



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, July 25, 2022 – 7:00 pm

Virtual Zoom Meeting

Members:

Chester	Elaine Fitzgibbons Cindy Lignar *
Clinton	Alan Kravitz Martin Jaffe
Cromwell	Nick Demetriades Anthony LaCava * (7:30)
Deep River	Tony Bolduc *
Durham	Frank DeFelice *(7:30)
East Haddam	Crary Brownell
East Hampton	Michael Kowalczyk *
Essex	Carey Duques Sandra Childress
Haddam	Raul deBrigard *
Killingworth	Alec Martin * Stephanie Warren *
Lyme	Mary Stone * David Lahm
Middlefield	Paul Pizzo *
Middletown	Catherine Johnson * (7:25) Kellin Atherton *
Old Lyme	Harold Thompson *
Old Saybrook	Douglas McCracken Michael Bender *
Portland	Chantal Foster * Bob Ellsworth
Westbrook	Bill Neale * Marie Farrell

*Members Present

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Torrance Downes
Eliza LoPresti
Ben Lovejoy
Kevin Armstrong
Megan Jouflas

RiverRPC

1. Call to Order

Vice Chairman deBrigard called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm. The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

2. Roll Call - Eliza LoPresti called the roll.

3. Seating of Alternates –Cindy Lignar (Chester), Kellin Atherton (Middletown), and Michael Bender (Old Saybrook) were seated.

4. Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Pizzo moved to adopt the agenda; second by Mr. Neale. Vote was unanimous in favor.

5. Public Comment

Sacha Armstrong-Crockett, Middletown resident, a member of their anti-racism task force, and local realtor commented that she was disappointed to see nothing in the affordable housing plan of Middletown or the regional plan about race. She mentioned that Black, Latinx and Indigenous people make up 34% of Middletown’s population, but they are missing from the plan. This feels dangerous to her as Black people are still facing the effects of COVID, job loss & insecurity, and housing insecurity, and the tight real estate market. She stated that she contacted Middletown’s representative and was told that race has nothing to do with affordable housing. Omitting the current and historical housing experiences of people of color is harmful to that population. She feels Middletown did a poor job of engaging community and people of color for the plan. She suggests not including race in the plan unless we are going to include specific actions to help people effected by systemic racism. Or, to have someone on staff who is well-versed in anti-racism language. She also mentioned feelings of safety in relation to housing being important for all people but particularly people of color in areas such as Essex. She stressed the need for meaningful partnership between communities of color and the housing plan.

There was discussion about Ms. Armstrong-Crockett’s comments with staff expressing that it’s necessary to create language within the plan that aligns with her comments.

6. Approval of the Minutes of Past Meetings

Mr. Neale moved to approve the minutes of the June 27, 2022 meeting; second by Ms. Lignar. Vote was unanimous in favor. Mr. Bender, Ms. Foster, and Mr. Kowalczyk abstained.

7. Referrals – None

8. Regional Housing Plan Presentation – Public Meeting

Ms. Jouflas outlined where and how the plan was dispersed for public comment and discussed comments that have been received. As of the meeting there had been nothing indicating any substantive change.

Ms. Foster asked for clarification on the use of “housing units” in the plan. Ms. Jouflas stated that refers to any unit that is for sale within the market, it could be a single-family house, or a condo, townhouse, etc.

Mr. deBrigard asked how race will be addressed in the plan and asked what the parameters are to modify the document. Ms. Jouflas stated that we are setting a foundation for future work with the

recommendation of the regional housing commission, which can partner with organizations throughout the region. The hope is to have continuing conversations with and outreach to BIPOC communities. Mr. Gold noted that education and outreach will be part of the toolkit, which is another one of the plan recommendations. Mr. deBrigard suggests we do something serious to meet the issue like researching statistics, including language describing in full what the issues are, and stating explicitly in the plan that this is one of the action items and we will be following through on racial issues.

Mr. Neale noted that many towns have not even created housing plans and even more have asked for an extension on creating theirs. He cautioned against letting perfect be the enemy of the good. The COG staff becoming a central clearinghouse for information is already a huge step forward.

Mr. Thompson noted that a shift in demographics in our region will be a long-term prospect and that there are more socioeconomic issues than just in housing.

Ms. Johnson stated that she noticed a quote that she would like removed from the plan that was something close to the age of the region's housing stock will not attract young residents. She feels this factor does not affect the attraction of younger residents and used the age of Paris' housing stock as an example. She also suggested that a committee of commissioners work on these things. The point on the quote about the need for modern housing was discussed, with staff explaining the disconnect between what younger people can afford and the need for efficient housing and housing that isn't in poor condition.

Mr. Martin, Ms. Foster, and Mr. Neale reiterated that the issue of race should be more included in the plan with specific action items.

Mr. LaCava stated that brokers cannot classify or steer people in any way because it is illegal, making it hard for that industry to adopt specific things to push people in certain areas. Additionally, inventory is at historic lows, driving prices through the roof. Rental prices are increasing as well.

Chairman DeFelice moved to refer the plan to the COG with approval from the RPC. Second by Mr. Pizzo. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: The plan is a living document, not cast in stone, with the goal to make it better each time involvement occurs. The goal is to make housing affordable for everybody. Ms. Joufflas explained the third recommendation of creation of a regional housing commission; if it were to be formed would be up to the COG board. Each town would have representation and possibly additional people. Mr. Gold noted that no statutes govern regional housing commissions but it would be a valuable working group with possible overlap with the RPC. Chairman DeFelice noted that Durham voted not to form a housing commission. Ms. Lignar clarified that a statement will be added to the plan to the effect that we are working with community partners in relation to issues of race. Ms. Joufflas confirmed that and stated that she will list the changes to the COG board.

9. Miscellaneous: State, Regional and/or Local Planning Issues

Mr. Lovejoy stated the first round of social equity candidates through the cannabis program were accepted.

The Commission on the Future and Development of CT is meeting; they are tasked with creating a

report that addresses a number of ways that CT does planning such as the interaction between state and local RPOCDs, sewer modeling, building code and more. Their meetings are online and viewable.

Mr. Gold is participating in a working group on digital building departments/files. He is working with DAS, the state library and the Association of Building Officials (BO) to come up with best practices for building records and making them more publicly accessible. This group will also address employment issues as many towns are struggling to fill BO positions. The hope is to have a team of BOs that can serve multiple towns.

Mr. Thompson noted that the state will make it mandatory for towns to have a ZEO that has certain qualifications by 2023. Mr. Lovejoy stated that is correct and CAZEO certification will be required. The state is now trying to refine the policy because there are some issues with obtaining the training on time and with long-time ZEOs that do not have this certification.

10. Adjournment

Mr. Neale moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 pm; second by Mr. Pizzo. Vote was unanimous in favor.