

## Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee

### Meeting Minutes

**Friday, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2020      9:00 – 11:00 AM**

Strafford Regional Planning Commission  
Virtual Meeting Via Zoom  
Rochester, NH

The meeting was called to order at 9:05am

Prior to beginning the meeting the Chair read the following statement:

As Chair of the Strafford MPO Policy Committee I have found that, due to the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-08, this Committee is authorized to meet electronically. Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to the meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, this is to confirm that we are:

*a) Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means;*

We are utilizing the Zoom platform for this electronic meeting. All members of the Committee have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through the Zoom platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone # 1-646-558-8656 and meeting ID 861 1044 1322, or by clicking on the following website address:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87001441551>

*b) Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting;*

We previously gave notice to the public of how to access the meeting using Zoom, and instructions are provided on the SRPC website at [Strafford.org](http://Strafford.org), and clicking on the link for the May Policy Committee.

*c) Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access;*

If anybody has a problem, please call 603-559-3500 (ext. 102) or email Colin at:

[clentz@strafford.org](mailto:clentz@strafford.org).

*d) Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting.*

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, we will adjourn the meeting and have it rescheduled at that time. Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote.

Let's start the meeting by taking a Roll Call attendance. When each member states their presence, also please state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to-Know law.

## 1. **Attendance:**

### Committee Members

Bill Watson (NHDOT), Bill Fisher (Farmington), Michael Williams (COAST), David Landry (Dover), Mark Richardson (Somersworth), Leslie Schwartz (Durham), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Tim White (NHDES), Wayne Burton (Durham), Peter Nelson (Newmarket), Victoria Parmele (Northwood), Don Hamann (Rochester), Barbara Holstein (Rochester), Joe Boudreau (Rochester).

### Guests

Stephanie Carver (SMPDC)

### Staff

Jennifer Czysz, Colin Lentz, Nancy O'Connor, Rachel Dewey, Jackson Rand

## 2. **Staff Communications**

J. Czysz gave a brief update on SRPC operations with the stay-at-home order. She said staff continue to work from home but they are working on getting the office ready for the end of May so the summer data collection team can start their work. Two summer field work interns will be starting at that time. New protocols for field work will be put in place to minimize risk of exposure to COVID-19. This includes keep field staff physically separate as they work in pairs. J. Czysz said she had acquired personal protective equipment for the office. She said the re-opening plan depends on coordination with the City of Rochester since the office is in a city building. J. Czysz added that the SRPC Executive Committee and staff have reconsidered how the SRPC annual meeting will be held because of the risk of having the usual large crowd indoors. The business items usually dealt with will be moved to the beginning of the June Policy meeting (via zoom), and SRPC will hold a virtual webinar in late June. Staff are in contact with potential speakers to discuss the issue of resilience in light of impacts from COVID-19.

## 3. **Public Hearing – Amendment #4 to the 2019-2022 TIP**

M. Williams made a motion to open the public hearing

Seconded by M. Bobinsky

Vote: Unanimous in favor (via roll call vote)

C. Lentz presented information about the draft amendment which one local project:

- Rochester (14350)

He explained proposed changes to the project and funding. M. Bobinsky asked about the funding change and why such a change amount was included in an amendment [which has a higher funding change threshold for projects to be included]. C. Lentz said this normally wouldn't qualify as an amendment, but the project was included because of the timing of the amendment.

D. Hamman made a motion to close the public hearing  
Seconded by L. Schwartz  
Vote: unanimous in favor (via roll call vote)

#### **4. Action Item(s)**

##### **4.1 Minutes from February 21<sup>st</sup> 2020**

L. Schwartz made a motion to approve the minutes as written.  
Seconded by M. Bobinsky  
Vote: unanimous in favor (via roll call vote)  
(B. Watson, W. Burton, B. Fisher, P. Nelson, L. Schwartz, V. Parmele abstained)

##### **4.2 Amendment #4 to the 2019-2022 TIP**

D. Hamann made a motion to approve Amendment #4  
Seconded by M. Williams  
Vote: Unanimous in favor (via roll call vote)

#### **5. Discussion Items**

##### **5.1 Review the SRPC Strategic Plan**

J. Czynsz gave a presentation on the SRPC Strategic Plan approved by the SRPC Executive Committee. She gave an overview on the current efforts and future actions in the plan, which focuses on three main strategic areas: 1) Planning Services and Current Issues; 2) Relationships, Marketing, and Communications; and 3) Internal Roles, Responsibilities, and Opportunities. Jen mentioned a number of recent successes: expanding the number of towns for which SRPC staff provide direct circuit riding services; advancement of online GIS services; additional environmental planning contracts; and improvements to in-office technology and project collaboration. J. Czynsz noted several examples of SRPC improving outreach and communications to identify opportunities for collaborative projects and partnerships and celebrate planning efforts. She said staff are working on an update to the SRPC website and building it all in-house. SRPC employee work policies have been updated (including a formal telecommuting policy) with more flexibility with an eye toward staff retention and development. J. Czynsz noted the development of relationships with commissioners their importance in maintaining a connection with the on-the-ground situation in municipalities.

L. Schwartz highlighted the value of improving options for telecommuting and virtual participation in meetings. She is regularly unable to attend in-person meetings because of scheduling conflicts and the virtual meetings have improved that issue. She asked if the option to attend meetings virtually would continue in the future. J. Czynsz noted that the current virtual meetings are enabled by the governor's emergency order related to RSA 91-A (public right-to-know law). Adapting the current

legal framework to include continued virtual participation will be an issue in the coming months. Virtual participation would be allowed after the emergency order and shutdown pass, but SRPC would still need to provide a physical location. This has not been an option since the office is in a city-owned facility. C. Lentz noted that current law doesn't prohibit people from participating via phone or other remote means but does prohibit them from voting on action items.

## 5.2 How are COVID-19 affecting the region, and how can we be better prepared in the future?

C. Lentz said SRPC wanted to know how COVID-19 is affecting the region and how can we be better prepared in the future. He had several prompting questions:

- What are immediate impacts to your community, and what long-term impacts do you anticipate?
- What technical expertise could SRPC provide to aid your community's recovery and preparedness?
- What research and outreach should SRPC focus on to develop lessons-learned and recommendations?

W. Burton noted local impacts in Durham due to decreases in the UNH student population and faculty and staff being laid off or working from home. He said the future of UNH operations for the fall semester (and how it will impact the town of Durham) is unsure.

J. Boudreau noted the importance of the vulnerability of seniors and asked about the related planning challenges. C. Lentz said there was an immediate transportation impact to transit services that many seniors and people with disabilities rely on to access medical appointments and other mobility needs. C. Lentz asked if other municipal members had seen additional impacts to vulnerable populations – specifically people who are battling opioid addiction and the people who provide recovery services.

B. Holstein said she works directly with several organizations that provide such support services and they are really struggling under the circumstances (this includes places like the SOS all-recovery organization in Rochester). Meetings of recovery groups are being help remotely and organization staff are reaching out to people directly but the organization offices are closed. People in recovery are very vulnerable to relapse being stuck at home without the network of support. Additionally, nursing homes or group homes for people in recovery or rehabilitation are unable to accept new or returning patients. Organizations and facilities that provide recovery and rehabilitation services are distributing cell phones to maintain contact.

J. Boudreau suggested that the current crisis shows the need for communities to do more to plan for long-term impacts and recovery over the course of a year or more, not just months. B. Holstein agreed, saying that additional services and facility capacity will be needed. She noted the current challenge of providing food and shelter for homeless and extremely low-income families and individuals.

L. Schwartz asked about SRPC's role in preparedness and response planning and whether that role could be expanded in light of the current crisis. J. Czysz said SRPC had been invited to apply as an Economic Development District for specific EDA grant funding through the CARES Act to increase regional economic recovery. SRPC can apply for up to \$400,000 and eligible activities

include regional resilience planning, incorporating more resilience into the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, and providing direct technical assistance to municipalities. SRPC could potentially hire additional staff to accomplish the scope of a grant. J. Czysz asked members to contact SRPC her or James Burdin with input on how SRPC should use grant funds should they be awarded. She said the grant application is due the end of the first week of June, so any comments should be submitted by the end of next week. C. Lentz said he would like to continue some of SRPC's recent resilience planning efforts, which focused on damage to physical infrastructure, to expand to economic and community health. W. Burton said SRPC needs municipal input on the potential EDA grant. He asked that SRPC staff send information about the grant application to the committee members so they could provide input. J. Czysz said they would send that out immediately.

P. Nelson said the focus under the current circumstances should be on testing. Rochester has the only testing facility in the region. He said he would like to see SRPC doing more on providing technical assistance and finding funding for additional testing capacity in the region. C. Lentz said he would also like to work on resilience planning around public health in preparation for a future situation similar to the current coronavirus.

M. Richardson shared that he had received testing at the Rochester facility (at the Brock St National Guard station) and it was very easy and well organized.

M. Bobinsky the EDA grant was great news and would love to provide input from Somersworth's perspective. He said Somersworth is looking at future bicycle and pedestrian safety under the COVID-19 crisis, including touch-free signal activation. He said expanding capacity for outdoor dining for local restaurants is an issue all municipalities are looking at. M. Bobinsky recalled that cooperative purchasing of raw materials and public utilities was discussed at the May TAC meeting. He said Somersworth would be interested in joining with other municipalities to get group rates on materials (such as road maintenance salt and sand) or public utilities (e.g. electricity rates). J. Czysz mentioned that SRPC staff hold weekly meetings with economic development stakeholders and discuss many of these issues.

V. Parmele said food security should go hand-in-hand with transportation and resilience planning for the region. Access to local food is a rising issue and it should be included in the EDA grant application. C. Lentz agreed, saying NH relies heavily on out-of-state sources for food, and is not prepared for a major disruption in the food delivery network.

## **6. Other Business**

C. Lentz presented a draft vision for the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and asked for initial input from Policy members. He noted several comments and edits from NHDOT. He asked members to review the vision and send comments or bring them to the next meeting.

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

## 8. **Adjournment**

D. Hamann made a motion to adjourn

Seconded by W. Burton

Vote: unanimous in favor (via roll call vote)

Meeting adjourned at 11:00am