

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, October 16th 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 2020-18, 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

Don Hamann (Rochester), Tim White (NHDES), Leslie Schwartz (Durham), Michael Williams (COAST), Mark Richardson (Somersworth), Bill Fisher (Farmington), Richard Michaud (Somersworth), Victoria Parmele (Northwood), Barbara Holstein (Rochester), Peter Nelson (Newmarket), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Glenn Davison (NHDOT).

Staff

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

2. **Staff Communications**

J. Czysz announced that SRPC had hired Natalie Moles as the Economic Recovery Coordinator, and she'll start on November 2nd. She said Natalie had a planning degree and had worked in a county planning office in Virginia, then recently in the hospitality industry. J. Czysz said her combined experience was going to be great for economic recovery planning related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. **Action Item(s)**

3.1 Minutes from September 18th 2020 [VOTE]

M. Bobinsky made a motion to approve the minutes as written.

Seconded by S. Diamond

Vote: unanimous in favor (via roll call vote)

4. **Discussion Items** - Provide feedback on draft Metro Plan theme content (see memo included in packet)

C. Lentz provided a brief summary of the role of the Metro Plan, the goals and progress on the update process, and the purpose of the discussion (also provided in a meeting prep memo). He noted that the deadline for the Metro Plan update was the end of June, 2021. The goal for the update and reorganization of the plan is to reduce the volume of text, increase data visualization, and better tie the goals, objectives, and projects together through data analysis. C. Lentz explained that he would be presenting individual parts of the plan for committee review between now and June so they could review them separately instead of trying to read the whole document at once.

C. Lentz said the first piece to review was the draft “themes”. Previous versions of the plan are very text-heavy and a goal of the update was to reduce the amount of text substantially. The themes were designed to discuss the core issues affecting transportation planning in the region – to set the context for data analysis and proposed projects later in the plan. They are meant to be readable for a wide audience and:

- Organize the plan into major topic areas (economics, housing, modes, infrastructure conditions, etc.)
- Describe central issues being addressed (e.g. senior population growth, funding sustainability for transit)
- Provide a reference point for readers to interpret the data and analysis in the plan and recognize why specific projects were programmed

C. Lentz explained that each theme will focus on a single topic have a standardized outline:

Example topic: Infrastructure Conditions

- Topic-specific goals
- Major issues (central challenges and trends)
- Implementation – “what we can do”
- Policy actions (how SRPC can affect this issue through advocacy and engagement)

He asked members several questions in the meeting prep memo for their review of the draft themes:

- Are they readable for a wide audience?
- Do they provide adequate context of the major planning issues?
 - Are there major planning issues you think we missed?
- Is there enough content for people to connect it with the metrics and projects in the plan?
- Do they give you a clear idea of how Strafford MPO is going to address the planning challenges discussed?
- The goals are primarily based on feedback from outreach and previous discussion with SRPC committees. Do you feel they are accurate and reflective of the individual topics?

M. Bobinsky said they were readable and said the bulleted goals at the top of each theme were well-stated. He said he had additional comments on the goals that he would bring up earlier.

V. Parmele asked how the themes would discuss the effects of the pandemic – in particular, the demographic shifts that had been observed or were more anecdotal at this point. R. Dewey explained that she’s working on analysis of available demographic data so SRPC can show emerging trends and COVID-19 impacts. Data for 2019 from the American Community Survey will be available in December. SRPC can then show population estimates from 2014, 2016, and 2019. Those figures can be compared with populations projections for NH. J. Czysz added that the data stop just before the pandemic hit so there will have to be caveats with the data analysis. S. Diamond noted that the demographic changes will take years to emerge fully.

S. Diamond asked if there was room for additional graphics in the themes. C. Lentz said he intended the themes to be very short and focused, and include most of the quantitative charts and graphs in

the section dedicated to metrics. That section will include snapshots for many metrics related to transportation. For instance, there will be individual snapshots for several demographic issues (population projections, senior populations, minorities, etc.). S. Diamond asked if more detail could be added on the demand for passenger rail and its potential impact on the multimodal network.

M. Richardson noted that the issue of school transportation is missing. He explained that schools in NH struggle to get competitive bids for buses [one company dominates the market] and struggle to find drivers. He added that Northwood had to start school late in 2019 because they could not find enough qualified drivers. C. Lentz added that availability of commercial drivers is a national workforce issue. There are fewer drivers who are certified to drive commercial vehicles (CDL) and even fewer who have the additional qualification to carry passengers. M. Williams added that commercial vehicle mechanics are also scarce; COAST has had an advertised position for a mechanic posted for 6 weeks with no applications. W. Burton said that along with the driver shortage, there's a lack of support for and emphasis on people entering the skilled/technical trades. There are well-paying jobs available, but people (especially young people) are not generally encouraged to seek those jobs. Training for those jobs is also less available. M. Williams added that Great Bay Community College had been uninterested in developing a CDL training program and the CDL school in Concord doesn't offer the additional certification for passengers. COAST is unable to develop its own in-house training program because insurance won't cover it. C. Lentz said skilled technical training had been discussed at weekly seacoast economy calls and he would follow up with them. He said he would be adding more content related to COVID-19 to the themes.

W. Burton asked how local strategic plans are linked to the Metro Plan. C. Lentz said the Metro Plan projects come directly from municipalities. SRPC staff also review local plans as part of the early Metro Plan development, and outreach is designed to solicit local priorities. W. Burton noted that local strategic and emergency plans are all obsolete at this point because of COVID-19. He said Durham is refocusing on self-reliance for energy, food, etc.

M. Bobinsky suggested that some of the discussion in the themes could be bulleted. He suggested that impacts from local planning and zoning changes should be included and discussed in greater detail in the "Policy in Action" sections. He asked if there had been any advancement on the P3 project at the Dover C&J lot. C. Lentz said he hadn't heard any updates and suspected that was a project that had been stalled due to COVID-19. M. Bobinsky explained that Somersworth was in discussion with COAST on upgrading traffic signals with transit prioritization technology.

C. Lentz thanked members for their input and said this would not be the last time for review of the themes and other Metro Plan content.

5. **Project Updates** - Current SRPC projects and progress

C. Lentz reminded members that applications for NHDOT's road safety audit program were due on December 1st. He said he can help put together applications but needs local crash data. S. Diamond asked whether local data (such as assessing card data) had become available for regional mapping efforts that SRPC leads. C. Lentz said he wasn't sure, but he would follow up with staff and municipalities about regional mapping. Specifically, on the safety data, C. Lentz said there was a large

difference between communities in their resources and capabilities for recording, storing, and submitting crash data.

6. **Commissioner roundtable – Updates from your community** - What should SRPC be focused on for COVID-19 recovery planning that would help your community?

C. Lentz invited members to provide local updates on COVID-19 impacts and recovery.

S. Diamond noted that there will have to be more decentralization of services for local and regional resilience [e.g. distributed generation of electricity rather than centralized power plants].

W. Burton said there were local discussions in Durham about zoning modifications in the downtown. He added that the town is working on adjustments of agricultural zoning to expand the range of things people could grow. W. Burton complimented NHDOT on the recent Bunker Creek bridge that was recently replaced.

C. Lentz mentioned that he had been thinking about the fires out west and that he knew many people who were leaving the west coast because of the impacts to quality of life (in addition to out of control housing prices). He said he expected a surge of climate refugees from the west and New England could see even greater demand for housing than currently.

M. Bobinsky agreed with C. Lentz's point about climate refugees. He said Somersworth had been interviewing new city engineers and a candidate had said they wanted to move from northern California to escape the increasing environmental impacts from wildfires. M. Bobinsky explained that the transition to winter will have a new impact on outdoor public spaces that had been used for outdoor dining up to this point during the pandemic. How local businesses that have relied on outdoor public infrastructure will survive the winter is unresolved. He added that most predictions are of a rise in COVID-19 cases heading into the late fall and winter; that could have a huge impact on city operations if staff contract and spread the virus throughout an entire department. State agencies face the same problem. Somersworth will be meeting regularly with neighboring municipal staff about mutual aid and support in case one town or city's staff are reduced due to infection. On top of all this, building and development have not slowed down at all during the pandemic, so pressure has remained on city staff. M. Bobinsky said workloads have increased approximately 50% due to small scale residential permitting requests and large public works projects that were already in process.

W. Burton noted that he recently sold his condominium in Durham and got three cash offers from across the country with no inspection within days. S. Diamond suggested that New Hampshire will have to make investments to improve major sectors (e.g. housing affordability and jobs) if it's going to provide an attractive location for young people moving from other states. This is related to the observed large numbers of students who finish a 4-year college and immediately move to neighboring states to find or accept jobs. C. Lentz agreed, saying NH (and most of the country) has a shortage of affordable housing that will only get worse with a large, sudden migration of people. V. Parmele highlighted the "Cottage Homes" development in Dover that is designed as a cluster of smaller homes in a compact area that might be a model for new housing.

D. Hamann noted that Sig Sauer was opening a new facility in Rochester that would have several skilled trades positions. W. Burton highlighted this as another example of the need for technical training. When he directed a community college in Massachusetts, a group of colleges focused on collaborating with workforce development boards to align educational programs with the regional

inventory of needed skills and professions. M. Richardson suggested that SRPC communicate with the multiple vocational centers in the region about this issue. C. Lentz agreed and said they might be a good group to host and one of James Burdin's weekly seacoast economic development meetings. Members noted the importance of transportation for students to technical and skilled trades schools. M. Williams said it's often a challenge for public transit to serve large employers and other facilities because they're usually built away from densely populated areas where land is cheaper. That makes it very inefficient and expensive to serve such a site with transit.

7. **Other Business**

T. White notified members that NHDES had opened a new round of funding available through their Clean Diesel program. This grant solicitation uses Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) funds matched with Volkswagen settlement funds and EPA funds. \$750,000 is available and applications are due November 16th at 4:00. If there is funding left over after that date, there will be an immediate second round of applications due on January 19th 2021. T. White said all information about submitting applications is on the NHDES website and he is available to answer questions.

C. Lentz said he was working with Jessica Wilcox at NHDES to host a webinar on siting and permitting electric vehicle charging stations. They're working on finding a date that doesn't conflict with other events, but it will likely be in mid-November.

J. Czysz said the NH Municipal Association conference is November 18th, 19th, and 20th. The November Policy meeting is on the 20th so C. Lentz said he would follow up to make sure a quorum of members would be available for the 20th because there is a scheduled public hearing for the draft Public Participation Plan.

S. Diamond asked if there was any public data on local water supply and use volumes. C. Lentz said it was most likely recoded at the local level. J. Czysz said it would be a good question for NHDES.

C. Lentz said he would send Kyle Pimental an email with that question.

8. **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

9. **Adjournment**

M. Bobinsky made a motion to adjourn; seconded by D. Hamann

The meeting was adjourned at 10:19am