

Metro Regional Coalition

Minutes of May 7, 2008 Meeting

The Metro Regional Coalition met on May 7, 2008 at 8:00 a.m. at the offices of the Greater Portland Council of Governments. All member communities were represented with the exception of the Town of Cape Elizabeth. Those attending were: **Falmouth:** Ethan Croce; **Portland:** Councilor James Cohen; City Manager Joseph Gray; Assistant City Manager, Patricia Finnigan; Nelle Hanig. **Scarborough:** Harvey Rosenfeld (Scarborough Economic Development Corp.). **South Portland:** City Manager James Gailey; Erik Carson. **Westbrook:** Mayor Bruce Chuluda; City Administrator Jerre Bryant. **Cumberland County:** Commissioner Richard Feeney; Assistant County Manager, Bill Whitten. **GPCOG:** Executive Director, Neal Allen.

Also attending were: Portland Chamber representatives -- Godfrey Wood, Chris O'Neil, Mark McAuliffe and Matt Jacobson (Maine & Co.); Jim Damicis, Policy One Research and Paul Stevens, Portland Society of Architects.

The following is a summary of the meeting.

1. Welcome & Introductions

Councilor Cohen, Chair of the Coalition, opened the meeting with introductions and indicated that the central purpose of the meeting is to continue the discussion on the issue of economic development. To that end he expressed his appreciation to the members of the Portland Chamber for meeting with the Coalition to discuss the Chamber's White Paper, "Looking Out for Portland and the Region 2007."

2. Minutes of the April 2, 2008 Meeting

Jim Gailey moved that the minutes of the April 2, 2008 meeting of the Coalition be approved; seconded by Joe Gray. Mr. Gailey then moved to amend the minutes to reflect the need to ensure that the four-community collaboration (Portland, South Portland, Westbrook & Scarborough) is not diluted through a broader regional effort but is given ample opportunity to develop. The amendment was seconded by Mr. Gray. The motion to approve the minutes as amended was unanimously approved.

3. Update: Regional Crime Lab & Scheduling of News Conference

Councilor Cohen briefed the Coalition on the status of the Crime Lab indicating that the Portland City Council had approved the Agreement. He reported that financing of the facility is anticipated for approval by the City Council when the Capital Improvement Program is voted on in June. Mayor Chuluda reported that the City of Westbrook has signed the Agreement. With respect to holding a news conference to publicly explain the Crime Lab and conduct a signing ceremony, there was consensus among the Coalition members to move forward in scheduling such.

4. Continued Discussion of Economic Development

Councilor Cohen began the discussion of this item with a brief report on the meeting of the Coalition's sub-committee. Key items discussed at that meeting included: review by Bill Whitten and Neal Allen of the Economic Development District (EDD) and companion Comprehensive

Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), including a review of the economic providers and resources in the region. There was also discussion surrounding how to get to a public-private sector relationship through an economic development corporation and the need to work closely with the Chamber and the University.

Godfrey Wood, Mark McAuliffe and Matt Jacobson were then asked to present an overview of the Chamber's White Paper. They explained that a key objective of their report is to implement change within one year. To that end, their initial focus had been on the City of Portland with a longer range goal to "morph" to a regional plan; however, they were pleased to proceed with regional opportunities as well. Mr. Jacobson stated that a plan needs to include strategies that include attraction, retention, and incubation. He mentioned that the state's Pine Tree Zone program is a key element of business attraction in Maine, but the PTZ program is a problem for the greater Portland region because of restrictions in the scope of the program – it simply is not available in much of the area. He offered that Bio-Tech has potential particularly in the manufacturing end but there is real need for a stronger educational component to support it.

Regarding the form of an economic development entity, Jim Damicis said there is no single best model, although a public/private model is preferred. In particular, he noted the importance of strong private sector investment and leadership. Godfrey Wood expressed concern with competition among municipalities to which Councilor Cohen emphasized the importance of developing an effective cost and revenue sharing model. Harvey Rosenfeld stated that competition is inherent in economic development but the four-community effort, with respect to the Bio 2007 Conference, was to share the cost and recognized value of marketing Greater Portland as a region instead of previous efforts to market one community over another. He also expressed the need to bring our legislative delegation together. Jerre Bryant emphasized the need to work our differences out in advance of any meetings or discussions in Augusta.

Councilor Cohen asked what the next steps should be in developing an economic development corporation. Neal Allen suggested that representatives from the Coalition and the Chamber form a working group. He also emphasized his view that, while GPCOG has a legitimate role in the process by virtue of its status as an EDD and through the CEDS, its larger role is that of a resource and not that of an organization "running" economic development. Jim Gailey stated that there is an effective business advocacy committee in South Portland and that he needs more information and analysis before signing off on a larger regional model, explaining that he is not there yet. Erik Carson emphasized the need to bring higher education representatives, both USM and the Community Colleges, to the table early in the process.

Following further discussion of next steps, the group agreed to form a task force consisting of Jim Cohen, Harvey Rosenfeld, Erik Carson, Bill Whitten, Neal Allen and members of the Chamber.

The Coalition members agreed to meet again on June 12th at 8:00 a.m. at the Westbrook Public Safety Headquarters. This concluded the meeting.