



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

145 Dennison Road Essex, CT 06426 | +1 860 581 8554 | www.rivercog.org

Regional Planning Committee

LOWER CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING

Wednesday, June 30, 2021 – 7:00 pm

Virtual Zoom Meeting

Members:

Chester	Mike Sanders *
	Cindy Lignar *
Clinton	Alan Kravitz
	Martin Jaffe *
Cromwell	Nick Demetriades *
	Anthony LaCava *
Deep River	Bruce Edgerton *
	Tony Bolduc
Durham	Frank DeFelice *
East Haddam	Crary Brownell
	Lou Salicrup
East Hampton	Michael Kowalczyk
Essex	Jane Siris *
	Sandra Childress *
Haddam	Raul deBrigard *
	Maurice Adams
Killingworth	Alec Martin *
	Stephanie Warren
Lyme	Mary Stone *
	Humphrey Tyler *
Middlefield	Paul Pizzo
Middletown	Beth Emery *
	Kellin Atherton *
Old Lyme	Harold Thompson
Old Saybrook	Douglas McCracken *
	Karen Jo Marcolini
Portland	Mary Dickerson *
Westbrook	Bill Neale *
	Marie Farrell *

*Members Present

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Margot Burns
Kevin Armstrong
Eliza LoPresti

RiverRPC

Torrance Downes
Megan Jouflas
Ben Lovejoy

Guests:

Marek Kozikowski, City Planner, City of Middletown
Sofia DiNitale, Sustainable CT Fellow
Megan Schweickert, Sustainable CT Fellow
Francisco Gomes, FHI
Paula Kay, Old Saybrook Planning Commission
Bob Friedman, Old Saybrook Zoning Commission
Cathy Iino, First Selectwoman, Killingworth

1. Call to Order

Chairman DeFelice called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

2. Roll Call

Eliza LoPresti called the roll

3. Seating of Alternates – Martin Jaffe of Clinton and Anthony LaCava of Cromwell were seated (Cromwell member Nick Demetriades entered the meeting after this point)

4. Adoption of Agenda

Mr. deBrigard moved to adopt the agenda; second by Mr. Martin. Vote was unanimous in favor.

5. Presentation on Lower Connecticut River Valley Regional Plan of Conservation & Development

Mr. Gold and Ms. Jouflas presented a summary of the plan.

6. Public Hearing on Lower Connecticut River Valley Regional Plan of Conservation & Development

a. Open Public Hearing

Mr. deBrigard moved to open the public hearing at 7:35 p.m.; Mr. Jaffe seconded. Vote was unanimous in favor.

The same members that were seated remain seated for the public hearing.

b. Public Comment

Cathy Iino, First Selectwoman of Killingworth, stated that the plan seems comprehensive and to the point. Existing conditions are based on pre-Covid data and while we know things are changing, we don't know how exactly. (Ex. The declining population trend may have turned around). We can refer to the fact that there are most likely changing trends even though we probably can't point to data yet, it should at least be acknowledged. Recommendations around aging population and affordable housing should reference the need for additional services that would allow seniors to stay in their homes.

Marek Kozikowski, City Planner for the City of Middletown, offered his support for the plan and stated that the spirit of the plan is in line with City of Middletown POCD. He thanked staff, consultants and the RPC. Since many recommendations identify municipalities as the lead, he will evaluate his daily work as to whether it supports the regional goals and urges other municipal planners to do the same.

RiverRPC

Paula Kay, Old Saybrook Planning Commission, noted that while it is stated clearly that the RPOCD is non-binding on municipalities, elsewhere it is indicated that state or RiverCOG funds may be prioritized according to municipalities compliance to the plan.

Bob Friedman, Old Saybrook Zoning Commission, previously submitted similar comments in writing: The table on page 12 does not reflect Old Saybrook Station affordable housing units (38). He would like to see Old Saybrook's transit-oriented development, incentive, affordable housing at Saybrook Station be recognized in that table. Additionally, on page 28 Spencer's Corner is recognized as a good example of affordable housing. Old Saybrook has Saybrook Station that includes state defined affordable units as well as Hanford Commons on Lyme St in Old Saybrook, one building of which is nearing completion with another approved.

Raul deBrigard commented that we should include a one-pager in the beginning of the plan that can be understood by an untutored public, authored by the RPC as a whole, that explains why we are doing this, that the plan is aimed at public officials, that we want them to think regionally and will hopefully point to actions important to the region as a whole that we should all strive to do - state what it is about in the real world.

Marie Farrell stated that under the "sustainable" section, talking about threat of waste discharge, for implementation we discuss reducing the environmental impact of waste, but it is interesting that we do not take a stronger stance on endorsing a certain solution. Waste water discharge along the shoreline is huge problem and this document doesn't state the issue strongly enough. She would like it to have a stronger statement that says it has major impacts for the future of the coastal community. Many properties along the shoreline have cesspools and/or septic systems 40+ years old. This document states it's a high priority to make it environmentally friendly but doesn't do much more than that and doesn't speak to the future of where we should be going with that. She also indicated that Westbrook's parks are not included on the map on page 17.

Cathy lino stated that it's worth a mention as we talk about water that PFAS problems have recently emerged in Killingworth and will probably affect every town eventually.

Martin Jaffe stated that the plan contains good comparisons between towns' demographic data, but it would be nice to have a benchmark as to state averages (ex: income), that would help frame the status of the region. In terms of the innovation section, there is no mention of anchor institutions like Middlesex Hospital or Middlesex Community College, both of which can help with bioscience or other initiatives that the plan envisions. Additionally, Covid issues ought to be addressed more, especially the fact that everything is virtual and people can engage in work and community virtually. For example, we are outside commuting the sheds of northeast innovation sheds (Manhattan, Boston). Once we get into virtuality, where you are aspatial, it evokes a series of different strategies for attracting people to the region. One of our strengths is physical beauty, particularly along the river. Selling quality of life to people that no longer have to commute is a useful strategy to explore, as it relates to Covid-19.

Bob Friedman stated that the state's direction of increasing housing opportunity is basically increasing housing density. For towns that have flood zones and river and Long Island sound frontage, density should not be increased in flood zones that may be cut off by 2031. Is it appropriate for the regional plan, for several towns that are sensitive to sea-level rise, to recommend increasing density away from the areas that will be subject to sea level rise?

Marie Farrell stated that she has the opposite comment: she would like to see more support for helping, and not just in the vague term resiliency. We state under goal 2 that we need to make sure

wetlands are restored, enhanced and protected but there is not that strong of a statement for the coastal communities. It is hard for people on the coastline to get (couldn't make out what she said here) rebuilt and get DEEP to enhance the beachfront so they have barriers against erosion. The coastal income of the coastal communities is essential to the shoreline properties. If the coastal people are forced to move away she doesn't understand where those towns' tax base will come from. Stronger support for the coastal communities is essential. People may be forced to raise houses and towns may be forced to raise roads, but there are other ways of slowing erosion and sea level rise that aren't always supported by the state. Coastal communities are often at odds with the state. DEEP has a strategy of asking them to move away. DEEP's long-term strategy is for the coastline to return to its natural habitat and for people to lose their property because they won't be able to sell it. She understands the want to decrease density but the fact of the matter is that density already exists. There are only more people moving down the coastline with the intent to settle on the beach. She doesn't want to see another plan handed down that is not supportive of coastal communities and would like to see stronger language such as what is put in for wetlands. The coastline is essential to CT and attracting people. Additionally, it would be nice to see shell beds restored: it's a great environmental plus, and an area attraction. She understands a regional plan can't necessarily address minutiae but coastal communities warrant more attention.

Chairman DeFelice read the letter received from State of CT, Office of Policy & Management into the record:

Dear Sam:

The Office of Policy and Management (OPM) has reviewed the draft *Lower Connecticut River Valley Plan of Conservation and Development 2021-2031* (Regional POCD) that you provided by email on April 26, 2021, in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes [Section 8-35a\(b\)](#). OPM hereby determines that the draft plan is not inconsistent with the *Conservation and Development Policies: The Plan for Connecticut 2013-2018* (State C&D Plan).

OPM would like to commend RiverCOG for preparing an especially thoughtful plan that should prove to be a useful tool for the COG and its member municipalities. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way citizens of the state work, live, and communicate. OPM acknowledges that the timing of the pandemic created a challenging planning process for RiverCOG, as there are many unknowns about the way traditional customs and expectations will evolve in a post-pandemic economy. Undoubtedly trends will evolve, and some predictions or expectations may be wrong. To the extent resources allow, OPM encourages incremental revisions to RiverCOG's Regional POCD in the coming years to account for these anticipated unknowns.

Please contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Eric Lindquist

Environmental Analyst

c. Close Public Hearing

Mr. Sanders moved to close the public hearing at 8:10 p.m.; second by Ms. Dickerson. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Mr. Sanders moved to resume the special meeting of the RPC; second by Mr. Martin. Vote was unanimous in favor.

The same members that were seated previously remain seated.

7. Regional Plan Next Steps

The comments received will be gone through and organized. At the July RPC meeting we will discuss the comments. Possibly we can make a recommendation for adoption to the COG in August.

RiverRPC

Ms. Emery asked if the COG CEOs make comments will those come back to the RPC for review. Mr. Gold replied that yes, his recommendation is cooperation with the RPC, though the COG board can ultimately make any changes they prefer. If there are major comments he will recommend they refer them back to the RPC.

Mr. deBrigard stated that CEO comments should be simple and will be related to details on their own towns. He suggests they find a way to open discussion at a COG meeting about thinking regionally. He used the comments about the shoreline as an example of a larger topic that will continue and hopes that the plan will present it as an issue instead of something one-sided.

Mr. Martin noted that the document isn't an advocate for any group but is an overall look at the situation. The situation on the shoreline is delicate, and thinks that the comment made by Ms. Farrell points to us using the document to advocate more for people who live on the shoreline.

8. Updates

a. Planning & Zoning Legislation

Mr. Lovejoy gave an update on legislation that came out of the most recent session that affects planning and zoning, including recreational cannabis and the budget implementer bill which were passed during special session. He mentioned public act 21-29 which encompassed many zoning ideas such as zoning reform, ADUs as a right, parking requirement restrictions, and zoning regulation changes. All affordable housing plans have been rolled back to 2022 (instead of 2023), outdoor dining as a right was passed, and remote meetings were also addressed. He sent along a written, detailed report to the members.

b. Sustainable CT Fellows

Megan Schweickert and Sofia DiNatale are the 2021 Sustainable CT Fellows being housed at RiverCOG. They introduced themselves and discussed their work with the RiverCOG towns.

c. Regional Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan

FHI has been hired to complete the plan. The Sustainable CT Fellows will be helping with data collection. The goal is to create places the average person will feel comfortable walking or cycling with access to transit. Ms. Emery is included as part of the steering committee.

Ms. Emery suggested a section about Sustainable CT in the bike/ped plan along with a small section in the RPOCD as well.

d. Regional Housing Plan

Ms. Joufflas stated that the regional housing plan will fulfill the state's 8-30j requirements for an affordable housing plan and build upon that to make a larger assessment of and recommendations for the region. The municipalities that are participating will have their own appendices attached, so it builds off the housing section of the RPOCD in a way. The consultants plan to launch a website and survey in July and the whole thing will be completed by the deadline of June, 2022.

e. Regional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan

Ms. Burns reported that the NHMP is complete except for adoption in 7 towns that she hasn't met with yet. DEMHS has reviewed the plan at the state level and FEMA has reviewed and approved at the federal level.

9. Items of Regional or Local Interest

RiverCOG adopted their budget for fiscal year 2022.

10. Adjournment

Mr. Neale moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:44 pm; second by Ms. Dickerson. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti