

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 19th 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 2020-10, 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 852 4088 7267, or by clicking on the following website address:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85240887267>

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, 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.

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

Evan McDougal (Wakefield), Steve Diamond (Barrington) Leslie Schwartz (Durham), Peter Nelson (Newmarket), David Landry (Dover), Don Hamann (Rochester), Barbara Holstein (Rochester), Tim White (NHDES), Rad Nichols (COAST), Joe Boudreau (Rochester), Victoria Parmele (Northwood), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Mark Richardson (Somersworth), Bill Fisher (Farmington), Beverly Cray (UNH)

Guests

Stephanie Carver (SMPDC)

Staff

Jennifer Czysz, Shayna Silvia, Colin Lentz, Alaina Rogers, Nancy O'Connor, Stefanie Casella, Jackson Rand

NOTE: this was a joint meeting of the SRPC commissioners and the Strafford MPO Policy Committee. The first part of the meeting agenda was reserved for annual business that needed to be conducted by the Commissioners; then the Strafford MPO Policy Committee was convened to conduct monthly MPO business.

2. Convene SRPC Commission Meeting

Minutes for this meeting were recorded separately and will be available on the [SRPC website](#)

3. Convene SMPO Policy Committee

4. Staff Communications

5. Action Item(s)

5.1 Minutes from May 15, 2020 [VOTE]

D. Hamann made a motion to approve the minutes as written.

Seconded by P. Nelson

Vote: unanimous in favor (via roll call vote)

6. Discussion Items

6.1 Metro Plan and Ten Year Plan projects – updates on the process and discussion about increasing considerations for equity

C. Lentz explained that SRPC staff had been working on the Metro Plan update – focusing recently on much more concise written content. He said he would send out a revised outline that showed the proposed changes. C. Lentz explained that Rachel Dewey had been working to build a universal database of metrics related to all of SRPC’s work. Many of the metrics will be relevant to transportation planning specifically, but most will be relevant to economic development and housing as well. The new Metro Plan structure will use very concise snapshots of overarching issues (such as population changes, housing and jobs, and public transit – no more than 3-4 pages each), combined with single-page reports for each of the metrics. This was designed to show more clearly how metrics, regional trends, and proposed projects were linked. C. Lentz said Rachel was also working on enhanced analysis of areas where people may have lower income, low access to a vehicle, speak a different language, or other reason why they might be more vulnerable. That analysis will play a greater role in the regional planning process, and staff will be able to make a targeted effort to reach people who may have difficulty making their voice heard in decision-making.

C. Lentz reminded Policy members that the criteria for scoring Ten Year Plan projects are being updated. All RPCs will use the same set of criteria but are able to weight them individually as regions. He said two criteria were added for this round: Natural hazard resilience, and Equity, Environmental Justice, & Accessibility. C. Lentz said the criteria were also now grouped by whether they concerned the “Need” for a project, or its “Impact”. He expected the final criteria guidance document to be finalized that day and would send it to the committee. C. Lentz said the TAC committee would be weighting the criteria, he would conduct an initial scoring of the candidate projects (about 10 of them at the current time), and prepare information to have a quantitative and qualitative discussion with committee members.

C. Lentz said he had attended a recent webinar hosted by the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) about the federal transportation re-authorization. He noted that the current FAST Act expires in September and will need to be replaced. Both houses of Congress and the President’s office are drafting versions of a reauthorization bill; the House just published theirs. The House version was developed by the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee – it increases funding levels over the FAST Act, includes increased funding specifically for public transit and MPOs, and increases focus on climate change. C. Lentz noted that the bill has an uphill battle because it does not specify where the additional funding would come from, and it will be in competition with bills from the senate and executive branch.

V. Parmele asked for an update on the Ten Year Plan approval process. C. Lentz said he had attended a virtual public hearing of the NH Senate Transportation Committee. Because the pandemic severely reduced the amount of time the NH House and Senate had to deliberate on legislation, many bills were grouped together for public hearings. The Ten Year Plan was grouped with other transportation legislation into HB1182, which became an “omnibus” bill. C. Lentz said he submitted written testimony for the draft Ten Year Plan centered on the Policy Committee’s planning priorities. He noted that the omnibus bill included a bill to give NHDOT access to crash data with other state agencies and RPCs (no private or personal information can be shared; including names, address, date of birth, VIN numbers, etc.). The Senate approved the omnibus bill, including the Ten Year Plan and the crash data bill. Both go to the Governor for review and signature. Improved access to safety data will enable RPCs to be more detailed in regional analysis.

7. Project Updates

7.1 Ten Year Plan Corridor studies update

C. Lentz said Bill Watson from NHDOT had given an update on the statewide corridor studies process at the June TAC committee. NHDOT will be hiring a consultant to prioritize potential corridors and conduct the studies themselves. NHDOT is under political pressure from members of the executive council to conduct studies in specific areas. NHDOT thought it would be best to hire an outside professional who would be tasked with balancing the political and objective justifications for corridor study priorities. Bill Watson has said that the full scope of the consultant's process is being determined but it will include seeking input from RPCs on their regional corridors.

D. Hamann said Rochester DPW had requested that funding for improvements at the Lowell St Intersection be swapped for improvements on NH11. He said Rochester council members were not sure where the original Lowell St project came from. C. Lentz confirmed that he had been discussing the NH11 project with Rochester DPW staff and NHDOT and that NHDOT had approved the funding swap. He said the original Lowell St project came from a solicitation before he started and would have been proposed by city council members or city staff. It's obvious that NH11 improvements are a higher priority due to increased congestion and a planned expansion of the Granite Ridge commercial development. C. Lentz reminded committee members that NHDOT always checks with RPCs to confirm their Ten Year Plan projects and is open to swapping programmed funding and projects. The Lowell St swap worked well because it was funding in Rochester and swapping projects in the same year. This would have been more complicated if Rochester had proposed to advance the substitute project schedule as well. J. Czysz added that the swap will be completed as part of the upcoming Ten Year Plan round and confirmed in March of 2021, when SRPC submits a final list of projects. C. Lentz said SRPC needed to submit a draft list of candidate projects to NHDOT for engineering review by December 6th [this was subsequently updated to November 6th because of a scheduling update from NHDOT].

8. Other Business

8.1 Local COVID-19 recovery and adaptation updates

C. Lentz asked Policy members for local updates on their communities efforts to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic.

D. Hamann explained that Rochester had just opened a new play structure on the city commons. They had been near completion just before the pandemic shutdown and had been postponed until now. He said city council had just had their first in-person meeting in a high school building since they couldn't keep 6 feet apart in the council chamber.

B. Fisher said the Farmington town office would be opening next week for limited in-person visits. The library would also be opening soon and the Select board was looking at using the school buildings for voting since the usual location lacked sufficient space.

M. Bobinsky said the city had been working on outdoor dining modifications for downtown restaurants and downtown shops are beginning to reopen. Little league has started on a limited basis at the local park – no games, just practice. City council and boards continue to meet on zoom and a reopening plan for the city hall and other municipal buildings is in development. Employees will be required to wear face masks and the public will be encouraged to wear them as well.

S. Diamond explained that he had been examining parts of Barrington where emergency services would face difficulty reaching people. Many places on private roads or very rural areas (many of which are where low-income residents live) have access barriers that would block emergency vehicles.

Evan McDougal said Wakefield was seeing more people coming to the lakes earlier than usual and realtors are fully booked showing houses and properties. C. Lentz added that SRPC staff living in Concord reported that I93 was just as busy with tourist traffic. V. Parmele said she had heard rumors of people relocating to NH from large cities permanently.

R. Nichols said COAST would be starting their new service concept on June 29th. COAST had to shut down at the end of March and had been reopening sequentially since May 11th. Ridership was almost back to 40% of the original numbers. Some routes had rebounded faster; the Farmington route was almost back to pre-covid levels. R. Nichols said COAST ridership had been rebounding faster than many parts of the country and this was an indication of the value of the service in the region. Many riders had been communicating to COAST how critical the bus was for their daily lives. COAST was continuing to procure personal protective equipment.

B. Cray said UNH was going to hold a public hearing about proposed cuts to the campus transit system. Buses were currently not running, but would likely open for the fall semester.

J. Boudreau suggested that the pandemic was likely going to cause a permanent change to large businesses and offices. For instance, Liberty Mutual was planning to enable more staff to work from home and other businesses may be permanently eliminating office space to reduce overhead costs.

M. Richardson added his son said that many technology companies in California are seriously considering switching to remote-only workers. J. Czysz added that it is currently impossible to predict future impacts and that makes planning difficult. She also had heard that some businesses are reluctant to completely switch to 100% remote work and eliminate office space. R. Nichols said the increase in telehealth services has impacted fixed route and demand response service.

Committee members discussed emerging and potential impacts from the pandemic.

C. Lentz reminded committee members of the information he had sent regarding a future funding opportunity through Electrify America (part of the Volkswagen settlement). Electrify America is looking for input on how the funding should be invested.

9. **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.

No members of the public were present to provide comments

10. **Adjournment**

M. Bobinsky made a motion to adjourn; seconded by B. Cray

The meeting was adjourned at 10:50am