, and targets.

T. White mentioned that at a recent Rockingham Policy Committee meeting they provided a similar presentation. Representatives from towns of Rockingham Regional Planning Commission are worried that small towns of the region may be overlooked if the focus is shifted to urbanized areas. T. White stressed that all opinions and views be included in a comment letter because this is a significant change that is being done.

B. Jaffin suggested that every municipality should write a comment letter and submit it to the docket because it makes a difference. He also suggested reaching out to the congressional delegation.

S. Huard noted that the urbanized area map (provided at the meeting) showed Rollinsford as being no longer part of the urbanized area. She asked what the implications of the change were, especially related to funding and eligibility for grants. C. Copeland said the U.S. Census would be preparing for the 2020 decennial census in 2018, and suggested that municipalities contact the regional Census Bureau in Boston. K. Ortmann asked if SRPC could provide guidance to communities so they understand the implications of census changes and write informed responses.

V. Parmele asked what caused FHWA and FTA to publish the proposed rule. C. Lentz said he was not completely sure of the details, but noted they would be learning more at an FHWA webinar that afternoon. He said the overall goal seemed to be improving coordination between MPOs and simplifying jurisdictional boundaries. C. Copeland said some large metropolitan regions have extremely complex urbanized areas, and that the decision may be driven in-part by perspectives of federal transportation agencies as they observe all MPOs. She added that The Census Bureau process for establishing urbanized areas plays a critical role in this decision; staff will include a map with the packet of information they develop for TAC and Policy.

P. Nelson said the MPO boundaries on the map are missing. C. Lentz responded that for the Strafford region, the SRPC and MPO boundaries are the same. P. Nelson suggested that transportation corridors be added to the map.

P. Nelson asked if the urbanized areas of Dover/Rochester and Portsmouth/Kittery should be combined, and if the NPRM required forming new additional MPOs. C. Copeland explained that the NPRM focused on reorganizing existing MPOs around existing urbanized areas. She said

SPRC and Rockingham RPC used to be the “Seacoast MPO”, but they were split in 2007 based on increasing populations in the Dover-Rochester and Portsmouth-Kittery urbanized areas. C. Copeland said splitting the MPOs into separate organizations made sense given the large distances between the seacoast and inland communities like Wakefield. This enabled greater participation by municipalities throughout a more manageable region.

C. Copeland added that the Metro Plan (which was approved in June) was designed to integrate with the regional Master Plan that was developed through the Granite State Future project. The proposed rule would negate those efforts to create integrated planning documents for a single region.

T. White said that at a recent Rockingham Planning Commission meeting people wondered if this proposed planning rule went into effect whether RPC staff would have the resources to incorporate changes.

K. Ortmann said communities need resources to understand the issues related to the NPRM so that they can respond to the docket. They should also have a reasonable amount of time to respond before the end of the comment period so that they have time to decide and to authorize someone to write a letter. C. Lentz said he would be putting together a packet of information for TAC and Policy members as soon as possible.

B. Connor asked if a regional meeting with SRPC and municipalities could be organized to discuss the impacts of the proposed rulemaking. C. Copeland explained that staff will be extremely busy trying to develop a new TIP and are waiting for additional information from NHDOT in order to complete a draft for TAC and Policy review. She added that with a staff member leaving, multiple critical projects in process, and the NPRM’s very recent publication, time is short and staff will do their best to gather input from TAC and Policy members.

B. Jaffin said he thought a unified transportation plan would probably be of great value for the region. He emphasized that the NPRM is not a law yet; it is a proposed implementation of the U.S. Code and is not likely to be wholly rejected at this point. He said comment letters are meant to propose modifications to the initial proposal and that input from citizens will be what drives change for this rule.

V. Parmele asked if SRPC could send information to towns with context so that they could understand the proposed change to the rule and can adequately comment in time. C. Lentz responded that SRPC can compile some information and distribute it to communities.

P. Nelson asks what the implications would be for Newmarket if the community was reincorporated into the Rockingham MPO. C. Copeland explained that SRPC and RPC have an MOU saying Newmarket is a community of the Strafford Region because of its historical connection. She added that there is a need for clarification and more information on this issue. C. Lentz added that if the NPRM was implemented in its current form, that could potentially move Newmarket into RPC. C. Copeland stated that for now the MOU will keep Newmarket in SRPC.

L. Cherry added that the decision to move Newmarket back to RPC is based on discussion between MPOs and the Governor about the complexity of the planning area.

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V. Parmelle asked if the FWHA webinar would be available online after it is shown today. C. Lentz said that he will be able to distribute it after today.

B. Connor asked if Strafford County was involved in the NPRM process. C. Lentz said he wasn't aware that the County was involved at all, that this NPRM was not related to their work.

7. **Citizen's Forum** – Citizens of the Strafford region are invited to speak on the subject matter of the meeting. Statements shall be limited to three minutes

No Citizens brought comments forward

**8. Adjournment**


K. Ortmann Made a motion to adjourn the meeting

Seconded by J. Hotchkiss

Vote: All in favor

The meeting was adjourned at 10:41am

Minutes submitted by,  
Colin Lentz, Recording Secretary

Approved by   
Name Printed: Victoria M Carmele

Signed Victoria Parmele

Date: 8/19/16

