



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

October 27, 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: Joe Samolis *
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:

Cynthia Clegg, Middlesex Community Foundation
Jeff Pugliese, Middlesex Chamber of Commerce
Rep. Irene Haines
Rep. Christine Goupil
Lou Mangini, Rep. DeLauro's Office
Attorney Steven Mednick

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Torrance Downes
Eliza LoPresti
Robert Haramut
Kevin Armstrong
Janice Ehle/Meyer

RiverCOG

Margot Burns
Paula Fernald
Ben Lovejoy

1. **Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions**

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 12:13 P.M. The meeting was held at the Chatfield Hollow Farm/Inn, Killingworth.

2. **Public Speaking**

Susan Bransfield, Noel Bishop, Rob Smith, and Cathy Iino, all of whom were attending their last meeting, each spoke briefly about their time with the COG.

Lou Mangini of Rep. DeLauro's office stated that earmarks are moving along. The infrastructure bill, which is to be voted on the next day, will increase the amount of federal funding for transportation and infrastructure in the state through already existing federal funding streams. The LOTCIP list will probably be looked at as a good starting place to use that money.

Rep. Christine Goupil explained that the Planning & Development committee and ACIR had a discussion on what the term "home rule" means. Attorney Mednick provided insight. ACIR has come up with a commonly understood definition of home rule, which is a misnomer, as there really is no such thing. The state constitution was amended for the home rule article in the early 1960's, but when you read that article, it is really about the General Assembly. Therefore, the point of home rule is that you only have those powers that are expressly granted by the State of CT. When the state gives a mandate that a municipality doesn't like, it is not an interference with home rule because they are the only body that can even tell what home rule is.

3. **LCRVMPO Business**

a. **Approval of Minutes of September 22, 2021 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting**

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the September 22, 2021 meeting; second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. **21TIP Amendment #10 East Haddam, 0040-0146, STPR, X6, Replace bridge over Strong's Brook on RT 82, CON, \$2,800,000, 2022, Increase FED from \$800,000**

Ms. Gister moved to approve 21TIP Amendment #10 East Haddam, 0040-0146, STPR, X6, Replace bridge over Strong's Brook on RT 82, CON, \$2,800,000, 2022, Increase FED from \$800,000; second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. **21TIP Amendment #11 District 2, 0172-0513, STPA, X6, Replace traffic control signals at various locations, PD, \$473,000, 2022, FD, \$406,000, 2023, ROW, \$110,000, 2023, New project**

Ms. Bransfield moved to approve 21TIP Amendment #11 District 2, 0172-0513, STPA, X6, Replace traffic control signals at various locations, PD, \$473,000, 2022, FD, \$406,000, 2023, ROW, \$110,000, 2023, New project; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

d. **Endorse MOU Regarding Transportation Planning and Funding in the New Haven Urbanized Area**

Ms. Francis moved to authorize the Executive Director or Chairman to sign the MOU Regarding Transportation Planning and Funding in the New Haven Urbanized Area; second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

e. Endorse Targets for Safety Performance Measures Established by CTDOT

Ms. Bransfield moved to endorse the state targets for safety performance measures established by CTDOT; second by Ms. Iino. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Mr. Gold asked if any state money can be used for enforcement. Mr. Haramut stated that may be, but the funding will probably be from a different pot of money. Ms. Francis stated that it feels funny to be endorsing measures we have not and will not meet and asked if it's safe to say that our endorsement will make us eligible as a state to move forward to meet them. Mr. Haramut replied that is why CTDOT creates the more aggressive plan. Ms. Bransfield thanked the COG for helping the town of Portland with measuring speed and with digital safety signs. Because the town increased their safety measures so much they won an honorable mention award from the Federal Highway Safety bureau because of COG and CTDOT safety measures and connectivity programs. Mr. Smith asked if any of the safety measures are mandatory. Mr. Haramut has not heard anything about that.

f. State Recreational Trails Grant Program – Air Line Trail Connection Between East Hampton and Portland

DEEP is applying for a state bond for a construction project to fill the gap between the East Hampton and Portland sections of the Air Line Trail. There is a pending corridor study with CT DOT to connect all towns in a loop trail.

Ms. Bransfield moved to endorse DEEP's application to fill in the gap in the Air Line Trail between East Hampton and Portland. Second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Ms. Bransfield stated that this has been a long time coming, that East Hampton has done a great job with the trail, and she will be happy for the two towns to meet again.

g. Transportation Updates: RTSP, Bike/Ped Plan, CT Traffic Incident Scene Management Field Guide from the Greater Hartford TIM Coalition is available, etc.)

Regional Transportation Safety Plan: comments will be finishing up soon and the plan will probably be on the Dec. 8th meeting agenda for board endorsement.

Bike/Ped Plan: most of the existing condition work is done, the consultant is currently doing data analysis. A draft plan should be available in a few months.

The Greater Hartford TIM coalition recently completed the Traffic Incident Scene Management Field Guide, which is a collection of best practices for emergency responders. Mr. Haramut will send out the link to this as soon as it is posted. Along these same lines, the Governor approved crash safety responder week for November 8.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. Executive Director's Contract Approval

Mr. Bishop moved to authorize the Executive Committee to negotiate a three-year employment contract with Sam Gold for the RiverCOG Executive Director position effective Dec. 8, 2021,

and to authorize the RiverCOG Chair to sign the mutually agreed upon contract on the behalf of RiverCOG. Second by Mr. Griswold; vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Legislative Agenda Discussion

The Executive Committee began discussing ideas for the 2022 legislative agenda already. The legislative meeting is now slated to take place at the January COG meeting, but some CEOs suggested holding a separate meeting earlier in January. The list of ideas that already exist will be sent out to all as soon as possible. Mr. Gold requested additional ideas be sent to him.

c. MIRA Update & Trash Discussion

Mr. Gold is hoping to secure a place on the MIRA board, which is actively looking for members.

Ms. Iino endorsed Mr. Gold as a potential MIRA board member. Second by Mr. Smith; vote was unanimous in favor.

Ms. Ehle/Meyer reported that this year's shredded paper totaled about 40,000 pounds. The final household hazardous waste collection for the year will be the Saturday after this meeting. She is looking into a DEEP grant that supports unit-based pricing and food scrap collection. She would like to apply for an expression of interest for the region, if is approved a plan will be developed.

Ms. Francis moved to apply for the grant and volunteered to help with a plan; second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Mr. Fortuna gave an update on the closing of the MIRA plant, which will happen by June 30, 2022. DEEP wants the 49 MIRA towns to stay together, but that may not be feasible. Towns need to let the MIRA board know if they are opting out of the opt out clause that is in the RFP. If they do so, lower prices will be available. The general consensus seemed to be that the opt out option would be deleted.

*Ms. Gister moved to add **Report on the Transit District Merger** to the agenda; second by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

Mr. Comerford reported that a non-binding letter was received from the CT DOT, signed by the Commissioner. The boards felt comfortable moving forward with this and are asking all the towns to endorse it, which is the last step before voting to accept. They asked for Federal funding for the first three years, which will be received, and are asking in a second round for additional funding. The CT DOT closed on property on North Main St. in Middletown for a maintenance facility.

Ms. Francis pointed out that the voluntary merger of the two districts for the sake of more effective service and efficiency is unique in the state.

Express bus service hasn't been running since September because of a contract dispute, but a resolution is coming shortly.

d. **ARPA County Set Aside Request**

i. **RiverCOG Attorney Mednick Legal Opinion – ARPA Role of Local II**

Atty. Mednick discussed the previously distributed legal opinion on how towns can authorize use of ARPA funds, the distribution of which is an executive function.

ii. **Using the MCRC Board (with invitations to Lyme and Old Lyme) to scope and develop a regional small business and non-profit grant administration project**

Middlesex County Revitalization Commission and the Community Foundation of Middlesex County already have framework in place to for small business grants and/or loans with a social service component. The region can benefit from the prior existence of these programs. Mr. Gold is asking that some of the county funding allocation be reserved by towns to make it possible to participate. The MCRC can act as underwriters, not entities that will hold towns' money. There will be a cost for administration of the program. There was general consensus to continue forward with establishing this program.

iii. **Committee to Oversee an RFP for Municipal ARPA Reporting Assistance**

Ms. Iino approved the formation of the RFP subcommittee to include Regina Regolo, Finance Director of Killingworth, Karl Kilduff, and Tim Griswold. Second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

iv. **Official Request Letter to Municipalities for a set aside**

The draft letters will be formalized and sent to each town, asking for up to 15% of the county share to participate in regional projects.

v. **Regional ARPA Project to Fund Shared HR**

There is potential for a pilot for shared human resource services, with the possibility of recruiting services as well. Additionally, there is potential money for a possible training of building code officials. Mr. Gold will be following up with the state on this.

vi. **Document Digitization RFP**

Mr. Armstrong has created a draft which will be sent out shortly. The RFP will include two phases: scanning of documents and an add-on for maintaining a digital database in the future. The next meeting will include interested Town Clerks.

e. **Update on Regional Housing Plan**

A public launch was held on Oct. 12, the recording of which is available on www.rivercog.org/rhp. The consultants are wrapping up data analysis now. There will be another public meeting in January in which they will present existing conditions and begin to solicit information for the town-specific 8-30j annexes.

There was discussion of the COG issuing a statement of demographic crisis, based on what Ms. Francis suggested after hearing the current data. Mr. Gold noted we need a statewide approach to dealing with the issues, as it affects the whole state and is multi-factorial. There was further discussion on affordable housing and its definition.

f. FY21 Audit Update

Ms. Fernald reported that the audit was finished at the end of September. Four years ago we went out to RFP for our current auditors, Henry, Raymond & Martin. Their contract is up and we can go back out for RFP or stay with them. Ms. Fernald recommended to stay with this firm as she has been pleased with their work.

Mr. Bishop moved to stay with the current auditors for up to two more years then go out to RFP, second by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Ms. Francis stated she will go along with it for one more year but that it's not a good practice to stay with the same firm, and that we should go to RFP next year. Mr. Fortuna stated that he doesn't think four years is too long and asked if there was mention of this in the by-laws. There is not. He feels comfortable even with six years of the same auditor. Mr. Gold asked if the group wanted to identify a maximum number of years to stay with the firm, Ms. Iino suggested a six year maximum, so two more years. Mr. Bishop and Mr. Fortuna amended to motion as above, to include this information.

g. Lower Connecticut River Land Trust Update

A survey was conducted of the member trusts' needs. The top three needs were for a legal professional, land staff/stewardship professional, and fund development. The Berlin Land Trust may be joining the LCRLT as they are adjacent to our region and own land in Cromwell and Middletown. The Land Trust Advancement Initiative project with CLCC is moving along. At a joint meeting of the LCRLT and LTE, the Chair of the Regional Agriculture Commission discussed the possible no-till grant they may receive and talked with the land trusts about the possibility of using some of their land for farming, which they seemed excited about.

h. DEMHS Update

Mr. Downes reported that the application process for the FY21 homeland security grant is complete. \$60,000 in additional funding was added to the 2019 homeland security grant so the deadline was moved to June 30, 2022.

Mr. Lovejoy reported that the resolutions can be reused year to year as long as the language matches up and the same signatory is in office for the rest of the fiscal year. They can also be submitted electronically.

5. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Chairman Salvatore thanked everyone that is departing the board and wished luck to all those up for reelection.

Mr. Gold reported that the state is getting cold feet on county equivalency, which needs to be resolved by the end of the calendar year. The administration has hired a fellow to look into their concerns.

FEMA will be prioritizing the projects that towns submitted to them for possible funding by the beginning of December, and will share information.

6. Other Business

Ms. Francis asked if towns have noise ordinances, and if so to please share them with her.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Fortuna moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:23PM,, second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti