



## MEETING MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING NHCOC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**DATE: APRIL 24, 2026**

**LOCATION: REMOTE ONLY**

**Present and Voting:** Dan Jerram, Chairman | Mike Criss, Vice Chairman | Tom Weik, Treasurer | Greg LaCava, At-Large

**Others Present:** Doug Thompson, CEO of Burlington | Robert A Phillips, Executive Director | Rista Malanca, Director of EcDev and Comm Development | Leo Ghio, Director of Rural Health Resources | Annmarie Ryan, Grant Financial Manager

**1. Call to Order:** Chairman Jerram called the meeting to order at 11:15AM

### **2. Public Comment / Member Concerns**

Doug Thompson raised several member concerns related to the proposed budget. His comments focused on the amount of grant funding received by NHCOC, the portion of funding used for salaries, benefits, and overhead, and the amount of funding or services reaching member communities.

Mr. Thompson specifically referenced the Rural Health Transformation Program and the Regional Service Grant. He expressed concern that, in his view, a large share of the Rural Health Transformation Program grant appeared to be allocated to salaries, benefits, and overhead rather than direct program activities. He also raised questions about the increase in the Regional Service Grant and how those funds would be used. He stated that the COG should be budgeted like a municipality to raise funds to cover costs.

Mr. Thompson further expressed concern regarding employee compensation, benefits, work schedules, work-from-home practices, and the proposed 3.75% salary increase. He also reiterated prior concerns that NHCOC's excess funds should be invested in order to generate interest income that could potentially offset member dues up to 50%. He can't support the proposed budget by the level of overhead in it and does not favor a move to the 3rd floor for additional staffing space, as there shouldn't be an increase in staff.

Chair Jerram summarized Mr. Thompson's comments into several main categories: grant administration and program funding, the Rural Health Transformation Program, the Regional Service Grant, employee salaries and benefits, investment of surplus funds, and the possibility of reducing member costs.

### **3. Budget Discussion**

Robert Phillips provided an overview of how NHCOC's budget and work plans are structured. He explained that NHCOC's budget process differs from a municipal budget because NHCOC does not build its budget around taxing authority in the same way municipalities do. Instead, NHCOC's work plans and staffing are largely based on grant revenue, including both formulaic and discretionary grants.

Mr. Phillips noted that NHCOC, as a rural planning region, does not receive Metropolitan Planning Organization funding, which other Councils of Governments receive, and which can amount to a relatively large sum of dollars. He explained that this affects NHCOC's ability to support staffing compared with other COGs.

Rista Malanca added that NHCOC's salaries, benefits, and overhead total approximately \$1.57 million, while member dues total approximately \$91,000. She stated that the dues help leverage a much larger amount of operational and grant funding and that many grant funds are intended to support regional services rather than be passed directly to municipalities.

Michael Criss asked what would happen if certain grants were eliminated. Mr. Phillips and Ms. Malanca explained that positions funded by grants could be affected if the grants ended. Options could include reallocating staff, using reserves temporarily, increasing dues, or making staffing changes, depending on the circumstances and policy direction of the board.

### **Health Insurance and Employee Benefits**

Mr. Criss asked about NHCOC's health insurance coverage and whether employees contribute toward premiums. Mr. Phillips stated that NHCOC currently uses Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield and that the plan renews annually in February. He noted that NHCOC currently covers 100% of medical benefits under its personnel rules. He also stated that COG practices vary, with some COGs covering the full cost like ours and others requiring employee contributions.

Chair Jerram noted that premium sharing and employee benefit policies may be appropriate subjects for further discussion, while also cautioning that changes to employee compensation and benefits should be considered carefully because they form part of total compensation.

### **Investment of Surplus Funds**

Mr. Thompson again urged NHCOC to invest excess cash or reserves in order to generate interest income and potentially reduce dues. Chair Jerram agreed that this had been raised previously and stated that staff should pursue this issue. A STIF account or comparable investment option was discussed as a potential approach. Chair Jerram directed Mr. Phillips, as Executive Director, to move forward on the issue.

### **Rural Health Transformation Program**

Leonardo Ghio provided an overview of the Rural Health Transformation Program. He explained that the federal program was released to the states with a short application timeline and that DSS and OPM had reached out for project ideas. Mr. Ghio proposed rural community health navigators who would work with municipal social service providers, EMS, hospitals, clinical community health workers, and VNA providers.

Mr. Ghio explained that the program is intended to increase access to services in rural communities, particularly for older residents. He described potential activities such as home visits, follow-up with residents after EMS lift-assist calls or hospital refusals, and coordination with local service providers. He

also noted that the budget includes a grant writer focused on health-related grants, including potential funding opportunities for ambulance services, billing improvements, and regional paramedicine.

Mr. Criss discussed challenges faced by municipalities in securing paramedic services and the possibility of regional approaches to paramedic coverage. Mr. Ghio indicated that such issues could be explored through the health-related grant-writing component.

### **Budget Detail and Transparency**

Mr. Thompson requested more detail on how staff salaries and benefits are allocated across grant programs and departments. He stated that he would like to see, for each major grant or program, the positions and allocations included in the budget.

Annmarie Ryan shared the staff summary tab from the budget spreadsheet and showed how full-time equivalent allocations and salary amounts are broken down by department and program. Using the Rural Health Transformation Program as an example, she showed Leo Ghio's salary allocation as well as the proposed health navigator positions included in that program.

Mr. Thompson stated that this information was helpful and requested that the expanded version of the spreadsheet, including drop-downs and hidden detail, be shared with Executive Committee members and potentially the full membership. Ms. Ryan agreed to provide the information. Ms. Malanca noted that the spreadsheet previously sent to members included expandable sections, but members may need guidance that the additional detail is available to be seen.

Ms. Malanca also shared a work plan overview connecting NHCOC programs to regional plans and goals, including the Plan of Conservation and Development, transportation plan, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, transportation safety plan, natural hazard mitigation plan, and housing growth plan. She explained that programs are organized around both regional goals and regional services, including DEMHS, rural health, procurement, engineering, residential assistance, and GIS-related services.

### **4. Approval of Minutes of the Special Meeting of February 24, 2026**

Tom Weik moved to approve the minutes. Greg LaCava seconded the motion. There was no further discussion.

**Vote:** The motion passed unanimously.

### **5. FY 2027 Budget Recommendation**

Michael Criss moved to forward the budget to the full membership as presented. Greg LaCava seconded the motion.

Before the vote, Chair Jerram asked staff to briefly summarize what was different from the prior year's budget.

Mr. Phillips stated that the primary differences involved additional revenue related to Mr. Ghio's rural health work and increased Regional Service Grant funding, including funds tied to housing-related responsibilities and implementation of the legislative requirements. He stated that most other areas reflected continued implementation of NHCOC's major plans.

Ms. Malanca noted that the budget also includes a new effort to help municipalities develop projects to the point where they are ready for grant applications. She described possible examples such as economic development projects, trail projects, sidewalk projects, and other early-stage municipal initiatives. The goal would be to help towns position projects to be more competitive for future state or federal funding opportunities.

Mr. Phillips added that this effort may also involve GIS capacity and project development support, noting that NHCOC is the only COG in the state without a GIS staff person.

There was no further discussion from committee members.

**Note:** The chair noted affirmative votes from the members voting, including Tom Weik, Michael Criss, and Chair Jerram. The transcript reflects that Greg LaCava may have stepped away before the vote. The motion passed to forward the budget to the full membership.

## 6. Follow-Up Items

The following follow-up items were identified during the meeting:

1. Staff will provide additional budget detail showing staff allocations, FTEs, and salary/benefit allocations by grant and program area.
2. Staff will clarify for members that the budget spreadsheet includes expandable sections and additional detail.
3. Staff will refine the budget presentation for the full membership to make it concise, direct, and comprehensive.
4. The Executive Director will pursue investment options for excess funds or reserves, including potential use of a STIF account or comparable investment vehicle.
5. Staff will incorporate feedback from the Executive Committee discussion into the presentation to the full board.

## 7. Adjournment

There being no further business, Tom Weik moved to adjourn at 12:16PM. Chair Jerram seconded the motion.

**Note:** The motion passed.