



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

May 26, 2021

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: Bob 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 *

MPO Members:

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

*present

Others Present:

Brianna DeVivo, Senator Murphy's Office
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Jonathan Ferrigno, Eversource
Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
TJ Magnoli, Eversource
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
David Dickson, UCONN CLEAR
Jennifer Carrier, FHWA
Erik Shortell, FHWA
Leah Sirmin, FTA
Laurie McElwee, Kennedy Center
Bill Villano, Workforce Alliance
Lou Mangini, Congresswoman DeLauro's Office
Cynthia Clegg, Community Foundation of Middlesex County

RiverCOG

Jeff Riley, Centerbridge
Irene Haines, Representative House District 34
Cathy Lezon, Eversource

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Torrance Downes
Eliza LoPresti
Margot Burns
Robert Haramut
Kevin Armstrong
Janice Ehle/Meyer
Paula Fernald
Megan Jouflas
Ben Lovejoy

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

Representative Haines discussed the Swing Bridge Landing project, which is a mixed-used development in East Haddam at the foot of the swing bridge utilizing the old town hall/municipal complex. The project will be presented in more detail at the June COG meeting.

Ms. McGrath of Congressman Courtney's office stated that the treasury department released the calculations for the non-entitlement towns but in CT, OPM will be the ones to do the math and hand out funds. The Corona virus state and local recovery funds interim final rule is open for public comment until July 16 through the regulations.gov portal. The broad latitude municipalities have in spending the money was discussed along with unanswered questions that will hopefully come with the final rule. Mr. Gold brought up the hope of the state pooling some of their funding with municipal funding or providing incentives for larger regional projects.

Mr. Mangini of Congresswoman DeLauro's office noted that some municipalities (in other regions) have been getting together in small groups to discuss what to do with the funding to come. He stated these discussions can be helpful in generating questions that need to be asked as well as creating best practices.

Ms. DeVivo of Senator Murphy's office discussed congressionally directed spending, or earmarks. Community groups, non-profits and municipalities can submit project funding requests to Sen. Murphy's office by June 7. Their website includes a form, account details and FAQ. Ms. Iino asked whether they were looking for a few large projects or many small projects. Ms. DeVivo replied that there is no cap on the number of senate projects and will likely depend on what the requests end up being.

In regards to the earmarks, Mr. Mangini stated that Congresswoman DeLauro's office is limited to ten projects. They are looking for very specific projects that can get done in one shot and are ready to go.

Ms. Graham of Senator Blumenthal's office stated that their office also has a June 7th deadline for submitting earmark requests.

Mr. Villano of Workforce Alliance stated that a number of programs are going to be funded by the Governor's workforce council. He will know more by the June meeting and will report then. There are over 200,000 people on unemployment in the state now and they will begin to lose benefits soon.

2. UCONN Clear Stormwater Corps – David Dickson

Mr. Dickson presented on the stormwater corps – a team of students trained in low-impact development (LID) retrofits for communities. He is looking for two municipalities from our region to participate. A report will be created with suggestions for projects to reduce impervious cover, then one project out of those suggested can be funded and completed in the town. Six of our municipalities were interested.

3. FHWA LCRV MPO Certification Presentation

Jennifer Carrier of the Federal Highway Administration presented on the findings of the MPO's quadrennial certification review that occurred in March 2021. She was joined by Erik Shortell (FHWA) and Leah Sirmin (FTA).

The MPO received two commendations: one for transit planning due to the Transit Integration Study and the second for our multi-faceted approach to public participation. One corrective action was issued which was the fact that no MOA has been signed with the New Haven TMA. This needs to be completed by the end of the year.

Eighteen recommendations were made and are listed here: amend bylaws to define roles in the MPO structure, take a more active role in financial planning and fiscal constraint in the TIP program, take an active role in the CT DOT locally coordinated human services transportation plan (LCHSTP), document coordination efforts with local transportation providers in the MTP, post the TIP and amendments on our website, work with CT DOT to receive guidance on ADA and section 504 responsibilities, coordinate with CT DOT on regional transportation safety plans, include a system performance report in the next update of the MTP, update the congestion management process to include the whole TMA, coordinate with CT DOT as related to intelligent transportation systems, document and work with CT DEEP on environmental mitigation.

4. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of April 28, 2021 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meetings

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the April 28, 2021 meeting; second by Mr. Bailey. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. FY 21 TIP Amendment #5, Statewide, Statewide TDM (greater CT moderate), project #0170-3608, 2021

Mr. Cox moved to approve FY21 TIP Amendment #5; second by Ms. Francis. Vote was unanimous in favor.

- c. 21 TIP Amendment #6 - Various, CTTransit systemwide admin capital/misc. support, project #0400-XXXX, 2021**
Mr. Bishop moved to approve FY21 TIP Amendment #6; second by Ms. Francis. Vote was unanimous in favor.
- d. 21 TIP Amendment #7 - Statewide, Statewide TDM (NY/NJ/CT moderate), project #0170-3605, 2021**
Mr. Bailey moved to approve 21 TIP Amendment #7, second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.
- e. 21 TIP Amendment #8 - ETD/MTD, ETD – ETD/MTD merger studies and ETD – radios and MDTs, project #0478-XXXX, 2021**
Mr. Griswold moved to approve 21 TIP Amendment #8, second by Ms. Francis. Vote was unanimous in favor.
- f. 21 TIP Amendment #9 - MTD, MAT – facility improvement, replace small busses, bus replacement 1 2012 30’ bus and replace radio system, project #0422-XXXX, 2021**
Mr. Bailey moved to approve 21 TIP Amendment #9, second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.
- g. Endorse 2022-2023 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) (motion)**
Mr. Cox moved to endorse the 2022-2023 UPWP; second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.
- h. Endorse UPWP Statement of Cooperative MPO/State/Transit Operators’ Planning Roles & Responsibilities (motion)**
Mr. Cox moved to endorse the statement of cooperative MPO/State/Transit Operators’ Planning Roles and Responsibilities; second by Mr. Bailey. Vote was unanimous in favor.
- i. Endorse UPWP Authorizing Resolution (motion)**
Mr. Bailey moved to endorse the UPWP Authorizing Resolution; second by Ms. Francis. Vote was unanimous in favor.
- j. Transit District Update**
Mr. Comerford discussed the list of transit enhancements that they were asked to write by the state. They applied the recommendations of the Transit Integration Study to the list. The state will be funding something on the list, but details of what are not yet known. The state plans to enhance bus service statewide.

There will be a pilot program this summer to provide service to Hammonasset and Silver Sands beaches on Sundays and holidays and add some extra Saturday service. A new shuttle route around Madison to alleviate parking issues will also be in place. Statewide, all bus systems are free on weekends all summer.

The CT DOT has the MOA produced through the Transit Integration Study. Mr. Comerford is hoping for an approved copy from them by Friday, though he is not sure what form it will ultimately take.

k. Other Transportation

Mr. Gold stated that route and service changes along the Shoreline East are open for public comment. They are proposing reduction in service and massive increase into the New Haven area, and extending the Madison route into the early hours of the morning. Mr. Gold commented on each change and sent a copy of his comments to the First Selectman in the affected towns.

5. LCRVCOG Business

a. RiverCOG Lease Extension Authorization

Ms. Iino authorized the RiverCOG Chairman to enter into a lease extension for 145 Dennison Road, Essex with the recommendation that we accept the 17-month compromise outlined in the extension, subject to the approval of RiverCOG's attorney. Second by Ms. Francis. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Mr. Cox asked what the essence of language disagreement was in the extension, Mr. Gold replied that in a previous amendment there was a 25% penalty holdover rent. He would like that to be considered regular rent if we give notice in month 17 but then stay another month or two since we have a 36-month lease. The landlord believes that the current language gives us squatter's rights if we give notice and don't leave right away. Mr. Gold wants to make sure that penalty rent only exists if we stay past the 36-month mark or drop it all together. Our 17-month out clause ends December 31, 2022.

b. ARPA Funded Regional Projects Update

Mr. Gold gave an overview presentation of possible uses for funds such as municipal IT that will facilitate hybrid meetings and/or digitize in-person transactions, economic recovery planning, funding of grants and/or loans to businesses or individuals, sewer, water, broadband projects, and more.

Mr. Fortuna discussed his opinion that the towns' CEO can spend ARPA funds without consulting the BOF or going to town meeting. This is based on the fact that this is considered emergency funding and follows the guidelines of the funds from the CARES Act. Attorney Mednick will be asked to issue one opinion on this topic for all the towns.

Cynthia Clegg of Middlesex Community Center discussed the possibility of funding a shared social worker or funding other types of mental health service providers for long-term public health needs. She mentioned that many non-profits need technology funding and training as well.

Mr. Bishop asked if CCM would be giving information today during their meeting about when the funds are going to come in. Mr. Gold is attending that meeting; he will ask and report what he finds.

There was a meeting of the Middlesex County Revitalization Commission (MCRC) that Mr. Gold attended. Funding this group would be a vehicle to support small businesses and

individuals that have been financially hurt during the pandemic with grants or low interest loans.

c. RiverCOG FY22 Budget Update

The legislative session is still on so the COGs do not yet know the amount of RSG funding to be received. There is also a possible EDA grant that is still pending. Hoped-for projects in the upcoming fiscal year are a corridor study for the Air Line to Farmington Canal Trail and a regional project with ARPA funds. Mr. Gold thinks that a draft budget will be ready by the June meeting.

d. Draft Regional Plan of Conservation & Development Update

The plan is now open for public comment. There will be a public hearing at 7:00 pm, June 30th via Zoom. Mr. Gold encouraged all in attendance to comment on the plan and register for the public hearing.

e. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

FEMA has approved the NHMP. It now needs to be adopted by each participating town's Board of Selectman or Town Council. Once this happens the COG can adopt it.

f. Lower Connecticut River Land Trust Update

Tentatively, at the June meeting there will be a list of services that the LCRLT may be able to offer as shared services for land trusts and a proposal to the funders of the collaborative services project with CLCC.

g. Hydrilla Update

Senator Blumenthal sent a letter to the appropriations committee to create a Hydrilla abatement program and rapid response task force led by the Army Corps of Engineers, the CT Ag. Station and CT DEEP. The hope is there will be an action plan for FY 22. Ms. Burns is working on a document for further senatorial support. She gave a tour of Hydrilla sites on the Connecticut River to Mark Heilman of the Northeast Aquatic Nuisance Species. She has also learned that the species of Hydrilla seen now doesn't have a lot of tubers and reproduces annually so it can be more easily controlled.

h. Household Hazardous Waste Update

Ms. Ehle/Meyer reported that Ms. LoPresti earned her 40-hour Hazwoper certification, which means that she can be a second on HHW collections. The Clinton April collection was up 42% from that same collection in 2019. During the May Essex collection Calamari Recycling closed to make traffic run more smoothly. Ms. Ehle/Meyer is waiting for proposals on the roof at the Essex facility. The shredding event that took place in East Hampton in May had over 13,500 pounds of paper but was down 11% from last year.

i. Regional Agricultural Committee Update

The RAC is applying for a farm viability grant to get no-till equipment that would be shared regionally. Mr. Armstrong is helping to revamp the front page of the Knowyourfarmers.org website.

j. Recycling Grant

There is a recycling grant due at the end of June that Ms. Ehle/Meyer and Kim O'Rourke of Middletown are working closely on. They are thinking of using it for education and enforcement, details will be forthcoming.

k. Update on Shoreline Basic Needs Task Force

Needs at food pantries are still high. They are looking into working on a permaculture design for a food forest and need site so if any towns are interested please contact Ms. Ehle/Meyer. There is an internship available at the SSK & Pantry. She will be sending an email out shortly to learn which towns are going ahead with summer meal programs.

A bill has been passed that gives people facing eviction a right to counsel. Thirty-six people that stayed at the Middletown warming shelter now have personal housing plans. The need now is about 3x more than it was in 2020. This program takes places in hotels, thanks to FEMA. The Unite CT program waived the 15% contribution from landlords.

Funeral expenses for those that passed away due to Covid are now free thanks to the federal government. Westbrook's career study and placement program, Pathways, is a good model for a regional program.

l. Legislative Update

Mr. Lovejoy gave an update which was also sent out to CEOs by email. Executive orders are in place until July 20 now.

m. DEMHS Update

Mr. Lovejoy reported that the 2018 grant has only \$5,000 left to spend down. Five electronic trailers purchased with DEMHS grant funds were utilized for the funeral of the fallen New Haven firefighter. The EMPG one-year grant has only \$20 left. The 2021 three-year grant budget will be presented soon. He is collecting MOAs and resolutions for the 2020 grant and needs them from Clinton, Durham, Middlefield, Old Saybrook and Westbrook.

n. Update From Municipalities on Logistics of Reopening Town Halls

No update as most town halls have been open for a while.

6. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Chairman Salvatore and Mr. Gold both had no report.

7. Other Business

None

8. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:05 AM, second by Mr. Bailey. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti