



# 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

February 23, 2022

#### RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Charlene Janecek \*  
Clinton: Karl Kilduff \*  
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore \* (until 10:30)  
Deep River: Angus McDonald \*  
Durham: Laura Francis \*  
East Haddam: Irene Haines \*  
East Hampton: David Cox \*  
Essex: Norm Needleman  
Haddam: Bob McGarry \*  
Killingworth: Nancy Gorski \*  
Lyme: Steve Mattson \*  
Middlefield: Jim Irish \*  
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  
Rep. Christine Goupil  
Laurie McAlwee, South Central Mobility Manager  
Brianna DeVivo, Sen. Murphy's Office  
Cathy Lezon, Eversource  
Alvin Bingham, Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities  
James Murray, Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities  
David Murphy, UCONN CIRCA  
John Olin, East Haddam Conservation Commission  
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor  
Carey Duques, Essex  
John Guzkowski, Multiple Towns  
John Halfinger, Chair, Regional Agricultural Council

# RiverCOG

**Staff Present:**

Sam Gold  
Eliza LoPresti  
Robert Haramut  
Kevin Armstrong  
Janice Ehle/Meyer  
Margot Burns  
Paula Fernald  
Megan 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. Cox moved to add item 6i, HHW Update; second by Mr. Samolis. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**2. Public Speaking**

**a. Regional Election Monitor Update – Carol Conklin**

Ms. Conklin stated that the registrars are now working on their yearly canvas clean-up of voter lists. The registrars in towns that have been affected by redistricting also have another set of projects on their plate related to that.

Rep. Goupil stated that the legislative session is moving quickly. She asked that those interested in supporting legislation send a letter. One thing that is being worked on is regional building official resources and streamlining those functions.

Brianna DeVivo of Senator Murphy's office stated that the Senate is finalizing the budget. Impending crisis between Ukraine and Russia is taking up a lot of their time.

**3. Presentation on Requirements for the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities – Alvin Bingham & James Murray**

Mr. Bingham discussed compliance with the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) on municipal contracts on brick and mortar construction projects over \$50,000. The presentation will be forwarded to members after this meeting.

**4. Presentation on CIRCA's Resilience 2.0 Program – David Murphy**

CIRCA is running their Resilience 2.0 program, which is an update of their original resilience program. The original resulted in social vulnerability mapping, a climate change index (for flood and heat), and identified opportunities for resilience programs, all with HUD funding. Resilience 2.0 will be deployed with state funding and will be focused on planning to provide technical assistance for various challenges. This will leverage town hazard mitigation plans. Each municipality should designate a person to meet with them. Ms. Burns noted that this might be good to do with the hazard mitigation plan committee already in place, though a few new reps are needed to replace some CEOs.

**5. LCRVMPO Business**

**a. Approval of Minutes of January 26, 2022 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting**

*Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the January 26, 2022 meeting; second by Mr. Hall. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**b. Approval of Minutes of February 9, 2022 Special LCRVCOG & MPO Meeting**

*Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the February 9, 2022, Special Meeting; second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**c. Other Transportation Updates (Bike/Ped Plan, I95 PEL Study, Etc.)**

Mr. Haramut reported that the draft Bike/Ped Plan will be presented to the Regional Planning Committee next week, and they are hoping to wrap it up within the next month.

There will be a Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) Study on I95 to look at future and existing conditions, purposeful impacts, permitting assessments, and more on the section from Branford to the RI state line. This is a Federal Highway tool to speed up the NEPA process. CT DOT or CDM Smith will be reaching out to towns involved.

**d. Update from Transit Districts**

Mr. Comerford reported that they now have access to the new facility at 91 N. Main, Middletown, the next step is design. Next priorities are determining the shoreline facility location and looking at the passenger terminal in downtown Middletown to make sure it still fits the busses. Proposals have been received for consultants to conduct a fare study, they are under review. They are waiting on responses to HR and Marketing RFPs.

**6. LCRVCOG Business**

**a. Packaging of Projects for Infrastructure Bill Programs**

Mr. Gold stated that there are individual town projects that will be more attractive for funding if they are bundled together into regional or statewide concepts. The notice to fund has not yet come out. Mr. Gold has plans to discuss this with Commissioner Boughton at the end of this week. There is federal funding available as well, so if the projects are not state-funded, they can be ready to submit for discretionary. He asked all to get back to him with ideas for projects.

**b. Regional Agriculture Council Farm Equipment Purchase (motion)**

The Regional Agricultural Council (RAC) is receiving \$49,000 from the Dept. of Agriculture to purchase no-till farm equipment to be shared by regional farmers. They've agreed to purchase a no-till drill from Zimmerman Farm Equipment for \$22,200 and a roller-crimper from INJ for \$6,490, for a total of \$28,690 for the first two pieces. Three bids were received for the drill but there was nothing else comparable for the roller-crimper. Sole source forms are being filled out now.

*Mr. Hall moved to expend \$28,690 for the two pieces of shared no-till farm equipment, Mr. McGarry seconded. A caveat was added to the motion that all purchased equipment will be held and not used until questions and issues discussed here are resolved. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

*Discussion: Mr. Hall stated that he supports the purchase but has concerns about working out the logistics. He recommends that a trailer is also purchased to move the equipment around. Some questions he had include: Where will it be stored? Will it be secure? Who holds the insurance? How will it get to the other side of the river?*

*Ms. Ehle/Meyer agreed with all Mr. Hall said and stated that they are working on those details now.*

*Chairman Salvatore suggested storing it at a public works department until the details are worked out. He stated there needs to be a fair and equitable solution for using the equipment. While he agrees that the details need to be worked out he doesn't want to hold up the vote, and therefore the purchase.*

*Mr. McGarry agreed with all stated above. He had a discussion with Mr. Halfinger, the RAC Chairman, about this the evening before. There is a model that the UCONN Extension Center has that can be followed. He stated the RAC is aware of all the details that need to be worked out.*

*Ms. Francis stated there is a model through DEMHS on administering shared equipment as well. She noted the need for a trailer and her concerns about the COG owning a lot of equipment. She asked which municipalities have trailers that could be used if a farmer in that community wanted to use the equipment. At least the municipalities of Durham, Cromwell, Middlefield, East Hampton, East Haddam, Middletown, Haddam, and Deep River raised their hands. There may be more that couldn't be seen on the screen at the time.*

*Mr. Gold stated that in a case where the town may not have a trailer available, a day rental rate could be arranged with possible reimbursement. Ms. Francis asked if it's unreasonable to ask to the farmer to pay, to which he replied no.*

*Representative Goupil stated that they have been working with the DMV and CT DOT to clarify the rules around transporting the farm equipment. She read from an email received, which ultimately stated that they would need to look into using a trailer.*

*Chairman Salvatore stated that it is legal to take the tractor on local roads. Mr. Hall noted that it cannot go on the interstate or Route 9. Ms. Ehle/Meyer verified that.*

*Mr. McDonald stated that he agrees with Mr. Hall's and Ms. Francis's concerns about the COG owning equipment. He is not sure that we should go ahead with the purchase until the questions are answered. He asked why we would buy it before we have the answers.*

*Mr. Guskowski stated that there is a resource and potential alternate path through the CT Resource & Development Center (RC&D), of which he is the Chair. They have a model for sharing equipment. He also stated that he can approach the RC&D council for their expertise and possible partnership in management if the COG is reluctant to own the equipment.*

*Chairman Salvatore noted that we can require that the user produce an insurance bond. He noted that the grant was given and already accepted by the COG so we should move forward*

*with the purchase. Ms. Ehle/Meyer stated that these are the first two items to purchase from that grant. Chair Salvatore confirmed that the COG authorized the grant application.*

*Mr. Irish asked if the COG owns other equipment. Mr. Gold replied no, except for some supplies for the HHW collections. He also noted that Northwest Hills COG has a model for owning and lending shared equipment that we can follow.*

*Mr. Hall stated that the equipment should be ordered because it takes months to come in. He just has those questions on management and who is holding the liability. But that yes, we should move forward.*

*Ms. Ehle/Meyer stated that the RAC is working with RC&D, who have been consulting on the whole process.*

*Chairman Salvatore added a caveat to the motion that purchased equipment will be held until all issues are resolved.*

**c. Consultant for Creation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) (motion)**

*Mr. Cox moved to authorize the Chairman or the Executive Director to enter into agreement with Ninigret Partners to create the CEDS Plan, conditional on receiving the grant award. Second by Ms. Francis. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**d. Legislative Update**

Mr. Lovejoy discussed pertinent current legislation including the accreditation status for law enforcement agencies, waste management, food donation program, community and economic development, children's mental health, extended producer responsibilities, an act establishing an office of aquatic invasive species, state plan of conservation & development, and tax assessments. Chairman Salvatore asked that Mr. Lovejoy look into state accreditation for law enforcement. There was discussion on the current legislation.

**i. Discussion of Amendment to 2022 Legislative Agenda Concerning Car Taxes**

There are proposed bills that address the depreciation schedule and mil rate cap for motor vehicles. The mil rate cap at 29 will impact a large group of towns in our region. There was discussion on the state's ability to stick to the plan of issuing refunds to the towns that are affected. Mr. McGarry suggested that the state send the money directly back to car registrants, rather than the towns. Rep. Goupil stated that comments are needed for these pieces of legislation. She has concerns about artificial inflation of grand lists and another unfunded mandate through the state.

At this time Chairman Salvatore exited the meeting; Secretary Laura Francis took over chairing the meeting.

**e. Update on ARPA Regional Projects**

**i. Document Digitization and ARPA Grant Administrations and Reporting Assistance RFPs**

Mr. Armstrong is reviewing the submissions to the document digitization RFP. It is hoped that the selection committee will meet this week to discuss the seven submissions and narrow that down to three firms to interview. There may be budget constraints on some parts of the project. It was noted that whatever solution the group decides to go with needs to be versatile as towns would like to pick and choose which services they utilize. The goal in doing this is to facilitate shared regional staff.

Mr. Gold reported that with towns being able to take the standard allowance of up to \$10 million, the reporting for ARPA fund projects is now simplified. The need for assistance from an outside firm may be eliminated. Part of the grant being received from DECD (from CARES Act funding) includes a shared recovery coordinator. That person could possibly assist towns with this function. Mr. Gold recommended that we cancel the RFP and use the long-term recovery coordinator to fill in the gaps.

**ii. Update on ARPA Final Rule/Reporting Requirements**

In addition to what was discussed above, Mr. Cox stated that he learned recently that if ARPA funds are used for any type of school construction the project is no longer eligible for state funds. Rep. Goupil will be asked to look into this for the group.

**f. Update on Regional Housing Plan**

Ms. Joufflas reported that the regional part of the plan is in its initial draft. That is temporarily parked while we work on the 8-30j portion of the plan for each municipality through mid-March. The complete draft should be out for comment in April and is on target to be completed for the June 1 deadline.

**g. Lower CT River Land Trust Update**

Ms. Burns reported that the second annual Dr. Melvin Woody Conservation Award was presented to Janet Stone of the Deep River Land Trust. The LCRLT is working on a trail challenge project, the funds raised from which will possibly be put toward hiring a stewardship coordinator. The week of Feb. 28 is national invasive species awareness week, during which there will be a congressional briefing on managing hydrilla in the Connecticut River on March 3 at 10:00 am.

**h. DEMHS Update**

Mr. Manke stated that the DEMHS SHMOs (state hazard mitigation officers) are always available to help anyone with questions. He asked that those that aren't able to attend the Region 2 REPT steering committee meetings submit a 2022 proxy letter to his office so each municipality can vote on purchases. His office is starting an asset review for planning and upgrade purposes. Mr. Manke will hold a new CEO briefing at a day/time to be determined. He also urged all to take advantage of the free cyber security training by REPT. There is a new grant manager named Kendall Bobula.

**i. Household Hazardous Waste Update**

Ms. Ehle/Meyer reported that the collection dates are secured for the season with the vendor, but locations still need to be confirmed. She would like to add three more at town properties or schools.

**7. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports**

Mr. Gold reported that financial spending is within the parameters of the adopted budget. He received the paperwork for RSG from OPM, this is the grant that we have been operating on since July 1. He is thinking of potentially hiring a junior transportation planner, but is not sure when. He also mentioned that there is a possible opportunity to share a planner with ETD as they are in need of someone as well.

**8. Other Business**

None

**9. Adjournment**

*Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:58 A.M., second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Eliza LoPresti