



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

DRAFT MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

January 25, 2023 – 9:00 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 & Bob Yamartino *
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:

Julia McGrath, Rep. Courtney's Office
Erin McBride of Senator Murphy's Office
TJ Magnoli, Eversource
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
David Murphy, UCONN CIRCA
Mary Buchanan, UCONN CIRCA
Kalyn D'Ochio
Krista Goodin, CDM
Becca Hall, CDM
Gary Sojka, CT DOT
Kevin Hively, Ninigret Partners
Kim O'Rourke, City of Middletown
Tom Metzner, CT DEEP
Erik Shortell, US DOT

RiverCOG

Olivia Chetcuti, DEMHS
Nicole Velardi, DEMHS
Megan O’Sullivan, Rep. Courtney’s Office
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal’s Office
Katie Digiantonio, Sustainable Essex

Staff Present:

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

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:01 A.M. The meeting was via Zoom.

2. Public Speaking

Ellen Graham of Sen. Blumenthal’s office stated that the budget had been passed and earmark notifications are out. They will be going up for the next round soon, she will email information.

Julia McGrath of Rep. Courtney’s office stated that they are still awaiting information for community funding. If you would like to be on the listserv for that information please let her know. She mentioned the FCC broadband map, challenges to which can still be submitted even though the deadline has passed. The assistance to Firefighters grant funding is open, the office is happy to provide letters of support for purchases.

Chairman Salvatore asked if there is federal funding for roads and drainage that will reach a local level. Ms. McGrath said yes, there are sewer-specific projects. She asked for details of specific projects.

TJ Magnoli of Eversource stated that there is a level 5 ERP in place due to snow, the towns should be getting calls from liaisons. He also noted that Cathy Lezon has taken on a new role within Eversource and he will temporarily be taking over her towns.

3. Presentations

a. CT DOT Route 95 PEL Presentation – Gary Sojka (CT DOT), Krista Goodin & Becca Hall (CDM)

There is a planning and linkages study on Rt. 95 from Branford east to the Rhode Island line. The presentation PowerPoint can be found [here](#). Mr. Sojka, Ms. Goodin, and Ms. Hall presented the information and answered questions that included the following. Mr. Hall asked what CT DOT is doing in Westbrook as they are realigning crosswalks if they are just going to

be rebuilt in two years. Mr. Sojka will talk to the project manager about this and get back to him.

Mr. Fortuna brought up a rumor of exit 67 closing and asked at what point the towns would be learning about potential exit closures. Mr. Sojka noted there are some early action projects that will happen; Ms. Hall will take a look at potential closures and impacts as low hanging fruit.

Mr. Griswold asked about plans to re-do the Rocky Neck connector and whether that was identified as an early action project. Mr. Sojka stated the project development unit will be looking at the preliminary concepts shortly.

Mr. Hall noted that the CT DOT just replaced the Willard Ave bridge last summer but it wasn't widened. He asked if future projects anticipate another lane. Mr. Sojka noted this has not yet been determined but they are not widening in the whole corridor.

Ms. Hall noted that some projects involve keeping things in a state of good repair and that there will be a long process for the projects. Chairman Salvatore suggested they come back later in the process.

b. UCONN CIRCA Resilient 2.0 – Dave Murphy & Mary Buchanan

The project will be extended three to six months. Mr. Murphy and Ms. Buchanan presented an update to the COG which can be found [here](#).

c. Extended Producer Responsibility – Kim O'Rourke and Tom Metzner

Ms. O'Rourke, Recycling Coordinator for the City of Middletown and Mr. Metzner, Environmental Analyst at CT DEEP discussed the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which we already have in CT for mattresses and other items. Ms. O'Rourke noted that as recycling costs go up an EPR program would shift the costs of residential recycling to those that create the product packaging. As it is now, the municipalities pay the costs for this while others make profit.

Mr. Metzner explained the proposal for an EPR program. This would give options to municipalities. They could keep the program as it is now, opt to have the stewardship organization pay for the recycling in cases that have a contract or do the recycling themselves, or towns can continue to operate the program as they have been but be reimbursed under certain conditions. So if a town operates a transfer station that accepts recycling, many costs can be reimbursed back to towns as manufacturers assume the costs. Municipalities are encouraged to submit testimony on the bill. There is a product stewardship call on Feb. 2 at 11:00 am.

d. CEDS Presentation and Launch of Public Comment Period

Mr. Hively of Ninigret Partners presented an introduction to the draft Comprehensive Economic Strategy (CEDS) that will be open for public comment until Feb. 24, 2023. The plan and all related information can be found [here](#). The goal is for approval at the March COG meeting.

Mr. Fortuna asked what the CEDS will allow us access to at the federal level. Mr. Hively answered that it is not anything specific, but that having the CEDS puts us at the competitive level in order to get federal funding. Mr. Gold noted that under the CARES Act the feds gave us temporary recognition for the GrowSmart plan but the CEDS will pave the way for the region to become an Economic Development District (EDD). We are only region in the state to not have an EDD.

Mr. Kilduff asked about the listing of projects. That is forthcoming in an appendix. We are still waiting to hear from nine towns on their projects. Mr. Gold emphasized the importance of each town listing their projects in the CEDS.

4. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of December 14, 2022 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the December 14, 2022 meeting; second by Mr. Hall. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. FY 22 List of Obligated or Granted Projects

Federal regulations require MPOs to publish a list of projects granted in the past year based on categories in the TIP. In the list the line items highlighted in yellow have bike/ped elements. There was one list change in the multi-regional projects for CT Transit bus replacement; two line items were combined into one.

c. Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update

A draft should be available in a couple of weeks. After the air quality determination is received from the CT DOT in early February it will be incorporated into the plan and we can begin the 30-day public comment period, for probable endorsement at the March COG meeting.

d. Air Line Trail to Farmington Canal Trail Connector Study Update

A RFQ was issued for consultants for the study. Five responses were received. A consultant selection committee hopes to interview three consultants in mid-February. After that it will take a few months for the study to begin as we'll need project numbers and other information from CT DOT and to negotiate the scope and contract. Work on the plan is expected to begin in the spring.

e. Other Updates (25-28 TIP Development, TRIP Reminder)

The new TIP for 2025 – 2028 will be developed soon. Expected endorsement will be in April or May of 2024.

The deadline for the TRIP was extended because it became open to local roads. Eligible towns should have applications in by March 31. Mr. Haramut will then list them for prioritization at the April MPO meeting.

f. Update from Estuary Transit District

Mr. Geraghty stated that a new logo and brand is coming shortly for the merged transportation companies. A new brochure with a fold-out map will be created. They are not reprinting existing brochures because of route changes. Some buses have been upgraded with technology

such as auto pass and electric sign kiosks. A new, updated website is also coming. He is conducting extensive public outreach for possible fares after March 31 when the free fare period ends.

5. LCRVCOG Business

a. FY 24 COG Dues (motion)

The proposed FY24 dues schedule was previously endorsed by the Executive Committee. There will be no increase proposed.

Mr. Griswold moved to approve the FY24 dues as proposed, with no increase. Second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. HHW Update and 2023 Season Budget (motion)

Ms. Ehle/Meyer presented the proposed budget. She mentioned that East Haddam may join the shredding events. If that happens, everyone's budget will be a little bit lower. The total budget is \$221,025.

Mr. Cox moved to approve the proposed budget and dues structure with a second by Mr. Hall. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Ms. Ehle/Meyer noted that the HHW subcommittee is still working on some things. She has a schedule ready to go but is waiting to hear back from one site. Once that happens she will probably be able to send it out next week. They are discussing not taking batteries anymore because there are opportunities to bring them to transfer stations, so that would be a duplication. In the budget there is a recycling fund balance of \$134,476. There was discussion on reducing that and how it could be distributed as there are no longer costs associated with the facility. They are also working on an HHW agreement for the towns. Chairman Salvatore asked if the fund balance will be disseminated to the towns; the answer is yes, it could be done a couple of different ways – given back to municipalities, given as a grant to do a regional program, etc.

Mr. Cox clarified that his motion is intended to include the dues structure as well; Mr. Hall concurred.

c. Nomination of Alan Ponanski as Northern Alternate to Gateway Commission (motion)

Gateway staff and the Gateway chair support this nomination.

Mr. Cox moved to appoint Alan Ponanski as the Northern Alternate to the Gateway Commission; seconded by Mr. Griswold. Vote was unanimous in favor.

d. Discussion on Bylaws Update

Updated bylaws were distributed to all, previously. Mr. Gold asked everyone to get their comments or edits in within the next month. A more detailed conversation will be held at a future meeting.

e. Regional Agricultural Council Update

Ms. Ehle/Meyer reported that they are waiting to receive the trailer that will allow transport of the no till drill. There is discussion on being included in a Dept. of Ag. grant that will have us be one of four shared equipment hubs for the state.

Mr. Armstrong will be helming a tech seminar for farmers the day after this meeting. There will also be an equipment demo day on March 2 with speakers on soil health.

f. Update on Regional Housing Plan

Implementation of the plan has begun. Ms. Jouflas is working on the toolkit and the regional housing committee bylaws have been approved so that committee will start shortly.

g. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

Ms. Burns reported that a donation of \$2,500 was received from GSB. \$1,500 of that will be put toward a grant for a project of a member land trust. Joe Samolis was elected President and Gail Reynolds moved into the Treasurer position. Melvin Woody was elected Secretary and Joe Porcaro became a board member. There is still one open position to fill.

The Melvin Woody Conservation Award will be given to the volunteers and John Hall of the Jonah Center, for his commitment to managing invasive water chestnut in the river and wetlands.

The Trail Challenge is still underway, please include it in your communications.

h. Aquatic Invasive Species Program Update

We are waiting to hear if we were awarded either grant applied for that would be used for the aquatic invasive species monitoring and mitigation program.

The initiative for hydrilla mitigation received \$6 million in the 2023 omnibus bill for the CT River Watershed. Sen. Blumenthal led this initiative. The Army Corp is continuing to look for the best pilot project locations on the river for this summer.

i. DEMHS Update

Mr. Downes reported that the oldest of the four 3-year homeland security grants will expire at the end of February. They are making sure that all the funds are spent. The next oldest grant was extended to May 2024 (from April 2023); this gives the REPT time to make sure those funds are expended.

6. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold reported that the Regional Planner position has been advertised. Mr. Downes will be moving to a part-time schedule. Mr. Gold is negotiating problems with the office heating system with the landlord. Mr. Gold reported that there are number of interesting legislative initiatives; if there is any concern on any or about testimony please contact him. He has become the interim staff member to the Gateway Commission.

Mr. Gold gave an update from Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor. She stated that there are five new registrars in the region, all in need of various levels of training. Four were ballot changes in November, one change is due to a health-related resignation. These changes occurred in Middlefield, Portland, Deep River, and Old Lyme.

Mr. Gold reported that he has spoken with Sen. Needleman about a regional waste authority take over at the Essex MIRA site. They will continue the conversations.

Chairman Salvatore noted that this legislative session will be a busy one with a number of bills that will have a direct effect on municipalities. People other than Sam may have to be sent to Hartford to testify, he is hoping that others will be available.

7. Other Business

Mr. Fortuna noted that when MIRA closed they were projecting reserves of over \$30 million. The Governor has said that money will go to the City of Hartford for remediation of the site; Mr. Fortuna disagrees with that move. The MIRA board will be reconstituted and they'll then vote to use the reserves in a specific way.

8. Adjournment

Mr. Fortuna moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:58 am; seconded by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti