



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments And Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Wednesday, October 28, 2020

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Lauren Gister *
Clinton: Karl Kilduff *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Angus McDonald *
Durham: Laura Francis *
East Haddam: Robert Smith *
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Norm Needleman
Haddam: Robert McGarry *
Killingworth: Cathy Iino *
Lyme: Steve Mattson *
Middlefield: Ed Bailey *
Middletown: Ben Florsheim *
Old Lyme: Tim Griswold
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna *
Portland: Susan Bransfield *
Westbrook: Noel Bishop *

*present

MPO Members:

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce: Darlene Briggs *
Estuary & Middletown Area Transit Districts: Joe Comerford *

Others Present:

Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Cathy Lezon, Eversource
Jake Manke, DEMHS Region 2 Coordinator
Pat Bandzes, Eversource
Edgar Wynkoop, CT DOT
Bill Villano, Workforce Alliance
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor
Joe Samolis, City of Middletown & MAT Board Chair
Susan Tyler, ETD Board
Leslie Strauss, ETD Board Chair
Frank DeFelice, RPC Chair
Erik Shortell, FHWA
Chris Costa, Town of Old Saybrook

RiverCOG

Mary Ellen Barnes, Town of Essex
Maria Lucarelli, Town of Essex

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Torrance Downes
Eliza LoPresti
Margot Burns
Robert Haramut
Megan Jouflas
Janice Ehle/Meyer

1. Call to Order, Roll Call/Introductions, Public Speaking

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M. This meeting took place via Zoom.

Roll was called by Sam Gold.

Public Speaking

Ms. Bransfield and Chairman Salvatore, along with all COG members and staff, thanked Pat Bandzes for her many year of service to the region. She will be retiring from Eversource on Friday, October 30, 2020.

Regional Election Monitor Carol Conklin reported that the absentee ballot process has been difficult for registrars and that yesterday the state shut down the database and rebooted it to correct glitches. Many registrars will be working over the weekend. A new timeline was given that the outer absentee ballot envelopes may be opened starting on Friday, Oct. 30 and there is now a 96-hour processing time post-election. Ballots received in the ballot boxes on election day will be held until the day after the election and cross-checked with in-person voter lists to cut down on people trying to vote twice. Ms. Conklin suggested to the state that they have employees there over the weekend so there is not a backlog of questions for them on Monday morning. Ms. Iino asked that the COG support this suggestion with a letter to the state which Mr. Gold will craft.

Jake Manke, DEMHS Region 2 Coordinator, stated that the Connecticut Intelligence Center (CTIC) has a new director who will be working around the clock to ensure safe elections. He asked that if there are any crimes committed during the election that he be notified after the police. Mr. Manke will be operating the Region 2 office out of Hartford at the State EOC the second week of November.

There have been issues with the Farms to Food program's limitations, but CT is most likely going to be approved to extend that program to December 31 with reduced numbers of trucks. The Region 2 Covid community resource coordinator is Gilead in Middletown. They will be looking for volunteers to help distribute assistance cards to those that are quarantined. The structure of the long-term Covid recovery committee has been reformulated. They are trying to develop immediate and long-term unmet need forms to be used state-wide.

A supplemental grant program for emergency management depts and agencies to mitigate Covid response will soon open up and details will be sent soon. There will also be action coming regarding the

draught that CT is still experiencing. There is a new regional intelligence officer for the Eastern part of the state. The Gov has asked that the Everbridge platform be utilized to notify residents of Covid testing. When asked about PPE, Mr. Manke reported that obtaining it is still a municipal function and the towns are encouraged to reach out to the normal chains of vendors. He expects to see some guidance coming on gloves; there are only 3 factories that produce these and one has been banned to produce and there is a shortage of resources to produce them so we may need to switch from medical grade gloves to another grade. There is an emergency stockpile of PPE in the state, to access this reach out to Mr. Manke.

2. Discussion on Crafting of 2021 Legislative Agenda

This year's session will be held virtually and due to issues earlier in the year related to Covid there may be a backlog of bills. Mr. Gold suggested a stand alone special legislative meeting in mid-December and asked that everyone send him their ideas for items to be included on the legislative agenda.

At 9:40 A.M. Chairman Salvatore had to depart the meeting. Vice Chairman Gister ran the meeting from this point on.

3. LCRVMPO Business

- a. **Approval of Minutes of the September 23, 2020 LCRVCOG & MPO Regular Meeting**
Mr. Smith moved to approve the minutes of the September 23, 2020 special meeting; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

- b. **2018 TIP Amendment 43 Replace traffic control signals at various locations, District 1, project 171-0459 FY21/FYI (motion)**
Provides STPA funding to replace traffic control signals at various locations in District 1 to meet current standards.

- c. **2018 TIP Amendment 44 Replace highway sheet aluminum signs, Statewide, project 170-3545, FY21 (motion)**
Moves from FY20 to FY21 and broadens the project scope (district 1 and 2 to statewide) of replacing highway sheet aluminum signs.

- d. **2018 TIP Amendment 45 Adjust FTA 5311 to actual appropriations, admin, and RTAP programs, Various, project 170-XXXX, FY20/21 (motion)**
Mr. Cox moved to approve 2018 TIP amendments 43, 44 and 45; second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

- e. **Endorse FY 2021 TIP (three separate resolutions) 1) TIP, 2) Air Quality Conformity, and 3) Self Certification (motion)**
The TIP is a list of federally funded transportation projects to maintain and enhance the transportation network of the region. The draft TIP was available for formal public review and comment from August 24, 2020 through October 9, 2020 and a public informational meeting was held virtually on September 16, 2020.

The TIP includes a discussion of the TIP planning and development process, program descriptions, a financial plan, list of projects to be funded, and environmental justice review. The TIP also

includes appendices that details projects by year, maps regional projects, performance-based planning and programming, Air Quality Conformity determination, comments, and certification. Regional investment from all funding sources is approximately \$186.0 million while statewide projects require an additional \$694.2 million for a total expenditure of \$880.2 million in the Lower Connecticut River Valley Region.

Mr. McGarry moved to endorse the FY2021 TIP, Air Quality Conformity Determination and MPO transportation planning self-certification; second by Mr. Bailey. Vote was unanimous in favor.

f. Endorse FY 2021 PPP revision (two separate resolutions) 1) PPP, 2) Policy (motion)

The MPO public Participation plan was created in 2015 after the merger and is reviewed annually per federal regulation. An additional section was added for MPO public involvement due to coronavirus describing the process for holding virtual public meetings.

Mr. Bailey moved to endorse the FY 2021 PPP revisions; second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

g. Transit Study Update

Mr. Gold has received the draft service improvement report and the study will hopefully be wrapped up by the end of December. Both transit districts have formed subcommittees to negotiate a MOA with CT DOT. Mr. Gold had suggested a motion supporting the MOA so that it is shown that the COG and CEOs are behind both the region's transit districts. The Chair of ETD, Leslie Strauss, and the Chair of MAT, Joe Samolis, were both present.

Ms. Strauss and Mr. Gold addressed a misunderstanding in communication between CT DOT and Mr. Gold in which CT DOT made some allegations against a member of the ETD board, which was communicated to the Executive Committee of the COG. It turned out to be a misunderstanding. Ms. Strauss noted that the ETD board has been working diligently since February to get merger conditions addressed and discussed with CT DOT though they have not been successful. A consultant was chosen to help with the MOA, who would have been paid for by ETD, though that consultant was rejected by CT DOT. Ms. Strauss stated that they need assistance to move forward and respect from the CT DOT.

Mr. Samolis stated that MAT is also willing to move forward and that they are there to help ETD in any way including leveraging clout with the legislative delegation and the state as they want this potential merger to be beneficial for all the communities and ridership involved. He feels a motion from the COG would be helpful. Mr. Gold suggested that RiverCOG send a letter to Deputy Commissioner Garret Eucalitto or to the Commissioner on behalf of the districts to get to a deeper level of communication within the CT DOT. Ms. Francis stated a general letter would be good but to remember that the CT DOT is a large bureaucracy that holds the funding for what we want to do so it should be delicately worded. Mr. Comerford noted that the two boards have been working well together, the challenge lies in negotiations with CT DOT.

Vice-Chair Gister noted that it should be clear that the boards and the CEO appointees that make up the board have the autonomy to speak for them and to stress that this is a partnership between the different agencies in the interest of the region's residents. Mr. Bailey noted that it might be

beneficial to ask CT DOT for proper engagement and commitment of resources by people that are able to forward this process. Mr. Samolis suggested putting this item on the COG legislative agenda.

Ms. Bransfield asked what the actual problems are and is looking for specific items that they have not gotten answers on. Mr. Gold noted that there are outstanding bills that CT DOT owes ETD, among other items. There was a discussion on who is leading the charge. The Chairs of each transit board were cited but additionally the chairs of the MOA sub-committee were as well. Mr. McDonald noted that this might be part of the problem, the crux of which is the lack of honest communication from the CT DOT. They have not really communicated with the board other than the two First Selectman that sit on the board, which they find inappropriate. Ms. Iino suggested that the letter to CT DOT be a statement of support and confidence in the transit boards themselves. Mr. McDonald agreed. Mr. Bishop suggested that the second consultant that has now been hired to come up with the MOA draft work with the two boards and the CT DOT to get something in writing to move forward.

There was discussion on the consultant and the fact that the has been engaged to work and will move forward with the deliverable, which is the MOA, which the consultant feels can be done in two to three weeks. Ms. Strauss discussed the idea of wanting to hear from the DOT that they have the money before they go ahead with further work. Mr. Bishop noted that during one discussion with the CT DOT it was explained that they have an issue about knowing what funds will be available due to the volatility of state funding. Mr. Comerford noted that this is why it would be helpful for the people at CT DOT that can make those commitments to be part of the discussion and that some items are wish list items but some are critical and the deal cannot happen without that commitment.

Mr. Gold will craft a letter of support from the COG. The letter will be a vote of confidence in the transit boards to negotiate with DOT with regard to implementing the improvements recommended in the transit study and asking for the involvement of at least the deputy commissioner.

i. Resolution Supporting MOA (motion)

Ms. Bransfield moved to send a letter of support for the work that the transit districts are doing. This was seconded by Ms. Iino. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Ms. Iino suggested a sentence be included that says a commitment is needed from DOT to move forward with the process. Vice Chairman Gister noted that we will see what comes out of the ETD meeting tomorrow morning as they also have passed a resolution.

h. Route 66 Corridor Study Update

A draft report was sent to the advisory committee. Once comments come back from the towns, the advisory committee and the CT DOT the consultant will hold a virtual public meeting and hopefully the board can endorse the final project in December or January.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. Regional Plan of Conservation and Development

The draft existing conditions (EC) report was sent to the RPC for review yesterday. We are in the process of renegotiating the contract with FHI as RiverCOG staff has done most of the work on the EC report. The plan is scheduled for completion in spring of 2021.

b. Regional Affordable Housing Plan

Due to new regulation 8 30-j each municipality must have an affordable housing plan. RiverCOG proposes taking a regional approach and creating a plan for the municipalities that would like to join in. Middlefield, Durham and Westbrook will create their own plans. The regional plan can be created out of RSG funds and the addition of grant money already received by Old Saybrook.

Ms. Bransfield moved to support a regional approach to the affordable housing plan mandate through RiverCOG with the caveat that Old Saybrook's portion of the plan is completed by June 30, 2021; second by Ms. Iino. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Mr. Gold will reach out to the towns he hasn't yet spoken with to make sure they would like to participate. Costs will be covered by RSG funds. Old Saybrook has specific things to accomplish on a tight timeline, they will bring grant money to the table. Chris Costa is the point person in Old Saybrook and will help with their scope of work. We will need a point person from each town involved. Old Saybrook is concerned with the time frame as their plan needs to be done by June 30, 2021. Mr. Gold agreed that the RFP can go out quickly and a consultant can be hired by December, which gives us six months to finish the plan. Other work on the plan could be secondary and we could finish Old Saybrook's portion first if necessary. The RPC hosted an affordable housing workshop and from that came up with their twelve goals for affordable housing.

At this time Ms. Francis brought up that her public works department is getting Covid testing. If the virus comes into municipal public works departments in the winter this could be a major issue. There was discussion on holding a separate special meeting in December about public works departments and Covid with a discussion on a possible regional contract with local contractors.

c. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

The plan will be heading to the state for review next week, which will be in time for any towns that want to apply for the hazard mitigation grants that are due in January. The model for the flood susceptibility project that the COG has been working on since 2017 will be updated with the new NOAA data for land cover and elevation. The takes the model data from 30 meters to 1 meter, which will hopefully lead to a much less expensive way to do flood modeling than what is currently available.

d. Lower Connecticut River Land Trust Update

The annual meeting will be held in December after the COG meeting. There is a request for all members to look at the bylaws as there will be a subcommittee formed to update if necessary.

e. DEMHS Update

We are back to running three three-year grants. The annual EPPI exercise for October has been postponed and not yet rescheduled.

f. HHW Update

The final collection will be held in Essex on Oct. 31. All HHW collections and paper shredding amounts are up this year. Ms. Iino asked if the slam fund was being looked at due

to some dramatic increases; Ms. Ehle/Meyer stated that will be looked at upon completion of the season.

a. MIRA Update

Mr. Bailey mentioned that MIRA is working with Waste Zero on a pay as you throw programs, they will be looking for a town to do a pilot program for a year.

At this time it was reported that the temporary eviction ban due to Covid will be ending Dec. 31. This will be a large issue in the region. The CT Water payment extension program ends on Nov. 1.

g. Hydrilla Public Information Video

The 12-town ERT (environmental review team) is creating a video to educate the public about hydrilla. There will also be a report produced by Greg Bugbee for the lower CT River region. Ms. Burns was able to get out on the Mattebessett River and saw that there is an abundance of water chestnut coming into it through feeder ponds in Berlin. Ms. Burns asked if she should invite the gentleman representing the companies that deal with pesticide applications to a future COG meeting.

5. Chairman's & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold reported that OPM is funding \$400,000 for all the COGs to split for Covid work prior to June 30, 2020. They will continue to work with OPM on funding for FY21. He also reported that Mr. Manke is looking for the COG directors to provide more leadership for Covid; to that end the long-term recovery committee may hire a consultant to help with recovery and leadership of that committee. There followed a discussion on leadership in DEMHS Region 2.

6. Other Business - None

7. Adjournment

Ms. Iino moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:23 AM, second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti