



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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

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

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

January 26, 2022

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Charlene Janecek *
Clinton: Karl Kilduff *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Angus McDonald *
Durham: Laura Francis * (until 10:30)
East Haddam: Irene Haines * (until 10:50)
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Norm Needleman (briefly) *
Haddam: Bob McGarry
Killingworth: Nancy Gorski *
Lyme: Steve Mattson *
Middlefield: Bob Yamartino
Middletown: Joe Samolis *
Old Lyme: Tim Griswold *
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna *
Portland: Ryan Curley *
Westbrook: John Hall *

MPO Members:

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

*present

Others Present:

Cynthia Clegg, Middlesex Community Foundation
Anthony Cozza, Westbrook
Rep. Christine Palm
Andy Shatz, Westbrook
Jim Crawford, Westbrook
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Sam Carmody, Eversource
Laurie McAlwee, South Central Mobility Manager
Brianna DeVivo, Sen. Murphy's Office
Ellen Graham, Sen. Blumenthal's Office
Mark Boughton, Commissioner of DRS
TJ Magnoli, Eversource
Cathy Lezon, Eversource
Paul Hearn

RiverCOG

Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
Chris Holden, City of Middletown
Eric Shortell, FHA

Staff Present:

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

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:02 A.M. The meeting was held via Zoom teleconference.

Mr. Griswold moved to moved item 6g, MIRA & HHW Update, up to item 6b; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

2. Public Speaking

a. Regional Election Monitor Update – Carol Conklin

Ms. Conklin was unable to be present for this meeting.

Rep. Palm stated that during the upcoming short legislative session, extending the Governor's power with executive orders surrounding the pandemic or whether to codify the remaining eleven into state law will be addressed. Children's mental health will be another big item on the agenda.

Rep. Haines noted that since it's a short session most bills will be related to budgetary concerns.

Ellen Graham of Sen. Blumenthal's office stated that there will be a press event Jan. 25th at 1:30 pm on the need to preserve Deer Lake scout camp property in Killingworth.

Julia McGrath of Rep. Courtney's office stated that they continue to work with Treasury, CCM and the COGs on changes that came with the final rule on ARPA funding. The office is available for any assistance. A guide for grant programs from the IJA is being developed now.

3. Presentation on Infrastructure Act Funding – Mark Boughton, DRS Commissioner & Gov. Lamont's Senior Advisor on Infrastructure

Commissioner Boughton gave a briefing on the state's deployment of IJA funding (which is the funding provided by the Federal bipartisan infrastructure act that was passed in November 2021).

After the presentation there were questions from those present. What, if any, state resources is the Governor asking for from the general assembly to use for match funding? Commissioner Boughton

stated the Gov. will consider asking for a match funding from the state surplus. Commissioner Boughton is also working on getting staff time to count as local match.

Representative Palm asked whether abating invasive species like Hydrilla would be a funding fit; Commissioner Boughton is going to direct her to the best person to talk to about that. Mr. Griswold asked if the new funds could be used in addition to what his town is receiving for bridge repair/replacement; Commissioner Boughton stated yes, with the possibility that the repair be moved over to that program rather than local bridge at 50% funding.

4. Presentation – Westbrook Economic Action Initiative – Andy Schatz

Andy Schatz, Jim Crawford and Tony Cozza of Westbrook Economic Action Initiative gave an overview of their business, government, school partnership and how and what it does for the community. They are proposing three sessions to meet with folks in towns in the fields of business, education and government to have a dialogue about how to launch a program like Westbrook's in each town or regionally. These meetings could take place directly after the next three COG meetings. Staff will reach out to CEOs to gauge interest.

5. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of December 8, 2021 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting

Mr. Fortuna moved to approve the minutes of the December 8, 2021 meeting; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Approval of Minutes of January 13, 2022 Special LCRVCOG & MPO Meeting

Ms. Haines moved to approve the minutes of the January 13, 2022, Special Meeting; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. 2021TIP Amendment #13 – Statewide, 0172-0516, STPA, X7, Replace traffic signal controllers and cabinets at various locations, CON \$0 2022 AC, CON \$5,160,000 FD, 2022 AC Conv, New project

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment #13; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor.

d. Review FY21 Obligation List

The obligation list was made available for informational purposes.

e. Other Transportation Updates (Bike/Ped Plan, Corridor Study, CHRO, Etc.)

FHI is working on the draft of the bike/pedestrian plan. The final steering committee meeting will be held 2/1/22 at 3:00 and is open to the public. The draft plan will be presented to the RPC in February with hopes of wrapping it up in March.

Verbal approval has been given that we will go ahead with the corridor study on the Air Line and Farmington Canal trails connection.

The CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) has requirements for state-funded projects such as LOTCIP, STEAP, Community Connectivity, and more. They will attend the February COG meeting to present the requirements.

The Regional Transportation Safety Plan was approved on 12/08/21 but the resolution was not signed by the previous Secretary so Mr. Haramut will be sending that over to Ms. Francis for signature.

f. Update from Transit Districts

Mr. Comerford reported that Middlefield voted to join the Estuary Transit District. Now all the Middletown Area Transportation towns have joined, making the expansion complete. As of July 1, 2022, they will be operating as one transit district. The property on N. Main St. in Middletown will start into the design phase within the next six months or so.

Ridership has been down statewide. Middletown is down about 30%, which matches what is happening in the rest of the state and nation. However, the ETD is up about 2% over 2019 numbers, which is led by the on-demand service. Rail ridership is still very low.

6. LCRVCOG Business

a. COG FY23 Dues (motion)

Mr. Fortuna moved to raise the COG dues for fiscal year 2023 by 2% as recommended; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. HHW Update & MIRA Discussion

Ms. Ehle/Meyer reported that the HHW subcommittee met and is recommending that we move to all satellite collections this year and close the site in Essex. This will save the towns just under \$3,000 per event. All towns would be able to attend all collections. There would probably be seven events, one per month April through October, with locations to be determined.

Mr. Needleman would like more discussion before a vote is taken on this topic. Mr. Gold suggested a special COG meeting to discuss only this so that Norm can participate.

Mr. Cox moved to table a vote on the HHW collections and recall to a special meeting, date to be determined by the Director and Chairman. Second by Mr. Griswold. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Mr. Fortuna stated that MIRA will be around another year as there are two more months to negotiate with Murphy Rd. Recycling, if the dispute cannot be resolved the plan is for the plant to remain open one more year. He discussed the opt-out and opting out of the opt-out in terms of tiered cost. Many towns are opting out or issuing their own RFPs, so MIRA may not be around either way. The fewer towns that are in MIRA, the higher the tipping fee will be for the remaining towns.

c. Update on ARPA Regional Projects

i. Document Digitization & ARPA Grant Administration and Reporting Assistance

The RFP for document digitization services closed last week with seven total respondents. The third stage, which is the implementation of hosting the data, is looking rather expensive so we may need to revise that.

d. Amendments to 2022 Legislative Agenda (motion)

Mr. Cox moved to amend the legislative agenda by the action related to maximizing tax returns for residents and businesses and to add the action pertaining to reducing energy costs and maintaining grid reliability; seconded by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

e. Update on Regional Housing Plan – Upcoming Municipal Meetings

Ms. Joufflas reported that the second public meeting on the plan was held Jan. 24, 2022 and saw over 100 attendees. We will be starting the 8-30j process of meeting with each town through mid-March. After that time there should be a draft plan available for public consumption.

f. Update on Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

RiverCOG's request to be designated a REDD has been approved, which is the first step toward creating the CEDS and eventually getting federal economic development district designation. There were six responses to the RFP, three will be shortlisted for interviews. There will be a recommendation to the COG for the consultant at the February meeting. Work needs to be completed by September 23, 2022.

g. 2021 Recap on Food Insecurity and Homelessness

Calls to 211 have increased from January 2021 to January 2022. Priority calls in our region have been about vaccinations, housing, shelters, mental health, food purchasing, financial assistance, child care and medical and public transportation needs.

Shoreline Soup Kitchen distributed 1.5 million pounds of food last year, 1.5 million meals, 11,000 individuals are registered, and 23,466 meals were served, which is the most ever.

i. Reminder: Funding of Shoreline Soup Kitchen Vehicle

SSKP has requested to purchase a refrigerated vehicle to help deliver food. Some towns have already supported them financially with this purchase. Please consider contributing to the purchase of the truck if your town is served by SSKP. ARPA funds can be used. Chairman Salvatore asked for Mr. Gold to put something out stating that the COG supports town contributions to the purchase of the truck.

h. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

New officers have been elected to replace Ms. Gister and Mr. Bailey, though we are still short one board member if anyone else would like to volunteer. The Berlin Land Trust became a regular member. Mr. Armstrong is working on a new website and a new logo has been voted on. The annual report was created and will be posted soon. The group continues to work on the governance structure and advancing the CLCC initiative.

i. Yale Intern for Invasive Species Work

The first gen intern program is for Yale undergrads to apply to work on non-profit submitted research projects. We put in for some work on terrestrial invasive species. The student would do a survey and site visits as well as develop a needs assessment report for a stewardship coordinator.

j. DEMHS Update

Mr. Downes reported that there are still substantial funds left in the grant that is expiring in June, efforts are being made to spend that down.

Mr. Manke reported that COVID test kits and N-95 masks are being pushed out, towns need to request them by noon today. His new planner has been put under military orders so his department will be back to just him at least until March. There is an upcoming meeting to discuss possible reallocation of the funds Mr. Downes described above. There will probably be an online brief for new CEOs, new emergency managers and more, possibly through the COGs.

7. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold reported that the COG is still waiting for fiscal year 2022 RSG funds from the state, though he has been assured that they will arrive soon.

8. Other Business

Mr. Gold reported that UCONN's CIRCA (center for climate resiliency and adaptation) wants to work in our region on the Connecticut Resilience 2.0 project, somewhat in line with the recently adopted hazard mitigation plans. This may include funding for some COG staff time. David Murphy will be presenting the project to the COG at the February meeting.

9. Adjournment

Mr. Fortuna moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:02 A.M., second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti