



# Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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## Regional Planning Committee

### LOWER CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

#### MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Monday, September 27, 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	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  
Torrance Downes

**RiverRPC**

Megan Jouflas  
Robert Haramut

**Guests:** None

**1. Call to Order**

Chairman DeFelice called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm. The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

**2. Roll Call**

Eliza LoPresti called the roll

**3. Seating of Alternates** – Cindy Lignar (Chester) and Stephanie Warren (Killingworth) were seated.

Mr. Martin of Killingworth arrived to the meeting after this point in time; when he arrive Ms. Warren was unseated. It was also noted that Mr. Bolduc is now the member and Deep River has no alternate.

**4. Adoption of Agenda**

*Mr. Kravitz moved to adopt the agenda; second by Mr. Bolduc. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**5. Public Comments** – None

**6. Approval of the Minutes of Past Meetings**

*Mr. Neale moved to approve the minutes of the August 30, 2021 special meeting; second by Ms. Warren. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**7. Regional Plan Next Steps**

On Sept. 22, 2021, the COG approved the Regional Plan of Conservation & Development. The document will be implemented online shortly after hyperlinks are added. An executive summary has been written and will be translated into Spanish for the website.

There was discussion on updating data in the plan. If there is an update to census data or something along those lines, that would not need the COG's approval. If there were something of substance, like a policy added or changed depending on some larger societal change, that would warrant an amendment from the RPC and re-approval of the COG.

Mr. Gold discussed possibly doing a demographic data digest yearly. There could be a significant update in a few years. If data is changed there will be a revision page, which will be listed prominently. There was suggestion to have an RPC meeting agenda item once a year to do a status review on the plan. This could become an annual status report to the COG and town P&Z chairs. There was another suggestion that if something radically changes, we should deal with it immediately and then report on changes once a year. Another suggestion was to come up with five key variables to measure and track changes to data.

Mr. Gold cautioned that we shouldn't be reopening the document for data updates, but we do want it to be useful for the full ten years. A data update can be achieved with a hyperlink or footnote to the new/updated data. There will be an appendix that tracks the changes and if the document changes enough to warrant a new version it needs to be named at the front

**RiverRPC**

*Ms. Stone moved to support the idea that an index for any changes to the RPOCD will be added to include impacted page number, links and/or footnotes and a version date on the front of the document. Second by Mr. Pizzo. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**a. Presentations to Planning and Zoning Commissions**

Once the web page for the plan is all set up, Mr. Gold would like to get on the agendas for each P&Z commission to show them how they can use the plan.

**b. Use of Regional Plan in Land Use Referrals**

It will be helpful for the RPC to use conformity with the RPOCD as a metric in referral letters. There then followed a discussion on the process of receiving and sending referrals.

**8. Updates**

**a. Regional Housing Plan**

Ms. Joufflas explained the components of the plan and highlighted the public presentation that will take place on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm via Zoom. There is a housing survey open now, the purpose of which is to learn about the public's perceptions on housing.

There was discussion that the towns don't have the bandwidth to have housing resource experts on staff and that perhaps the COG could provide a regionally utilized person with this type of expertise.

Non-participating communities are Middlefield, Durham, Haddam, Old Saybrook and Westbrook. Old Lyme has also received their own grant to do this work but will stay part of the regional plan.

There is going to be an existing housing stock taken that will answer questions such as those about healthy homes. Housing age and condition will be looked into during the research. One of the consultants will focus primarily on the housing market and that will reflect changes that are occurring now in the market.

The hope for the plan is that we can help guide the conversation at the state level and try to get some less narrow policy in place.

**b. Bike/Ped Plan**

Mr. Haramut updated everyone on what has been done in the past and the work being done now. A consultant was hired in May to finish the plan. A steering committee has been convened to include Ms. Emery, a representative from the Durham Complete Streets committee, John Hall from the Jonah Center, RiverCOG staff and more. Sustainable CT Fellows that worked at RiverCOG over the past summer went to each town and helped with observations of perceptions of safety in the field.

Current data being used is from Strava, which is based off fitness trackers, and Streetlight Data, which is more intensive, quantitative phone data that can be looked at in-depth.

The plan is intended to be a placemaking study looking at linking communities more than diving into specific projects. Goals include bike & pedestrian safety, improving regional connectivity, promoting health, using projects as economic drivers for the region, promoting an equitable network of bike/ped amenities accessible for all users, and connectivity of village centers and nodes.

There will be a few more advisory committee meetings and the plan should be wrapped up by the spring.

There was a question about whether users have been engaged. Mr. Haramut answered that the steering committee is populated with them and an electronic survey and mapping tool was released to the public in the past. Pop-up events have been limited due to COVID. There isn't anyone who represents a hiking group, because the focus is more on pedestrian uses in town centers. A goal is to make it more comfortable for people that don't walk or bike now. We will be looking at on and off road connections.

Ms. Emery mentioned a mobility talk that will be happening regarding over-policing that CROG is sponsoring. She will send information out to all.

#### **c. ARPA Plan Regional Projects**

Mr. Gold reported that RiverCOG is working with the First Selectmen on creating some regional projects to do with some of the county share of the ARPA funds. He discussed using the Middlesex County Revitalization Commission as a vehicle for small business grants and/or loans, the Community Foundation of Middlesex County as the same for social service organizations, and hiring a consultant or firm to help each town with the federal reporting requirements of ARPA. There is an upcoming meeting where FEMA will attempt to match-make regional projects with available funds. Additionally, DECD has notified RiverCOG that we will be receiving a grant to create a SEDS plan, which is a comprehensive economic development plan.

### **9. Discussion on National Estuarine Research Reserve (CT NERR) DEIS/DMP**

The NERR has been in the works for a number of years. A portion of the CT River estuary and shoreline will be the site of future research. This will provide academic resources for students, bring researchers into our region, raise the profile of the estuary/river on a national and global level, and help support conservation efforts and the health of the river.

Ms. Burns discussed the project and how it came about. The proposal to build it in our region was chosen by the state and by NOAA, who likes to focus on a unique research area, strong educational component in K-12 schools, conservation and stewardship of the area and collaboration with local and state partners. As part of the proposal to NOAA a draft management plan and draft environmental impact plan were created. These documents are now open for public comment until the middle of October. Links were forwarded to the RPC.

There was discussion on more inclusion up the river toward Haddam. Ms. Burns feels they will be included in the future. There was general consensus that it would be good for all to comment that they should push the area up to the Salmon River. Ms. Burns noted that they could include Eagle Landing state park as a public access point for education should the move the area up north. She

also feels that comments have been made by multiple parties throughout the process about moving the area up and that it will happen eventually.

*Mr. deBrigard moved that the RPC should comment as a body on the plan – complimenting it but stressing interest to have the research area extended north to the Salmon River. Second by Ms. Stone. Vote was unanimous in favor with Mr. Neale abstaining.*

*Discussion: Ms. Stone noted that she sent these documents to the committee because it was critical that they are aware of it and comment it. It's not just where the comment comes from but also the volume of comments. Please refer it to your town commissions for comment as well because it advocates for research money to go into the area. Everything we do on the RPC that connects to the environment connects to the river. She agrees that it is appropriate to advocate for extending the area north, but let's get money and research into the areas we need to protect.*

*Mr. Neale noted that McKinney Wildlife Refuge has no money, therefore they are not a reason for limiting the research area. He does not know the goals and stated that there are probably reasons for that limitation but it's not McKinney.*

*Ms. Childress noted that one part of the plan is for 2022-2027 and then there is a future five-year plan, which was surprising to her due to the number of areas in Essex that they are looking at. She doesn't want us to get ahead of ourselves saying they need to add in more as it's a focus on five years and a good lookout for the following five.*

*Ms. Emery stated that there are scientific and education opportunities in the southern part of the region, which doesn't do a lot for diversity as most of the diversity is in the northern part of the region. She wondered if there would be summer school opportunities for children in the Middletown/northern area to take advantage of. There could be buses or auxiliary things, presenting a great opportunity for young people in Middletown but right now the way it's written there are no funds to do that. We could encourage furthering the way the plan expands so it's equitable to a diverse population.*

*Mr. DeFelice suggested that staff craft a letter and then distribute it before sending it out, the RPC agreed.*

## **10. Referrals – None**

## **11. Miscellaneous: State, Regional and/or Local Planning Issues**

Mr. Neale stated he has information on stone wall ordinances and is hoping it can be discussed at the October meeting.

It was also noted that this is Mr. Tyler's last meeting as he is moving to California.

## **12. Adjournment**

*Mr. Neale moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 pm; second by Mr. Bolduc. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Eliza LoPresti