

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Technical Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, May 1st 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
The chair read the following statement prior to the roll call:

The chair of the SRPC Executive Committee has found that, due to the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, 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:

- *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 number 1-646-558-8656 and meeting ID 861 1044 1322, or by clicking on the following website address:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86110441322>

- *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 www.strafford.org.
- *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 603-994-3500 or email at: clentz@strafford.org.
- *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

Jon Hotchkiss (Middleton), Shanna Saunders (Somersworth), Chris Parker (Dover), Marcia Gasses (Barrington), Michael Williams (COAST), Leigh Levine (FHWA) Linda Dusenberry (NHDOT), Scott Kinmond (New Durham), Bruce Woodruff (Milton), Tim White (NHDES)

Staff

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

2. Staff Communications

C. Lentz noted that SRPC staff were all working from home. He thanked Rachel Dewey for setting up additional measures and fixing IT issues so everyone could work together online, and he thanked Jen and Kathy for working tirelessly to support staff from the administrative side. C. Lentz said SRPC and the other eight RPCs would be working to update their public participation procedures in light of the stay at home order.

3. Action Item(s)

3.1 Minutes from March 7th 2020

B. Woodruff made a motion to approve the minutes as written.

Seconded by C. Parker

Vote: unanimous in favor (via roll-call vote)

3.2 Review Amendment #4 to the 2019-2022 TIP

C. Lentz explained that there would be a public comment period starting May 4th and proceeding through the 14th prior to the public hearing and Policy Committee meeting on the 15th. He gave a presentation on the amendment which contained only one project (in Rochester). He described the proposed changes.

B. Woodruff made a motion to approve Amendment #4

Seconded by C. Parker

Vote: unanimous in favor (via roll-call vote)

4. Discussion Items

4.1 How are COVID-19 and the stay-at-home order affecting the region, and how can we be better prepared in the future?

C. Lentz said he wanted to check in with communities about the COVID-19 crisis and discuss current and future impacts:

- How is it impacting your community now?
- 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?

C. Lentz shared a report from the NH Municipal Association on the initial economic impacts of the corona virus. The report was from a survey they had conducted since the emergency order. He asked committee members what their initial and anticipated budget impacts were.

D. Timmons said UNH Wildcat Transit has shut down except for one morning and evening run to Dover each day. They are taking extra precautions to sanitize buses and facilities. He said the transportation department had refunded about \$600,000 in parking permits.

M. Gasses noted that several Barrington restaurants were still operating with new procedures. C. Lentz asked if members had an idea of how many restaurants were able to re-open with new procedures for physical distancing etc. S. Kinmond noted that Johnson's and the local general store in New Durham had been able to adapt quickly and was quite busy. He said the local food pantry and other services had been helping people get food and assistance. S. Kinmond said local contractors had been extremely busy working on vacation homes and the town had authorized four new building permits within the past four weeks. At this point the town is planning for a \$300,000 revenue shortfall, with additional unpaid taxes anticipated. They're also planning for potential service and staffing cuts in 2021.

A. Capello said Farmington is in a similar situation. They are anticipating a \$500,000-\$600,000 revenue shortfall. The recreation department has been shutdown and the staff furloughed, a hiring freeze is in place, and lost vehicle registrations may be in the range of \$25,000 for the first three months of the year. A. Capello said Farmington is also seeing a boom in permits submitted to the building department just like in new Durham. He said there would likely be a large impact on the state budget from losses in meals-and-rooms tax and gas tax.

B. Woodruff said Milton was seeing similar challenges, with many new building permits for construction and additions to properties around the lake. Businesses in town seem to be doing alright currently. J. Hotchkiss said Middleton is concerned about similar revenue shortfalls but he suggested it was not wise to completely suspend evictions if people were unable to pay mortgages, taxes, and rent [as per the governor's executive order]. This might encourage people to abuse the situation if there isn't a penalty and could pose a future problem for landlords. A. Capello said the executive order included a recommendation, not a mandate, to temporarily suspend late fees and other penalties. It was up to individual selectboards and councils to decide – Farmington had voted to continue with their current late fees and penalties.

C. Lentz asked if there were proportional impacts in the cities. For instance, with a greater concentration of renters in the cities. He asked if members had seen any disproportionate impacts locally (e.g. according to age, income, etc.).

S. Saunders said it was still early for determining the impact to individual citizens. Many local small businesses have re-opened with new protocols and the business community has rallied to support each other. She noted that businesses had developed a website (Mighty Small) with information about each business's approach under the shutdown. Businesses in Somersworth started it, but it comprises the entire seacoast. She said there were more building permits in the month of April than any month going back ten years. C. Lentz said James Burdin had worked with Emmett Soldati to plan the Mighty Small website and Rachel Dewey had done with web development. N. O' Connor provided the website address and R. Dewey asked members to send the information to local businesses so they could join the business community collaboration.

C. Lentz asked if members had been in contact with the medical community. S. Saunders said her understanding was that Wentworth Douglas Hospital had prepared additional capacity for COVID-19 patients, but they did not get the anticipated surge in cases. C. Lentz asked how municipalities

were getting information about COVID-19 out to their citizens. Members said they were using official information and guidance from federal (CDC) and state resources (e.g. the NH Governor's office). Shanna said Somersworth was providing weekly updates from state and federal sources. B. Woodruff said Milton had been using facebook and social media to send out official information quickly to residents – other members said they were doing the same.

C. Lentz asked members what they thought the biggest challenge will be in recovering from the COVID-19 crisis. C. Parker said local restaurants are concerned that new requirements that come out of the crisis will make it impossible to operate restaurants with smaller dining areas. He said Dover was considering waiving the usual fee for outside seating areas. C. Parker added that there are concerns that customers may be shifting their preference to a take-out model rather than a traditional sit-down establishment. This would have a huge impact on waitstaff and other tipped positions. A. Capello said Farmington was also looking at possibilities for expanding outdoor seating. C. Lentz mentioned that he had seen cities are readapting streets and closing them off to cars so more people can bike and walk. He asked if municipalities in the region were considering the possibility of re-purposing some streets for developing more outdoor social space like restaurant seating. S. Saunders said that would be difficult in the downtown since their main street is a major commuter route and traffic volumes are currently lower but still active. C. Lentz said he had heard from bicycle shop owners that they have been inundated with people bringing in old bicycles for repair as people are taking the opportunity to ride more.

C. Lentz said uncertainty was a huge challenge under the COVID-19 crisis. He asked members for input on what we know for sure that will be critical for responding rapidly to a similar scenario in the future. S. Saunders noted that Somersworth staff learned that they didn't have a complete list of local businesses with contact information to contact businesses with information. She thanked James Burdin for requesting the state to release the full list of businesses to help coordinate the business community response. C. Lentz asked members what SRPC should be doing as far as research, outreach, and lessons learned to increase preparedness for a future crisis. J. Czys said SRPC was in a good position to maintain resources like the complete database of local businesses through contacts with state agencies. C. Lentz said he thought this was an opportunity to take another look at the statewide broadband internet plan to get broadband access to more places to enable people to work from home and get rapid information. R. Dewey asked what historic data will be important for the recovery process. S. Saunders said she was hearing from the business community that they see the need to reinvent themselves and adapt their business models to the world changing because of the pandemic. S. Kinmond said he thought the pandemic was going to change both private businesses and public operations. New Durham, like many towns, has an old town hall that will not accommodate physical distancing, so they are already looking for ways to adapt day-to-day business operations like permits and other hand-to-hand transactions.

C. Lentz asked members what they would change to adapt their communities if money were not an issue. A. Capello said he would like to adapt the town hall to enable people to conduct business without having to physically enter the building. He said he would like to have some form of community center where people could still gather in small groups. S. Kinmond said he thought New Durham would like to develop trails and outdoor recreation opportunities in the local town forest – considering the large increase in outdoor activity during the shutdown. He noted that it would be harder to generate local revenues from such activities. C. Lentz noted that Google had been publishing anonymized data about where people were spending their active time during the national

shutdown. In general, it showed large spikes in parks and outdoor spaces, with decreases in retail and office locations.

C. Lentz said he had been in contact with Stephanie Carver, the new transportation director at Southern Maine Planning & Development Commission. They facilitate cooperative purchasing agreements with their municipalities so they can get bulk rates for things like sand and salt for winter road maintenance. He asked if SRPC member communities would be interested in joining in bulk purchasing. S. Kinmond said communities in the Lakes Region get cooperative rates on electricity – he would be interested in working together to get cooperative rates among the rural communities. J. Czysz said a previous outreach effort hadn't generated much interest in cooperative purchasing, but this was a good opportunity to revisit that offer. A. Capello said that Farmington was making progress in generating local electricity through solar, but he was interested in getting better rates on other bulk commodities.

5. Other Business

No other business was brought before the committee.

6. **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.

7. Adjournment

C. Parker made a motion to adjourn

Seconded by A. Capello

Vote: unanimous in favor