



# 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

March 23, 2022

#### RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Charlene Janecek  
Clinton: Karl Kilduff \*  
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore \* (until 10:30)  
Deep River: Angus McDonald \* (until 11:00)  
Durham: Laura Francis \*  
East Haddam: Irene Haines \* (until 10:15)  
East Hampton: David Cox \*  
Essex: Norm Needleman  
Haddam: Bob McGarry \*  
Killingworth: Nancy Gorski \*  
Lyme: Steve Mattson \*  
Middlefield: Jim Irish \*  
Middletown: Ben Florsheim \*  
Old Lyme: Tim Griswold  
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna \* (until 10:40)  
Portland: Ryan Curley \*  
Westbrook: John Hall \* (9:30)

#### 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  
Cathy Lezon, Eversource  
Carey Duques, Essex  
Joe Samolis, Middletown  
Erik Shortell, FHWA  
Bill Villano, Workforce Alliance  
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office  
Noah Carver, Congressman Courtney's Office  
Grayson Wright, CT DOT  
TJ Magnoli, Eversource  
Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office

# RiverCOG

**Staff Present:**

Sam Gold  
Eliza LoPresti  
Robert Haramut  
Kevin Armstrong  
Janice Ehle/Meyer  
Margot Burns  
Paula Fernald  
Megan Joufflas  
Torrance Downes  
Ben Lovejoy

**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.

**2. Public Speaking**

Ellen Graham of Sen. Blumenthal's office stated that the budget passed on March 15 and soon earmarks for fiscal year 2023 will be opening up.

Rep. Goupil stated that they were heading in for emergency session today regarding temporary suspension of the gas tax, adding a sales tax free week, free public bus service and budget allocations. Chairman Salvatore asked if the petroleum industry will be raising prices to "make up" for the gas tax. Rep. Goupil stated that there will be language in the legislation to address that and that they are relying on the town officials to alert them of price gouging.

**3. Presentation – Workforce Alliance, Bill Villano**

Mr. Villano gave an update on the state of the regional workforce, the effects of the pandemic on employment and changes in job growth. There was discussion on the lack of candidates for public sector jobs.

**4. LCRVMPO Business**

**a. Approval of Minutes of February 23, 2022 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting**

*Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the February 23, 2022 meeting; second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**b. TIP Amendment #14 – District 1, 0171-0459, STPA, X7, Replace traffic signal controllers at various locations, ROW \$150,000 2022, move from FYI, FD \$554,000 2022, move from FYI, CON \$6,408,000 2023, New project/currently state funded**

*Mr. Fortuna moved to approve TIP Amendment 14, seconded by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimously passed.*

**c. LOTCIP Update – Cost Increase Policy**

Mr. Gold discussed the fact that LOTCIP project costs have been increasing when they have been under budget in the recent past. This is due to inflation, materials costs, etc. The COG's practice has been that if there is an increase of 20% or more, the project and increase are brought before the COG

for recertification. Changes to the project due to engineering finds or unforeseen costs are included; changes to the project at the request of the municipality should not be. The last LOTCIP solicitation was three years ago. Mr. Haramut discussed the life cycle of a LOTCIP project from the concept plan to the CT DOT cost analysis, final review, then the last CT DOT review, which is where rising costs often come in. Mr. Gold recommended that for now the COG stay with their plan of reviewing increases of 20% or more.

**d. Other Transportation Updates (Bike/Ped Plan, ALT Corridor Study, etc.)**

Mr. Haramut reported that the bike/ped plan will be presented at next month's meeting. The RPC members are submitting comments on the first draft now.

The Air Line Trail corridor study will be funded at 80% with a 10% and 10% match. The local match will need to be figured out. Mr. Gold thanked Mr. Hall of the Jonah Center for all his work on this project so far.

**e. Update from Transit Districts**

Mr. Gold reported that he and Mr. Comerford have created a job description for a shared planner to work initially mostly for the transit district, but also to work on projects for RiverCOG. He also reported that we can expect a 38% increase in the transportation planning grant, which will eventually bridge the gap in the funding of the position once projects for the transit district have been fulfilled and that person works full-time for the COG.

Mr. Comerford reported that the first electric buses will be delivered in 2024. The state is still working on property acquisition of the shoreline facility; they have identified a site and are in talks with the property owner. The terminal in Middletown needs renovation but it is too small for the buses, a plan is being worked on for this. A contract for a study on electrification in the state is being finalized, the Middletown facility is a state priority.

The park connect project will be starting again this summer, in a scaled down fashion on weekends and holidays. They are negotiating with firms to do fare, marketing, and HR studies.

**5. LCRVCOG Business**

**a. COG Staffing**

**i. New Regional Planner positions for Emergency Management and Transit**

**Planning:** The shared planner with the transit district was discussed above. The new Regional Planner will focus on emergency management. We have the funding for this position. This has already been discussed and endorsed by the Executive Committee.

*Mr. Fortuna moved that the board endorse the recommendation to fill both positions. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**b. Approval of resolution regarding the adoption of adding a ROTH option to the 457 investment plan (motion)**

*Mr. Fortuna moved approve the resolution regarding the adoption of adding a Roth option to the 457 investment plan. Second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**c. Approval of resolution regarding the adoption of the required restatement of the 401a investment plan (motion)**

*Mr. Cox moved approve the resolution regarding the adoption of the required restatement of the 401a investment plan. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**d. HHW Update**

Ms. Ehle/Meyer reported that the schedule is set for the upcoming year. Volunteers are needed at all collections now that they are all satellite. She is getting quotes for the phase 1 study at the Essex facility. The interlocal agreement has expired. There was discussion on an agreement between the COG and the municipalities, rather than an interlocal agreement moving forward, for the service, for the length of our agreement with our vendor.

In waste legislation there are EPR for tires, gas cylinders and packaging, and developing a working group for legislators. Some towns need to register their debris management sites with DEEP to obtain help if there is a storm. Transfer station permits will expire in the fall, DEEP is working on renewals. The money that towns will receive from recycling mini liquor bottles will be coming at the end of April. There is a solid waste operator training on March 25<sup>th</sup> on the DEEP site if any towns need it.

Ms. Ehle/Meyer mentioned two new companies opening up – Bright Feeds in Berlin will be converting unused food waste to animal food and Blue Sky in Old Saybrook will be making biochar using organic materials (wood chips, leaves and hopefully food waste).

MIRA prices were discussed. East Hampton has selected another option other than MIRA, they have not yet decided where. Towns have to decide to use MIRA or not by April 8. Mr. Fortuna verified that Essex transfer station will be sending waste to Preston. There is confidence that the Essex area is in the best shape in terms of certainty of getting rid of garbage. Mr. Fortuna discussed MIRA's contract with Covanta and CWPM and that those two companies are safe options if we were to ever need to move forward without MIRA. Ms. Francis noted that towns will need to make a decision by 2023. She also noted that going to Essex was an option, when the deadline expires for opting out of the opt out.

Mr. Fortuna discussed a bit more about Blue Sky and biochar, which will make compost that can be sold and graphene.

Ms. Ehle/Meyer reminded everyone that the COG has recycling bins that can be borrowed for events.

She and Ms. Francis are working on a SSM grant for unit-based pricing. There is hope to do a composting pilot project in Durham and Middlefield. Ms. Francis expressed the desire to create a transfer station model that can be replicated. She asked that other towns with interest get in touch with Ms. Ehle/Meyer. Cromwell and Deep River asked to be included.

**e. Regional Agricultural Council Updates**

Ms. Ehle/Meyer updated the group on the no-till grant. The farmers involved do not want to store the equipment at town facilities because they use them during off hours. They are

recommending that the equipment be stored at volunteer farms that will be vetted and include insurance riders. RiverCOG will have damage, loss, and liability insurance for the program. The items will be stored indoors in the winter, covered. Photos will be taken of the equipment before and after each farmer uses it so any damage will be on record. Equipment will be trailered for transport and RiverCOG will not be purchasing the trailer. From field to field or locally the equipment can be tractor-pulled. Mr. Hall stated that he feels comfortable with all this and with the program moving forward.

*Mr. Hall moved to endorse the procedures for the no-till agriculture equipment program as outlined above; seconded by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

The next piece of equipment to purchase is a transplanter. The best quote is from Mechanical Transplanters in Michigan, model #1,000, 3 point hitch, 8' x 5', 1,000 lbs., 40 HP, with stand legs. Delivery will occur in 4-5 weeks. The cost is \$6,766 plus \$475 in freight for a total of \$7,241. After purchase that will leave about \$11,000 in the grant for the next two years to work with. The equipment will be purchased in accordance with COG purchasing policy.

*Ms. Francis moved to endorse the purchase of the no-till transplanter as described above. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

At this point in the meeting Chairman Salvatore needed to leave. Secretary Laura Francis took over chairing the meeting.

#### **f. Update on ARPA Regional Projects**

**i. Lost Revenue Reporting Recommendation:** Mr. Gold is recommending that towns take the lost revenue standard allowance option.

**ii. Document Digitization and ARPA Grant Administration and Reporting Assistance Status:** Based on the above, RiverCOG will report to the vendors that responded to the RFP that we are not hiring anyone but that we will share the responses with those towns that want assistance.

Four firms have been short listed for the document digitization project interviews, a recommendation will be coming from the interview panel shortly. There does not seem to be a large savings on the scanning portion for towns to go in together; the reason to do a region-wide contract would be to set up common approaches and common software to facilitate shared staff.

**iii. 15% County Share Set Aside:** The document digitization project is being worked on.

**iv. Using MCRC for ARPA grant/loan application process administration:** There is also the project of using the Middlesex County Revitalization Commission's infrastructure to give small business loans and/or grants to businesses in towns. The MCRC would be underwriting the loans only, using funding from the towns that choose to join the program. There would be a cost for MCRC to administer this program. The same process can be replicated for social services and non-profits through the Middlesex Community Foundation.

- v. **ARPA Committee Forum Discussion:** Mr. Gold asked if towns would like to have a forum or summit of the ARPA committees so they can see what neighboring towns are doing. There was no answer.

**g. Legislative Update**

Mr. Lovejoy gave an update of current proposed legislation including the car tax mil rate cap, trash to energy bill, tree removal account, invasive species office, and the state POCD. Mr. Gold discussed the proposed bill for sharing Building Officials.

**h. Update on Regional Housing Plan**

Ms. Joufflas stated that the individual town presentations are complete, the committees are working to get them ready for public comment next. Drafts will hopefully be ready in the next month. We are still on track to complete the project by June 1. Ms. Francis asked for a format template for Durham and other towns that didn't participate in the regional plan.

**i. Resilient CT 2.0 / Hazard Mitigation Updates**

Ms. Burns reported that she has been working with CIRCA on trying to find regional projects that came through the NHMPs that can be funded within the Resilient CT 2.0 structure. Meetings about this in each town will take place the last two weeks of April and the first week of May. Multiple towns can meet at once if necessary. She will send communication about this as it develops.

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

The LCRLT is updating its website and working on a large trail adventure project that would take place throughout the region.

**k. Aquatic Invasive Species Update**

Rep. Palm's bill on combating hydrilla was unanimously voted out of the environment committee with full bipartisan support. There is hope that the CT Agricultural Station will be able to expand their work and that an invasive plant council can work in tandem. There is federal funding in the omnibus bill, including the asked-for appropriations through Sen. Murphy's office for monitoring and surveying of hydrilla and nation-wide research on aquatic invasive plants and support of cost-shared management program of the Army Corps.

**l. DEMHS Update**

Mr. Manke has left DEMHS for another position. Mr. Downes reported that he would create a one-page memo and distribute it after the meeting.

**m. Discussion on In-Person Meetings**

Although attendance with Zoom meetings has been good, it may be time to add in some in-person meetings, perhaps quarterly. Meetings in different towns around the region were discussed. A proposed schedule will be created.

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

Mr. Gold gave a financial report stating that we are within budget for the year. The STIF account totals \$1,041,541 and the checking account \$23,176.

7. **Other Business**

None

8. **Adjournment**

*Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:05 A.M., second by Ms. Francis. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Eliza LoPresti