Members present: Susan Arntz (Co-chair), John Knapp (Co-chair), John Adams, Steve Dornfeld, Acooa Ellis, Jim Erkel, Carol Flynn, Michele Foster, Sharon Sayles-Belton, Scott Neal, Chris Gerlach, Bill Hargis, Dan McElroy, Shannon Watson, Adeel Lari, and Jim Solem

Members not present: Elizabeth Kautz, Ravi Norman, and Peter Bell.

Staff & staff support present: Pahoua Yang Hoffman, Sean Kershaw, Larry Dowell, and Ellen Watters

Citizens League members and special guests present: Bright Dornblaser, Robert Tholkes, Kate Weyenberg, Gabriel Flaa, Peter McLaughlin, Randy Maluchnik, Curt Johnson, and Terry Schneider.

Proposed outcomes for this meeting
- Approve minutes from previous meeting.
- Debrief last meeting.
- Hear from presenter Curt Johnson on mission/role of Met Council and learn of other regional arrangements.
- Hear testimony from and conduct Q&A with political leaders on mission/role of Met Council, and recommendations for Task Force focus area.
- Discuss presentation, critical questions, and how to define focus areas.
- Agree on next steps.
- Evaluate meeting.

Minutes

Co-Chair John Knapp called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m.

1. Welcome, Introductions, Approval of Minutes and Agenda, Debrief of Previous Meeting

Introductions
Co-chair John Knapp started the meeting by welcoming Citizens League members and special guests. Co-Chair Knapp quickly went through the proposed meeting outcomes.

Approval of Minutes
Co-chair Knapp asked if there were any questions or feedback on the minutes from the November 5th meeting. Member Adeel Lari moved to approve the minutes. Scott Neal seconded the motion. A unanimous verbal 16-0 aye vote passed the motion to approve the minutes.

Debrief of Previous Meeting
Co-chair Knapp asked if there were any additional comments from the previous meeting’s discussion. Hearing none, he introduced the first guest speaker, Curt Johnson.
2. Mission & Purpose and Other Regional Arrangements: Curt Johnson, former Met Council Chair, 1995-1999

Co-Chair Knapp mentioned that although he missed the last meeting, he had been briefed by staff. Hearing that there was agreement to bring in Mr. Curt Johnson, staff invited Johnson to talk about his thoughts on the mission and purpose of the Met Council and his study of other regional arrangements in the country.

Presentation by Curt Johnson

Mr. Johnson reported that he could recall eight, nine, or ten delegations that have visited Minnesota as part of a leadership visit and wanted to know more about the Met Council, from its history to how it spends its funding. Mr. Johnson said that most visitors left wanting to create a similar model, but all said it would not be politically possible. Mr. Johnson mentioned that if we didn’t have it already, he didn’t think a Met Council could be created in Minnesota today for the same reasons. The politics, Johnson explained, has shifted and people today are wary of government at any level and they see the Met Council as another layer inserted between the counties and the state.

He explained that he feels the need to mention this because for people who are aware of the Met Council and are aware of what it does, they take it for granted. It has become of our region’s framework. But many regions around the country do not have such model and therefore no place for regional conversations. Johnson recalled moderating a group of five counties in the Houston area. He asked them to compile a short list of the major issues they needed to tackle. Predictably, they included flood control, traffic, etc. He asked the county judges if one entity could address these problems alone. The mayor and the county judges agreed that they could not solve these regional problems without the cooperation and help of surrounding counties.

To address these issues, Johnson explained that some regions have adopted a Council of Governments model (COGs). However, Johnson said he could count on few fingers the COGs that are exemplary: who do sound research and have achieved a level respect. In Johnson’s view, most COG arrangements have become a place where elected officials come to meet to exchange war stories about what didn’t work and they rarely exercise any authority and rarely assemble collective clout to go after a major issue.

A member asked why they don’t, to which Johnson responded that they are politically fearful because what the group wants or needs may be counter to what their local constituents want. Johnson said Minnesota is fortunate to have a model that encourages regional conversations and is charged with making coherent sense of what is needed in the region. He understands not everyone will agree, but a place does exist in the state structure for these conversations to take place.

Johnson felt that by and large, the Met Council has been successful so far. The thing that limits it, according to Johnson, is the way we arrange for its governance. He recalled a tactical, if not a strategic mistake that he felt was made in 1994 during the reorganization of the Met Council. When he was then chief-of-staff for Governor Carlson, he received a call from Senator Carol Flynn, who was then the conference committee Chair. She asked Johnson to ask the Governor if he would be supportive of the idea of all Met Council members serving at the pleasure of the governor. Of course, the Governor was supportive of the change. Johnson felt this was an easy way to settle a contentious issue and conclude the conference committee but he felt it was a mistake. He did not think this should have replaced staggered terms. Staggered terms, Johnson felt, offered a modicum of independence. Because staggered terms overlapped with the terms of governors, there existed members who might likely disagree. Since this change and increasingly, Johnson feels the Council appears to be—and at times may actually be—simply an extension of the governor’s office for metropolitan governance. Johnson mentioned that this was not what it was intended to be and felt it is not what it should be. Every four years, all new seats are filled yet people complain how the
Council is heavily staff driven. The Council staff is the only continuous force that is there. Given the flack the Council has taken, some deserved and some not deserved, Johnson felt some change in governance was inevitable. It is rare, he added, that a legislative session does not have some call for change in Met Council governance: how people are appointed, what authority, etc. Johnson felt one of these days, something is going to pass and it could be something that is not good for the region.

For those who understand the Council and want to see it preserved, what change in governance would actually give the critics a stronger sense that they have a voice in what the Council is and what it does without doing damage to the Council’s capacity to maintain a regional perspective. What solution could be offered that would be at the intersection of critics’ concerns and what the Council needs to continue to be successful. Johnson proposed some possible solutions:

- Restoring staggered terms
- Apply the same model used to appoint judges in appointing Met Council members: A high level group screens candidates, recommends a slate to the governor who appoints members from the list he receives. If done correctly, the list should contain highly qualified candidates. Counties could be given the ability to form nomination committees. This would give counties a clear sense that they had a voice in who gets appointed.

Johnson added that this proposed selection process may not be the best or the only one to consider, but it does address a real concern. He advised the Task Force to get ahead of this and propose changes to the current governor, whom he believe should stand up to make some needed changes on his way out. Johnson mentioned that the current Met Council Chair had wanted to institute some changes in January but it did not happen due to other priorities.

A member asked whether there was the danger of creating a COG by adopting some of his proposed changes by having elected officials involved who might only be interested in their parochial interests? Johnson responded that rules for eligibility would need to be established.

A member added that establishing rules is easy enough to do but she thought things started to break down with 200 units of government in the region and the seven counties. It’s hard to satisfy all the other units of government who are equally as unhappy. Johnson responded whether the Regional Council of Mayors could make recommendations.

A member commented that so far there have only been discussions on geographic representation, what about descriptive representation of members. That is, should members reflect the people in the region. Johnson responded that it does get discussed but no one has proposed a process for this.

A member asked Johnson that of the few COGs that do work, what do they have in common? Johnson referred to the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) serving the Kansas City metropolitan area. He attributed the success of this model to long-time executive director, David Warm, who has been with MARC since 1990. Johnson added that no one in the press knows his name because he puts elected officials out front while he does the relationship building behind the scenes. He is very good connecting elected officials. He also mentioned Southern California Council of Governments and Puget Sound Regional Council. Johnson recalled a Richfield city manager who took a position in North Carolina, where there were three COGs, indicating that it was near impossible to get any sort of consensus on anything so people got together “in endless admiration of their problems.”

A member added that people ask why the geographic basis for these models and it is due to certain federal requirements.

Johnson said Minnesota often gets compared with the Portland metropolitan council, but they have an elected body, not an appointed and there are only 35 units of government.
A member commented that since the first meeting of the Task Force, the debate has been about local versus regional and now versus future. He felt the staggered terms solution was a small gesture in thinking about the future by instituting some longevity. However, this does not deal with the scope question: local versus regional. Unless there were districts drawn to connect core cities with ex-urban areas like a slice of pie, the member did not know how this could be addressed. Johnson added that if the Council were to be elected, districts would need to be drawn in this way for it to work. He did not think it could look like a giant senate district and get the senate to vote for it.

A member asked Johnson about San Diego Association of Governments, indicating that it was similar to Minnesota. Johnson responded that the staff is very good in San Diego but the elected officials rarely come to agreement to get anything done.

A member asked Johnson about the COGs and despite few that Johnson thought were exemplary, he asked whether the structure of a COG offered the sort of consistency that is needed. If there are votes and a decision-making process, why couldn’t it work? Johnson responded that even the good ones often could not adopt an agenda for action and cited the members’ inability to vote. Members could not separate the local political impact from the regional need. It is very difficult, Johnson explained, to get members to shift from their local constituents and their city to looking at the region as a whole. Members generally will lean towards representing their city.

A member reminded the Task Force about the size of the Met Council enterprise. It is now an $800 million operating enterprise. He felt it needs a governing body that will be there long enough to understand the complexity of it. Some continuity of understanding the issues is very important and added that it was his experience that the longer members served, the likelier they were to take a regional view. Johnson agreed and cited Roger Scherer as one individual whose thinking shifted on certain issues after serving several years as a Council member.

A member asked about Johnson’s thoughts on the increased fragmentation of transportation planning, funding, and governance. Johnson referred to the city of Denver and their “audacity” to build their system all at once even when they were unsure of funding. In Minnesota, there is a lot of patience to build a little bit at a time and taking a long time to build each little bit. It may take Minnesota 40 years to build what Denver was able to do in 8-9 years. He connected this to the ambivalence of the population. Minnesota wants all the amenities of a large urban setting but it doesn’t want to be very urban. It’s a paradox. People and neighborhoods are often opposed to large, tall building projects like the Westin in Edina. Although it makes economic sense, it does not fit well with Minnesotan’s preferences and values. Johnson thought this was behind the fragmentation and the inability to get things done in a short amount of time.

Co-Chair Knapp thanked Johnson and invited him to stay for the rest of the meeting.

3. Interactive Panel of Elected Officials

Co-Chair Knapp explained that at the last meeting, there was a desire to have some elected officials present to share their perspectives on the Council’s mission and purpose and address 1-2 of the critical questions that the Task Force has agreed to continue discussing. The panel members included Minnetonka Mayor Terry Schneider, Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, and Carver County Commissioner Randy Maluchnik. Co-Chair Knapp stressed the importance of striking a balance with all speakers and indicated that while efforts were made to have two county representative and two city representatives, only one city official was able to attend given scheduling conflicts. Co-Chair Knapp did remind everyone that the Task Force is well represented with city officials.

Co-Chair Knapp reminded the panel members that after each responded to the questions that were sent ahead to them, the floor would then open up for an interactive Q&A with the Task Force members. He also indicated that Ellen Watters and Larry Dowell would help to moderate this section.
Terry Schneider, Mayor of Minnetonka
Mayor Schneider informed the group that he has been mayor for six years and on the city council for 23 years. He is also a real estate development consultant and has served on a number of regional boards and committees including Met Council related committees. While he has different perspectives, he thought it was best to share how the Met Council operates from the practical standpoint when trying to develop land and build buildings and on the public side, how this shapes the region. Despite disagreements on funding and rules and regulations that affect different areas differently, by and large, he thought the Met Council has done well given limited resources and limited authority. He admitted it was not perfect and agreed with Curt Johnson’s views on structure. He recalled having considered an elected Met Council in previous committee efforts, and it was determined that it would be disastrous because such an arrangement would enter in partisanship and fundraising. For example, the development community could fund the campaigns of candidates. A primary deficiency, he said was the lack of consistency when a governor turns over. To that end, he supports staggered terms. He would like to see a selection process that would involve not just counties but cities since cities are more affected by sewer, water, parks, etc. He felt this could be worked out. He proposed using existing Met Council districts in this process, not slices of districts that have been proposed. He thought TAB should be left intact since it fulfills a federal requirement. He mentioned that when the Met Council was reorganized, a concern was whether the operations arm would consume the Council and hinder its ability to plan and coordinate regionally. He thought it has affected the Council to some extent. They key, he thought was to maintain the regional perspective with a long-view thinking, not worrying about next year. He also understands the Met Council faces many things the legislature throws at it. Related to scope and authority, he thought there were times when he thought the Council exceeded its true authority by coercing cities into doing things that had a good goal but did not have an impact on regional systems. At the same time, the Council needs the authority to tackle large, regional issues. When the Council first started, Schneider explained that it was trying to address the pollution of Lake Minnetonka. At that time, the Council had to have the authority to require cities to sewer. Schneider felt the Council has done well with limited authority and that it should have limited authority. He thought the Council should not be another state agency with veto and dictatorial powers. They should be working on increasing collaboration. Only when an issue becomes critical should they be able to have such powers.

Peter McLaughlin, Commissioner of Hennepin County
Commissioner McLaughlin opened up his comments with a story of when he was in the legislature and opposed his own Chairman’s motion to do away with the Met Council. He went on to announce that he was not a governance guy. He thought a lot of time could be used up on governance and not get the group any closer to where they think they’d like to go. He advised the Task Force to carefully consider the time and political capital on governance. He stated he was not supportive of an elected Met Council. He referenced points made by Curt Johnson and Mayor Schneider on solving regional problems and advised the group to start with what are the problems – what are the list of regional problems only the Council can help solve with regional solutions. Instead of theory, McLaughlin recommended a focus on real issues. He brought up the issue of poverty as a very real regional concern. He referenced a meeting awhile back that involved Sue Haigh and five counties. During this meeting, the five counties shared that poverty was an issue that affected them. He thought she should have grabbed onto that issue that was expressed by the counties at that time. Understanding that there is a differences between concentrated poverty and dispersed poverty, the absolute number of poor people in the city and the suburbs are getting bigger all the time and more diverse. Related to transit, McLaughlin reminded the Task Force that one of the biggest opponents of the investments made in transit was in fact the Met Council. It was local government people who stepped up to support it. McLaughlin attributed the slowness of the approach not to local government or the Met Council, but to the legislature. Other places around the country that have been cited as successful have a regional tax. The Minnesota legislature makes it difficult to get the last remaining 10% from the state.
McLaughlin explained that when the bill passed in 2008, cynics in the legislature were skeptical about local government’s ability to create a joint powers board, but it was done in 5 weeks and passed the tax in five of the seven counties. There were others that that thought the board would blow up, but it hasn’t. He explained that they are approving grants upwards of $820 million dollars and attracting federal dollars. It is about relationships and making things work. McLaughlin explained the need to help people understand the regional vision and explain that one day, they’ll get their project funded. Local government has shown it can work together. Lastly, he thought fiscal disparities should be reconsidered. It was created to support the orderly development of the region, but did not think it scales with the regional issues. Instead, it thought this funding could be directed to the regional issues to be identified like poverty, water, etc. Currently, he thought it was being sprinkled around without impact.

Randy Maluchnik, Commissioner of Carver County
Commissioner Maluchnik conveyed his views and those of Carver County that the Met Council should be limited to metropolitan planning working in partnership with local government. Its purpose should be no more than that. He thought that when an unelected body exceeds this role, the taxpayer was ill served. Maluchnik indicated that the current mission and structure has excluded local government’s best interest and its authentic engagement. He added that the current environment does not promote true transparency, resulting in poor policy-making that many times have favored the two major cities. Maluchnik explained that much to his surprise, there have been some improvements under the direction of current Chair Adam Duininck. Maluchnik indicated that much of the issues are not related to the mission of the Council but the governance. Carver County and its elected board proposed that all the members of the Met Council should be locally elected officials. Secondly, membership on the Met Council must include representation from every metropolitan county board, city mayors, and/or council members both large and small inclusively and even rural townships. The terms of Met Council members should be staggered. Maluchnik added that currently, the governor is the only constituent since members are only accountable to him. It was felt that a Met Council was needed that was accountable to the people, especially if it is to have taxing authority. Maluchnik indicated that he was not against transit per se, but at the center of the economic development scheme, the Met Council is seeking to provide extremely expensive transit systems moving workers from one end of the metropolitan area to the other. Instead, he proposed moving living wage jobs to the local communities where people can walk to work and tend to their kids. Priorities should be put on people, not systems. He explained local governments are at the front lines of poverty. He thought Ghandi said it best: “Poverty is the worst form of violence.”

Q&A
A member asked Commissioner Maluchnik to define the people and/or the communities that the Met Council is supposed to be serving. Maluchnik responded that there are areas with great disparities such as North Minneapolis. He thought LRT was a lazy way to do economic development. Instead, he didn’t know why investments weren’t being made in the people. He thought the current plan would kill some communities. Without this, he thought areas of disparities could end up looking like Detroit.

A member asked why the speakers didn’t bring up the fiscal systems. Mayor Schneider responded that he did not include this in his presentation because this was not a question he was asked to address. That said, he did think we had a very complex fiscal system, which is difficult to explain. He would rather see communities be responsible for their own well-being and raise their own funds. He also agreed with Commissioner McLaughlin that he thought fiscal disparities was broken and needs to be refined. It should be used to address regional issues.

A member posed a question to Commissioner McLaughlin about CTIB, how it seems to be functional and is made up of elected officials. What prevents it from being too parochial? How does it work?
McLaughlin responded that if he were to turn in a term paper on the current transportation governance/transit finance system in a public administration class, he’d get a D. If he were to turn in the same paper in a politics class, he’d probably get an A-. He stressed that these relationships require constant tending. People need to believe in the regional vision. McLaughlin reminded members that CTIB is very focused.

A member asked Commissioner Maluchnik how he and other county commissioners set priorities other than through the input of elected officials? Maluchnik responded that priorities should be set according to the needs of the people and the greatest number of people. He added that he thought issues of disparities should be among the priorities.

A member asked Commissioner McLaughlin what he thought were the major issues? McLaughlin responded that he thought poverty was an issue that needs to be looked at a regional level. He also felt water needs a regional approach. He also felt transportation and transit will continue to need a regional approach. McLaughlin felt they were near getting the system built and he does not want to mess that up.

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A member asked the panel what impact does having an adequate supply of affordable housing have on the region? Commissioner Maluchnik responded with workforce. Mayor Schneider responded that having an adequate supply of affordable housing was critical to the long-term success of the region. He thought the issues was that there isn’t enough money to build enough affordable housing to come close to serving that need. He said it would require capturing the naturally occurring affordable housing that is in disrepair. He also thought this idea of people living and working in their community is utopian. People should be able to live and work where they want. They just need to have easy ways to get from one place to the other no matter what mode of transport.

A member asked whether a proposal for an elected Met Council would be politically possible. Commissioner McLaughlin did not think an elected Met Council would address all the concerns that have been raised but said that not having any elected officials has created an opportunity to debate this and it undercuts the Met Council’s credibility.

Final comments from the panelist:

- **Commissioner Maluchnik**: Local elected officials do have the ability to think regionally. If there is the right leadership, mission, and structure, it is possible.

- **Mayor Schneider**: Regional Council of Mayors do have a very strong sense of regional issues. GreaterMSP was an idea that came out of this group that was handed to Itasca to make happen. It has been a great asset to the region.

- **Commissioner McLaughlin**: One person, one vote matters.

4. **Discussion**

Larry Dowell reminded the group of the timeline and confirmed that the next several meetings will be focused on bringing outside speakers to come before the committee. We are on schedule to meeting the objectives by the March deadline. Through a PowerPoint slide, Dowell also went over the committee and project charge.

To test the anonymous *i-clicker* voting technology, Dowell presented a test question to the group.
Larry progressed to the next slide on mission of the Met Council. He explained that we are starting with purpose and mission because when making key strategic discussion, it is best to confirm agreement here. Dowell read the mission/purpose as outline in statute:

The Met Council shall prepare and adopt...and prescribe guides for the orderly and economical development, public and private, of the metropolitan area.

Larry asked if members had any questions/concerns about the mission and purpose as it is stated in statute. A member asked if the “…” indicated missing language since the statutes is not just about guides. Staff responded that the break does indicate missing language.

[The full mission in statute is: The Metropolitan Council shall prepare and adopt, after appropriate study and such public hearings as may be necessary, a comprehensive development guide for the metropolitan area. It shall consist of a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, programs, and maps prescribing guides for the orderly and economical development, public and private, of the metropolitan area.]

Dowell moved to the next slide and read the mission statement of the Met Council as the Council has expressed it on their website:

The Council’s mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous region.

The Metropolitan Council is the regional policy-making body, planning agency and provider of essential services for the Twin Cities metropolitan region.

Breaking the last statement into three components, Dowell engaged members to react to each separately and indicated that the group would be voting (non-binding) on each.

- The Metropolitan Council is the regional policy-making body
- The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning agency
- The Metropolitan Council is the provider of essential services for the region

A member indicated that the policy-making piece is the part that rubs many elected officials the wrong way due to its appointed body. Another member commented that there is a difference between policy-making and implementing that policy. Another member was stuck on the third statement and wanted to know what “essential services” includes - how is it defined? Others thought essentials services was too broad a term. Many essential services are already provided by cities, counties, and school districts.

A member referred to comments made by Commissioner McLaughlin, indicating that if the Met Council had the five counties’ money, it too, could go to county commissioners to do exactly what he said they’ve been able to do. They got the money, the Met Council didn’t and that is the difference she claimed.

Dowell asked members to vote on the first statement and explained that members could swap “is” with “should be.”

The Metropolitan Council is the regional policy-making body

A) Strongly agree 62%
B) Moderately agree 23%
C) Moderately disagree 0%
D) Strongly disagree 15%
62% strongly agreed this statement is an appropriate part of the Met Council’s mission. Dowell asked if a member would be willing to share why they voted A. A member who voted A explained that with seven individual counties and over 200 units of government, there are going to be different perspectives and while they may share some regional concerns, that’s not going to be their priority. A member objected to the word “the.” Had it been “a” regional policy-making…,” he would have been more comfortable with it explaining that they aren’t the only one but an important one. Another member added that the Met Council is a creature of statute. They implement at the direction of the legislature so indicating “the” makes it sound like they get the last word. A member indicated that he voted D (strongly disagreed) because in a democratic society, policy-making should be in the hands of elected officials.

The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning agency

A) Strongly agree 92%
B) Moderately agree 8%
C) Moderately disagree 0%
D) Strongly disagree 0%

92% strongly agreed this statement is an appropriate part of the Met Council’s mission.

The Metropolitan Council is the provider of essential services for the region

Before voting, there was a brief discussion on “essential services.” A member indicated that after “provider of,” they would have liked to see a qualifier such as some, selected, all, or even regional. A member asked if the group is voting on the statement as-is. It was suggested that “essential services” be defined as those that transcend city/county lines like water, sewer, etc.

A) Strongly agree 36%
B) Moderately agree 27%
C) Moderately disagree 36%
D) Strongly disagree 0%

It was generally agreed that although the group voted A, B, and C, they were all wrestling with the term “essential services,” and that it needed to be better defined.

Dowel closed the PowerPoint presentation and asked the group for feedback on any hot topic he and staff should tee up for the next meetings. Referring to the critical tree chart, Dowell indicated that he and staff did not think we could systematically go through each one-by-one and that they are all inter-related. In other words, it would be difficult to look at scope and authority without also looking at role and governance. He thought we may have to blend these questions.

A member suggested that based on today and previous discussions, we ought to look for ways to improve the Met Council member selection process. Following this point, a member noted that if the selection process were to include elected officials, the current MPO structure may not be necessary. Another member thought the group had already landed on scope and authority at the last meeting, not governance. Dowell suggested we just vote right now on that question:

Is scope and authority generally the next logical set of questions we should ask?

A) Yes 73%
B) NO 27%

A member that he voted “no” because he strongly felt that if you created a strong governance structure, it can address any tough issue, which will always change. You have to have confidence in the structure, people, policies, and plan.
5. **Next Steps & Evaluation**

Co-chair Knapp summarized next steps by explaining that at the next meeting on the 19th, the discussion will focus on scope and authority. Someone suggested the Regional Council of Mayors as a next guest. Someone asked what we mean by scope and authority and another member responded that we should stick to the scope and authority questions that have been agreed to in the critical questions tree. Cecile Bedor from GreaterMSP and Metro Cities was also suggested. Someone from the Itasca project was also suggested.

The members evaluated the meeting as follows: 3, 4, 4, 3, 4, 4, 4, 3.5, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, and 4 = Average 3.67. Co-chair Knapp polled members on the next meeting dates to see who would not be present.

6. **Adjourn**

Co-Chair Knapp adjourned the meeting at 6:06 p.m.