



# 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

July 27, 2022 – 9:00 am

#### RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Charlene Janecek  
Clinton: Karl Kilduff \*  
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore \*  
Deep River: Angus McDonald \*  
Durham:  
East Haddam: Irene Haines \*  
East Hampton: David Cox \*  
Essex: Norm Needleman  
Haddam: Bob McGarry \*  
Killingworth: Nancy Gorski  
Lyme: David Lahm \*  
Middlefield: Jim Irish \*  
Middletown: Ben Florsheim  
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:

Carey Duques, Essex  
Rep. Christine Goupil  
Julia McGrath, Rep. Courtney's Office  
Ellen Graham, Sen. Blumenthal's Office  
TJ Magnoli, Eversource  
Joel Severance, Citizen Corps  
Nicole Velardi, DEMHS  
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor  
Rep. Christine Palm  
Grayson Wright, CT DOT

#### Staff Present:

Sam Gold  
Eliza LoPresti

# RiverCOG

Robert Haramut  
Kevin Armstrong  
Janice Ehle/Meyer  
Torrance Downes  
Ben Lovejoy  
Megan Jouflas  
Brendan Geraghty  
Liam Rimas (Sustainable CT Fellow)

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

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M. The meeting was held via Zoom teleconference.

2. **Public Speaking**

Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor, announced that the first county meeting in two years was held and that there have been many changes in registrars, best practices, etc. It is critical for all the towns to promote having poll workers and moderators; there are a lot of shortages. Redistricting has thrown in some curveballs, especially with having to revamp the end of night reporting software that is used. The state is hosting training on the EMS software that all registrars should attend. Ms. Conklin also pointed out that the primary is Aug. 9 and the ballots have been printed. So, if a candidate drops out before then that name can be crossed off with black magic marker. She also reminded everyone that a primary election has to mimic a full election, statutorily.

Joel Severance of the Citizen Corps explained that he is part of the intercoastal waterway search, rescue, and recovery team that focuses on the lower Connecticut River. He knows where all the K-9 search and rescue teams are and has a document to share on mass casualty response planning that includes information on what needs to be done in the case of an active shooter. It includes the steps, who to notify, etc.

Ellen Graham of Sen. Blumenthal's office stated that the PACT Act should soon be finalized; veterans should contact her office or the VA if they have been injured by chemical exposure. The CHIPS act regarding semi-conductors will help our state. The key issues the senate will take up prior to recess are lowering drug costs and increased health subsidies.

Rep. Christine Palm stated that she is working on problem solving for Haddam Meadows. They need to work on safety practices along the river due to amateur boaters not following protocol, noise, and adding more safety patrolling.

3. **Regional Housing Plan Presentation and Adoption (motion)**

Ms. Jouflas gave a presentation on the Regional Housing Plan. This plan has been endorsed by the Regional Planning Committee.

Discussion amongst the CEOs occurred. Mr. Griswold stated some communities are having a hard time meeting housing goals. He hopes the recommendations are not mandatory. Mr. Gold assured them that there is no state statute regulating regional housing commissions, they are purely voluntary and advisory, created by the COG.

Rep. Goupil stated she appreciates the hard work done on the plan. She is vice chair of the Planning & Development committee and noted that most of our communities are small and want to keep that feel. However, we do need to come at it from the regional angle that there are no boundaries between the towns in the region. All the CEOs here have a good working relationship and can work together to come up with solutions that make sense for housing and also looking at increasing opportunities for employment and increasing the declining population. It's more constructive from a regional standpoint. She stated the plan will be instructive for the legislature to review and understand the perspective of the smaller towns.

*Mr. Curley moved to adopt the Regional Housing Plan (RHP). Second by Mr. Kilduff. At the end of discussion, a roll call vote was taken; all present voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.*

*Discussion: Mr. Lahm stated that he is being asked to adopt a plan that is far-reaching, and it is premature to send the plan now and ask him to cut out the rest of his governing body.*

*Mr. Gold stated the plan is advisory and consists of two components – the individual town annexes that have been adopted already by each town and this regional document that includes strategies towns could voluntarily pursue to address housing issues beyond their borders. It sets forth a framework for doing so and does not need to be ratified by individual selectmen.*

*Chairman Salvatore stated that it is a voluntary plan with nothing mandatory.*

*Mr. Lahm stated that voting now might be creating expectations and that this plan is a shell with an a la carte menu that should be considered piece by piece. He stated he wants to take it back to his board.*

*Chairman Salvatore asked if it had been reviewed by counsel. Mr. Gold stated that it had not because it was set forth by the towns and doesn't tell them they have to do anything. For example, the regional housing committee would only be established by the COG board and giving that group power would need to come at a statutory level and would include interlocal agreements with participating towns.*

*Ms. Jouflas noted that the data that informs the town plans came from the census and the previously adopted Regional Plan of Conservation and Development. The regional recommendation of creating a toolkit could just be done by the RiverCOG as that is just an informational resource. The recommendation on studying transit on demand areas is a recommendation for a study, in accordance with the towns. The recommendation of creating the regional housing commission is voluntary.*

*Chairman Salvatore noted that at that time the town could elect not to go forward or participate in that recommendation.*

*Representative Palm urged a framework on the vote. She stated the plan is thoughtful, consensus-oriented and that the public has had time to weigh in. From the state perspective, unless people are forced, they won't do it. If the vote is delayed, to please put a framework on it and don't let it linger. The time for this is now.*

*Representative Goupil reassured that this is an advisory plan. It does not have the same weight as the towns' 8-30j plans that have already been adopted by each town but helps create a framework for the legislature in Hartford to guide recommendations that will come through 8-30g over what is in the statute. The 8-30j plans directly reflect the town's community input.*

*Mr. Lahm withdrew his objection to the vote.*

*Mr. Gold stated that the new federal transportation bill has a requirement for a transportation plan and the RHP fulfills the new mandate to look at housing around transit.*

*Mr. Fortuna recognizes the concerns but having a passed affordable housing plan that is aspirational gives a shell framework to move forward. The word agenda can set up red flags, can be seen as a top-down directive. Overall, the plan is constructive, but we need to be careful on phrasing.*

*Ms. Haines agreed with Mr. Fortuna and stated that COGs have become places where local concerns can be addressed. For example, in the plan open space is protected, that is a decision to make here, not in Hartford. The decisions should be local. Ultimately 8-30g hasn't done what it was supposed to do. This plan makes it local and gives us a voice in Hartford for the autonomy of our towns. It's a good way to continue the housing conversation. It doesn't feel obligatory to East Haddam and we will have more power with this plan than before on the 8-30g program. If we do this first it's a good thing. We do need to make something happen, we are obligated to do something. This plan says that in East Haddam we can't do what is being done in Bridgeport. She doesn't feel like the plan is obligating us but if it did she would be the first to say so in Hartford. Chairman Salvatore concurred and called for a roll call vote at this point.*

#### 4. LCRVMPO Business

##### a. Approval of Minutes of June 22, 2022 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting

*Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the June 22, 2022 meeting; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

##### b. 21 TIP Amendment #18 (motion) - I-95 Corridor, 0170-5031, BRFP, X6, I-95 bridges concrete sealing AC Conversion, CON FY22, \$10,880,000, Increase federal estimate from \$5.6 to \$8.7 million

*Mr. Cox moved to approve 21 TIP Amendment #18; seconded by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

##### c. Endorse FY22-23 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) as amended (motion) [2023UPWP\\_DraftAmend.pdf](#)

*Mr. Cox moved to endorse the Unified Planning Work Program as amended; second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

##### d. Endorse Regional Transportation Safety Plan (RTSP) as Amended (motion) [Lower CT River Valley RTSP final rev.pdf](#)

*Mr. Cox moved to endorse the Regional Transportation Safety Plan as amended; seconded by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

*Discussion: The RTSP is approved upon adding the correct Secretary's name to the document.*

##### e. Other Transportation Updates (MTP, ALT Study, Etc.)

The Safe Streets for All (SS4A) grant application from the IJA bill is due in September. There is another new grant opportunity coming from that same bill, the Reconnecting Communities pilot program, which is due in October. Mr. Haramut will send out more information on this after this meeting.

Mr. Gold stated that Old Saybrook has an application that would be good for the SS4A grant, the minimum request is \$5 million. This year the COG will ask for planning money to survey safety needs to create a joint infrastructure project that can be submitted next year. This will be a coordinated way to make ourselves competitive for federal funding.

*Mr. Cox moved to endorse the COG to proceed with the application for the planning grant for this round of SS4A and to apply for the infrastructure funds next year. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

Mr. Haramut is meeting the day after this meeting with CT DOT to review the scope of the Air Line Trail project. It will happen in two phases; the initial planning phase and earmark to begin design on recommended projects that come out of the study. Work should start in the fall. Mr. Gold noted that federal corridor study funds and state bond commission funds will be combined to be the local match.

**f. Update from Estuary Transit District**

Mr. Comerford reported that in July the dial-a-ride program will be available to all ETD towns. The marketing study has pared down possible new entity names to four choices. They are looking for feedback on their survey, results should be ready by next week.

- i. Introduce New Transit Planner Brendan Geraghty:** Mr. Geraghty is working on a pilot program for on-demand transit in Wesleyan University and surrounding areas.

**5. LCRVCOG Business**

**a. Election of New Secretary and Executive Committee Member (motion)**

There were no additional nominations from the floor.

*Mr. Griswold moved to approve the slate of candidates consisting of Bob McGarry as the new Secretary and Irene Haines as the new At-Large Executive Committee Member for the remainder of 2022. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

**b. Workforce Alliance Vacancies**

Vacancies are due to departures of Laura Francis of Durham and Susan Bransfield of Portland. Ben Florsheim of Middletown is currently part of the Workforce Alliance. Meetings are quarterly.

*Mr. Cox moved to approve the following volunteers to the Workforce Alliance: Irene Haines, Dave Cox, and Ryan Curley (alternate). Second by Mr. McGarry; vote was unanimous in favor.*

**c. RPIP Application(s)**

Mr. Gold stated that there have been changes to the RPIP program, for which OPM is now soliciting applications. Mr. Gold had previously distributed a memo to all with ideas for applications which included a regional grant writer, regional human resources services, land use training academy and shared municipal officials. However, there is problematic language in the new law for RPIP that to apply the COG would have to get acknowledgment from every employee organization that may be impacted by the grant in each town. This was discussed with RiverCOG's attorney who stated that Mr. Gold would have to consult each town's attorney and collective bargaining units. OPM concurred. This cannot be done by the August deadline. Once those groups are consulted with, they have to affirmatively acknowledge the application. The next application deadline is in October.

Of the project ideas there is probably no impact on collective bargaining agreements with the training pipeline for land use officials. The HR consultant might be harder to facilitate, but the grant writer could probably be worked around. Ms. Duques suggested focusing on land use commissioners for the land use training as now ZEOs have to be CAZEO certified so they do the training. Mr. Gold noted that COGs are looking into creating pipelines for Building Officials and Fire Marshals too. Chairman Salvatore noted that towns are having a problem hiring Assessors as well.

Mr. Gold recommends sitting out the August grant round and regrouping and figuring out how to proceed on the new labor consultation statute. Mr. Fortuna asked what other COGs are doing about this. Mr. Gold reported that NVCOG is applying for a senior center project which doesn't affect any collective bargaining units and WestCOG is applying for a fire truck maintenance facility. All COG directors have concerns about the statute changes.

Mr. Kilduff noted that CRCOG is hiring a grant writer to work on the IJJA -related applications and asked what we will do. Mr. Gold stated that there is a bit of controversy in trying to get a grant writer with grant funding and was told it's not possible with an RPIP application. Matt Fulda, Director of MetroCOG did put in a request for funding for a grant writer for each COG. With RPIP there is also a 20% match; Mr. Gold is currently looking for funding for that.

**d. Letter of Support for SE CT Economic Development Districts Application for Offshore Wind Development**

Mr. Gold will check to see if this letter of support is still needed as the deadline may have passed.

**e. Document Digitization Project Update**

Mr. Armstrong reported that six towns are participating. He encouraged the rest of the towns to get a consult about how much paper they actually have as that process is free.

**f. Small Business and Non-Profit Grants and Loans Through ARPA Funds - Update**

A meeting was held with Cromwell and the Community Foundation of Middlesex County (CFMC). CFMC will run one centralized portal for non-profit and small business grants. The Chamber will administer the small-business side of it. The other towns that are interested will be followed up with.

**g. HHW Update**

- i. Phase 1 Environmental Study:** The subcommittee needs to select a vendor, this will be done shortly.

One more HHW subcommittee member is needed; Mr. Kilduff volunteered. An appraisal needs to be done at the Essex facility. The collections are going well with plenty of participation.

**h. Regional MSW Services Update**

Mr. Fortuna stated that MIRA is slowly unwinding and sending towns their separate ways. There has been some push back on the subsidy for the Essex transfer station towns. If MIRA fulfilled its contract through 2027, it would die with \$30 million. If MIRA were to dissolve

the state would take it over. MIRA understands its obligation to the towns it is contracted with. They may hand over money to those towns to help them with garbage disposal. If the MIRA contract is breached with Essex, it will cost them \$8.8 million, versus a cost of \$6.8 million if they continue as MIRA.

Mr. Griswold asked why remediation of the Hartford site isn't MIRA's responsibility. Mr. Fortuna replied that the responsibility doesn't lie with them as the site is much cleaner than when they took it over from it being a coal plant.

Ms. Ehle/Meyer noted that we had talked about options for towns with Mr. Fortuna. She is making some exploratory calls. The Hartford facility will be closing by Aug. 31.

**i. Regional Agricultural Council Update**

The RAC had a demonstration day for their new no-till farm equipment in June. Now they need farmers to sign up to actually use the equipment. Ms. Ehle/Meyer will re-send info and asked all present to help publicize this on websites and social media. There are turning out to be expenses to transport the equipment. We may be able to use some grant money to support the farmers with this. There was talk about proposing a legislation change to allow for moving equipment and/or products with trucks.

Representative Goupil suggested engaging with CT DOT or DMV now to find out why that is not already done, before considering legal changes. Addressing safety concerns is the first step. She is happy to work with the COG on this.

Mr. Hall stated that there are challenges on transportation due to weight, no brakes, no lights, etc. He is concerned about transporting the equipment and believes we should purchase a trailer. The cost of \$200-\$400 is not good for small farmers and he has heard concerns from farmers that the equipment won't be shared at all. He also noted that all the farmers that want to use the equipment will want to do so at the same times so we need to be prepared to move equipment quickly. Chairman Salvatore suggested looking into paying someone a stipend to move the equipment.

**j. Update on CEDS**

Ms. Jouflas reported that the steering committee has been selected, a survey will be released by the end of the week, and the website will be active soon. There will be community engagement workshops in the fall.

At this time, Mr. Gold read a written update from Ms. Burns on the Hazard Mitigation mapping project, which is in process. Ms. Burns may be reaching out to CEOs or Public Works departments to identify where some road or drainage projects are located, as needed.

**k. Lower Connecticut River Land Trust Update**

Mr. Gold reported for Ms. Burns that the LCRLT is still working on their trail adventure in which people will hike public trails in each community. They are continuing to discuss OSWA grants. An added component this year through NRCS and the CT Land Conservation Council, is a matching fund for the OSWA program for applicants through conservation easements, on project properties, that can either be conveyed to NRCS or another partner.

organization. Funding may be available for up to 90% of a project. The board is exploring the opportunity to be the easement holder to support its land trusts. The board has also been discussing accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance.

**l. Aquatic Invasive Species Update**

Mr. Gold reported for Ms. Burns that the majority of the region's river front and coves have been surveyed and pulled for water chestnut. She is out working on Salmon cove with DEEP today. It will take another couple of years to truly know the impact of the discharge of water chestnut in the lower river from the Hartford retention basis but for this year, through the hard work of many independent volunteers and the Jonah Center, Friends of Whalebone Cove, Eightmile Wild and Scenic, DEEP Fisheries and CAES, CT River Conservancy, the region is in good shape in its control except for the Middletown and Cromwell area. More consideration needs to be given for sustainable future control in these areas and the rest of the river before next season.

**m. DEMHS Update**

Mr. Lovejoy updated that the 2022 project proposal and budget process will start in August. He is collection MOAs and resolutions from the Region 2 towns. Nicole Velardi has taken over for Jake Manke. She is onboarding new grant staff, Region 2 should be fully staffed within the next month.

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

Mr. Gold noted that Mr. Lovejoy may be the new staff to the Gateway Commission once Mr. Downes retires.

Chairman Salvatore thanked the COG staff and wished everyone a great summer.

**7. Other Business**

Mr. Gold mentioned that the new Inspector General will be on the agenda for the September meeting.

**8. Adjournment**

Chairman Salvatore adjourned the meeting at 11:25 a.m..

Respectfully submitted,  
Eliza LoPresti