



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 LEGISLATIVE MEETING

December 14, 2022 – 11:30 am

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Charlene Janecek *
Clinton: Karl Kilduff *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Angus McDonald *
Durham: George Eames
East Haddam: Irene Haines *
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Carey Duques *
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:

Representative Joe Courtney
Julia McGrath, Rep. Courtney's Office
Representative Christine Palm
Senator Norm Needleman
Erin McBride of Senator Murphy's Office
Senator Christine Cohen
Representative John-Michael Parker
Senator Matt Lesser
Senator Jan Hochadel
Laurie McElwee, SC Mobility Manager
Joel Severance, CERT Team
Robyn Kebernick, Eversource
Cathy Lezon, Eversource
Grayson Wright, CT DOT

RiverCOG

Martin Henry, Henry, Raymond & Thompson
John Mercier, Killingworth Facilities Manager

Staff Present:

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

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions

Vice Chairman Griswold called the meeting to order at 11:40 A.M. The meeting was held hybrid style at the Old Lyme Town Hall and via Zoom. A moment of silence to commemorate the victims of the tragedy at Sandy Hook, which happened ten years ago today, was held.

2. Public Speaking

Laurie McElwee, South-Central Mobility Manager, thanked Mr. Gold and Mr. Comerford for knowing the importance of a regional mobility manager. She wants to connect more in the new year in order to better connect people in our towns, especially seniors.

Julia McGrath of Rep. Courtney's office stated that the Representative had a conversation with CT DOT about goals and plans and how that fits with the COG.

Erin McBride of Sen. Murphy's office discussed the omnibus bill and congressional spending within states.

Cathy Lezon of Eversource reminded all that Eversource has programs to help those that will have trouble due to the upcoming rate hike. There was a webinar on ISO load shed potential and they will be meeting with EMDs to deliver the latest emergency response plan.

3. Approval of the Fiscal Year 2022 Audit - Martin Henry of Henry, Raymond, and Thompson:

Mr. Hall moved to approve the audit as presented; second by Mr. Kilduff. Vote was unanimous in favor.

4. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of November 30, 2022 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Special Meeting

Ms. Haines moved to approve the minutes of the November 30,, 2022 special meeting; second by Ms. Janecek. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. 21 TIP amendment 22

Westbrook, 0154-0128, STPA-BRX, X76, Replace bridge 00323 over I95 and intersection improvements, RT 153, PD, FY23, \$1,180,000, (80/20/0), New project

Westbrook, 0154-0128, STPA-BRX, X76, Replace bridge 00323 over I95 and intersection improvements, RT 153, FD, FY24, \$924,000, (80/20/0), New project

Westbrook, 0154-0128, STPA-BRX, X76, Replace bridge 00323 over I95 and intersection improvements, RT 153, ROW, FY24, \$400,000, (80/20/0), New project

Westbrook, 0154-0128, STPA-BRX, X76, Replace bridge 00323 over I95 and intersection improvements, RT 153, CON, FYI, \$18,600,000, (80/20/0), New project

Mr. Fortuna moved to approve 21 TIP Amendment 22; second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Ms. Haines moved to change the agenda so that item 5d) Discussion with Legislators becomes item 5a); second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.

5. LCRVCOG Business

a. Discussion with Legislators

Mr. Gold read through the legislative agenda. Rep. Palm stated that the state parks need more funding and that she is trying to work with financial committees on that. The purpose of the office of invasive species was to coordinate individual grants. She noted that there was a webinar which discussed ways that state agencies are cooperating on PFAS remediation, she can send a link. She previously had a discussion with Gov. Lamont about the state reclaiming ownership of private dams, she will revisit this with his office.

Ms. Gorski stated that Killingworth has a significant PFAS issue which the DPH investigated. Now the cost of installing and maintaining filters falls to the town. They need funding to help with their contaminated soil and water, or the town will have to bond. Rent caps are also important, there was recently a 7.28% rate increase in a 55+ community in Killingworth. The Deer Lake property is also still in jeopardy, there is a need to secure open space.

Sen. Lesser stated that he has had many conversations around municipal solid waste and is working with towns on that and issues of invasives. He has been elected to the human services committee.

Mr. Griswold mentioned that many towns are spending money already on dash cam storage for their police officers and requested the state create a storage program. Sen. Lesser noted that he spoke to one Chief that was not interested in bulk purchasing of that service because his preferred vendor was not the same as others. Mr. Griswold noted it could be done uniformly rather than balkanization. Chairman Salvatore noted that at the very least the state could offer a form of collection and maintenance which municipalities can choose to use or not. Otherwise it's an unfunded mandate.

Ms. Janecek moved to approve the 2023 Legislative Agenda; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Nominating Committee Report and Election of Officers for 2023

There were no nominations from the floor; all the existing executive board are willing to serve again. The slate of officers is as below:

Chairman – Tony Salvatore
Vice Chairman – Tim Griswold
Secretary – Bob McGarry
Treasurer – Carl Fortuna
At-Large Member – David Cox
At-Large Member – Irene Haines

Mr. Curley moved to approve the slate of officers for 2023; second by Ms. Janecek. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. DEEP Aquatic Invasive Plant Grant Application

This application is being worked on, there is no need for a resolution from the COG. This would be for funding to help eradicate hydrilla in the river with summer help, similar to the program for the RPIP grant. Both OPM and DEEP will be made aware of the other application.

At this time Joel Severance discussed the worsening problem of hydrilla, especially since last year it was found at commercial marinas. A few towns brought in contractors to help combat it at the marinas, costing them \$4-5 thousand.

Sen. Cohen stated that as chair of the environment committee she is interested in addressing this issue as well as PFAS and other items related to the environment. She is also co-chair of the coastal caucus, comprised of legislators across the state impacted by waterways in their districts. She would like to hear what everyone wants to prioritize with respect to the waterways. She believes there is a lot to be done in regard to PFAS but that we will need federal help. The more we test the more is uncovered.

Rep. Courtney discussed the FY23 omnibus bill agreement that was approved, which includes defense and non-defense spending. The infrastructure bill created a five-year architecture for our region but we need a spending plan. This includes Congressionally directed spending (earmarks), which towns are eligible for. East Hampton has a project forthcoming through this mechanism. The Representative's office will re-open the process for community project requests. Army Corps of Engineers has seen an increase in funding in the omnibus which will benefit towns that need dredging, such as Westbrook has seen.

Rep. Courtney discussed that there will be a request for a bond package item to create a fund in state for communities to be able to match grant funds, in order to maximize federally benefits from infrastructure bill. He then discussed FRA and the upcoming notice of application for the New Haven to Providence piece of NE corridor (for rail). FRA will be doing the planning, but will be taking applications from other entities to get local and state planning input. Mr. Gold asked if the FRA project would be one overarching project or if would be broken up between CT and RI. It's probably too soon to know, but Meghan O'Sullivan, Rep. Courtney's aide, thinks it will most likely be one application.

Rep. Courtney also discussed the Inflation Reduction Act, from which the US Dept of Agriculture will be funded a sizeable portion for climate change initiatives such as the existing EQUIP and REAP programs. Rep. Courtney also noted that the Undersecretary of Energy for Nuclear Policy, Catherine Huff, will be in Haddam at CT Yankee for a brief from them on waste disposal and storage.

At this time the problem of municipal waste was discussed. Mr. Fortuna reported that there is an upcoming meeting to discuss a possible formation of a regional waste authority. MIRA will not have to dip into their growing resources for their next budget. Though composting programs and EPRs are good, the state and federal government should take a hard look at new technologies, especially as other plants age and come offline. There are better solutions than landfilling, especially in light of the PFAs issues. Rep. Courtney thinks that biodigestion will be part of the climate bill for agriculture and will circle back with us on this topic.

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

Mr. Gold reported that a RFQ for a planning study for the Air Line Trail to Farmington Canal Trail connection is active now. He is working with other MPO directors on the federal transportation fund formula. Additionally, RiverCOG will soon be hiring for Ben's vacant position.

7. **Other Business**

Ms. Ehle/Meyer stated that the HHW subcommittee should meet soon to discuss the 2023 budget. There is a pilot food composting program happening at Essex Elementary now. She asked what towns are doing with their funds from the small alcohol bottles. Essex gave it to their clean energy commission; Old Saybrook purchased battery recycling containers, is reconfiguring their transfer station, and is using it on recycling education. Ms. Ehle/Meyer asked if there was interest in a regional project. Sen. Needleman noted that MIRA wants to terminate its contracts and thinks that if a possible regional resource for waste were formed that they would turn those contracts over.

Ms. Ehle/Meyer noted that through the Shoreline Basic Needs Task Force (SBNTF) she learned that the regional coordinated access network (CAN) has had to cut back their hours to 9:00 am – 5:00 pm so there is no answer if you call in the evening due to a housing emergency.

The Regional Agricultural Committee (RAC) is looking to apply for a grant to extend the shared equipment program and create a possible regional co-op.

8. **Adjournment**

Ms. Haines moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:02 pm; seconded by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti