



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

February 22, 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:

Noah Carver, Rep. Courtney's Office
TJ Magnoli, Eversource
Kevin Tedesco, CT DOT
Olivia Chetcuti, DEMHS
Mario Boozang, Rep. Courtney's Office
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor
Stan Mingione, The Estuary
Heather Milardo, The Estuary

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Eliza LoPresti
Robert Haramut

RiverCOG

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 9:04 A.M. The meeting was via Zoom.

2. **Public Speaking**

- a. **The Estuary Senior Center – Heather Milardo:** Ms. Milardo noted that they would like to be more involved with the COG. They have a robust meals on wheels program which uses their commercial kitchen until 1:00 pm each day, but then is available for rental for cottage industry.
- b. **Regional Election Monitor – Carol Conklin:** Ms. Conklin reminded everyone that there still needs to be an element of the town budget for registrar’s deputies and assistants. She suggested factoring in their hourly wage for 1 or 2 hours per week. The odds are good they aren’t used that much, but they could be used a week or two at a time during certain situations. She also noted that seven towns have new registrars and that to make sure that money for their certifications processes are in the municipal budget. Registrar winter projects are taking place to clean up voting lists. A special election will be held in Middletown on 2/28 due to Rep. Williams’ death; she has been in touch with them for that process there.

Mr. Griswold asked about the Secretary of State’s position on early voting. Ms. Conklin doesn’t yet have a lot of information. The hearing for the bill starts today, she predicts that it won’t go into effect until after the next two years and will probably include three weeks early voting. There is talk it would be a function of town clerks and mimic the absentee process.

Mr. Gold mentioned that he, Ms. Conklin, and representatives from NECOG met to discuss how to update the REM program and try to get it funded again. There was discussion on a program name change to Election Advisor, providing \$25,000 to fund the position to the COGs, and changing language from shall to may because some COGs don’t participate and that would relieve them of any mandate.

Mr. Griswold noted that if early voting becomes a function of the Town Clerk, the machine will need to be stored in the vault, which will be hard. Ms. Conklin noted that a mission of the new Secretary of State is to get new equipment. She also stated that the Town Clerk’s and Registrar’s associations are involved in giving input into this effort. Mr. Fortuna noted this would be an expense to expand voting in the small towns. This is the perfect opportunity to regionalize this in some way so that 169 towns are not paying for the same thing. Mr. Lahm agreed that keeping the voting machine in the vault is impractical. There was mention of just extending the absentee ballot instead of extending the in-person voting. No-excuse absentee voting is going back up this session. Mr. Gold can draft testimony about this bill. There was further discussion on how a regional vote may not work since municipality general elections

may have different ballot questions and that in-person early voting by absentee ballot could simplify the whole process, like an on-demand paper ballot in the clerk's office.

Ellen Graham of Sen. Blumenthal's office stated that applications for congressional directed spending, aka earmarks, will be live shortly.

3. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of January 25, 2023 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the January 25, 2023 meeting; second by Mr. Hall. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. FY21 TIP Amendment #23 (motion)

1. Middletown, 0082-0316, NHPP, CC, Reconfigure RT 17 On-Ramp to RT 9 NB – Ac. Conv., CON, FY23, \$10,938,000 80/20/0, increase estimate from \$6M to \$8.70M federal

2. Middletown, 0082-0316, NHPP, CC, Reconfigure RT 17 On-Ramp to RT 9 NB – Ac. Conv., CON, FY24, \$5,000,000, 80/20/0, add FY24

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 23, parts 1 & 2. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

3. Middletown, 0082-0318, NHPP, CC, Removal of traffic signals on RT 9 – Ac. Conv., CON, FY23, \$1,250,000, 80/20/0, delete project

4. Middletown, 0082-0318, NHPP, CC, Removal of traffic signals on RT 9 – Ac. Conv., CON, FY24, -\$21,250,000, 80/20/0, delete project

5. Middletown, 0082-0318, STPH, CC, Removal of traffic signals on RT 9 – Ac. Conv., CON, FY23, \$6,250,000, 80/20/0, delete project

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 23, parts 3 through 5. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

6. Westbrook, 0154-0127, STPNH, X6, Bridge 00349 deck replacement over Patchogue River on RT 1, CON, FYI, \$2,600,000, 80/20/0, new project

Mr. Hall moved to approve TIP Amendment 23, part 6. Second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Mr. Cox asked what the year is for this. Mr. Haramut replied that the state hasn't begun design yet so there is not year, it's in the FYI category.

7. Statewide, 0170-3577, STPA, X6, Line striping/pavement markings (1 of 4) – Ac. Conv. CON, FY23, \$2,000,000 100/0/0, delete project

8. Statewide, 0170-3578, STPA, X6, Line striping/pavement markings (2 of 4) – Ac. Conv. CON, FY23, \$2,000,000 100/0/0, delete project

9. Statewide, 0170-3579, STPA, X6, Line striping/pavement markings (3 of 4) – Ac. Conv. CON, FY23, \$2,000,000 100/0/0, delete project

10. Statewide, 0170-3580, STPA, X6, Line striping/pavement markings (4 of 4) – Ac. Conv. CON, FY23, \$2,000,000 100/0/0, delete project

11. Statewide, 0170-3649, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (1 of 4) – Ac. Entry, CON, FY23, \$0 100/0/0, new project

12. Statewide, 0170-3649, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (1 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FY23, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
13. Statewide, 0170-3649, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (1 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FY24, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
14. Statewide, 0170-3649, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (1 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FYI, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
15. Statewide, 0170-3650, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (2 of 4) – Ac. Entry, CON, FY23, \$0 100/0/0, new project
16. Statewide, 0170-3650, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (2 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FY23, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
17. Statewide, 0170-3650, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (2 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FY24, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
18. Statewide, 0170-3650, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (4 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FYI, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
19. Statewide, 0170-3651, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (3 of 4) – Ac. Entry, CON, FY23, \$0 100/0/0, new project
20. Statewide, 0170-3651, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (3 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FY23, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
21. Statewide, 0170-3651, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (3 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FY24, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
22. Statewide, 0170-3651, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (3 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FYI, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
23. Statewide, 0170-3652, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (4 of 4) – Ac. Entry, CON, FY23, \$0 100/0/0, new project
24. Statewide, 0170-3652, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (4 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FY23, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
25. Statewide, 0170-3652, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (4 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FY24, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project
26. Statewide, 0170-3652, STPA, X6, Pavement markings (4 of 4) – Ac. Conv., CON, FYI, \$2,500,000, 100/0/0, new project

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 23, parts 7 through 26. Second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update

The MTP is updated every four years. We have now started the 30-day comment period, which will end on March 17. It has been posted on the website. The first public meeting will be held during the RPC’s virtual meeting on Feb. 27, 2023, the second will be an in-person meeting on March 8, 2023, in the COG office. The board can endorse the plan during the March meeting on the 22nd. Some comments may not have been included at that time, if that is the case it can be adopted conditionally or a special meeting can be held.

d. TRIP Update

The deadline for the transportation rural assistance program has been extended to March 31 due to changes in eligibility. One application has been received from Haddam. If any others are received they will be prioritized during the April meeting.

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

Consultant interviews were held on Feb. 17th. Three firms were interviewed. VHB was the unanimous choice of the interview panel as they were the most qualified. The project doesn't have a CT DOT number yet and we do not have a PAL.

a. Authorization for COG Director to negotiate and execute a contract with the selected consultant

Mr. Cox moved to authorize the Executive Director to negotiate and execute the contract with the selected consultant. Second by Mr. Griswold. Vote was unanimous in favor.

f. Other Updates (LOTICIP, SS4A, TCP)

The LOTICIP annual review will be done at the March meeting. There has been one cost increase for Clinton's project and three others are delayed for construction in the spring. Mr. Haramut will put together a chart of the projects and their statuses.

RiverCOG staff and some CEOs met with Congressman Courtney and his staff to discuss the Safe Streets for All and Thrive Community Grants. These are new discretionary programs under IIJA. The SS4A grant will be received to enhance the regional safety plan and the TCP will probably study Transportation on Demand (TOD) at the region's three train stations and Middletown's bus terminal.

Kevin Tedesco of CT DOT mentioned that the Community Connectivity program will be open for another solicitation in a week or two. This is for towns and the COG for bike/pedestrian-specific projects.

g. Update from Estuary Transit District

Mr. Geraghty stated that the ETD will be unveiling their new name and brand as of April 1. New fold-out maps and brochures are being created. There is now over \$700,000 funding in the Governor's budget that would allow for evening and some weekend service if the changes make it through. They are now implementing bus and terminal upgrades to ridership data, electric signage and announcements and more. The extra mile program is going in Middletown again on Fridays and Saturdays.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. Discussion on Bylaws Updates

Mr. Gold reminded the members to read the proposed updated bylaws. We will look for approval at the March meeting.

b. CEDS Update

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is out for public comment through Feb. 24th. It is likely that this period will be extended for the Middletown P&Z. We are hopeful for adoption at the end of March or in April.

c. Regional Agricultural Council Update

The trailer that the RAC purchased will be delivered this week. There will be an equipment demonstration day on March 2 at the UCONN Extension Center in Haddam.

d. Update on Regional Housing Plan and Committee

We are looking to hear from each town whether they'd like to participate in the Regional Housing Committee. Everyone should please let Ms. LoPresti know.

e. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

Ms. Burns reported that East Haddam Land Trust has a new LCRLT representative, Barbara Pokorny. The first family to complete the trail challenge is up on the wall of champions at www.lcrlt.org/trailchallenge. This is a year-long challenge so please continue to post about it and get the word out in your towns. The board is developing a small grant for stewardship projects, made possible by a donation from GSB.

f. Aquatic Invasive Species Program Update

As a result of Rep. Palm's efforts to increase funding for the office of aquatic invasives at the Agricultural Experiment Station, Greg Bugbee reports that they filled the empty scientist position. They are meeting with CT DEEP and UCONN to coordinate activities and moving forward with working with the Army Corps of Engineers. They are working with UCONN and Northeastern University to determine monitoring technology. CT River Hydrilla has been identified in the latest edition of the CT Invasive Plant, Clam, and Mussel identification guide.

We still have not heard from either of the state grant programs that we applied to for the aquatic invasive species program.

g. DEMHS Update

The oldest of the three-year grants will expire in May. The group will start budgeting for the next three-year grant which commences in October.

h. Legislative Update

Mr. Gold started a tracking sheet for testimony and bill of note. This will be updated and sent out periodically to the COG. A few bills were discussed including Desegregates's housing bill, the MPO study bill, a policing bill (HB6722), and the Governor's waste bill.

5. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold reported that a couple of candidates have been interviewed for the open position but no decision has been made yet.

6. Other Business

Chairman Salvatore asked Mr. Fortuna for information on MIRA and whether the City of Hartford is going to take the \$30 million. Mr. Fortuna replied that Mark Daley believes there is enough money to satisfy Hartford's needs and fulfill contractual obligations of MIRA through 2027, if need be. Small towns may need to fight to get some of those funds. Chairman Salvatore asked Mr. Gold and Mr. Fortuna to put something out to the members about this.

Mr. Gold reported that CT DEEP released an RFP for Regional Waste Authority grants. There is a workshop via Zoom on March 7 and we will hold a regional meeting March 8 to determine whether we should pursue creation of our own RWA and inherit the MIRA contract through 2027.

MIRA has that much money because energy rates soared, making MIRA more money, while they haven't been spending capital funding on fixing up the facility. Mr. Lahm brought up the possible threat that towns could be on the hook for clean up at the site under environmental law.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:23 am; seconded by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti