



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 SPECIAL MEETING

March 29, 2023 – 12:00 pm

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
TJ Magnoli, Eversource
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor
David Murphy, UCONN CIRCA
Mary Buchanan, UCONN CIRCA
Laurie McElwee, Kennedy Collective
Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office
Grayson Wright, CT DOT

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Eliza LoPresti
Robert Haramut

RiverCOG

Kevin Armstrong
Margot Burns
Megan Jouflas
Brendan Geraghty
Janice Ehle/Meyer
Paula Fernald
Susie Beckman

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

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 12:08 P.M. The meeting was conducted in person at the RiverCOG office and via Zoom.

Mr. Cox moved to add an agenda item and make it 4.e.: Air Quality Control Endorsement. The other items will move down the list. Second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor.

2. **Public Speaking**

Carol Conklin - Regional Election Monitor: Ms. Conklin stated that she is helping registrars with completing their annual canvas to keep the voter lists cleaned up. There is a meeting next week with the election monitors and the new secretary of the state. There was discussion on the proposed bill for early voting; ten days is being floated now. There is concern over having enough labor to be able to pull off early voting. Mr. Gold mentioned the bill that is out of committee that would update the regional election monitor program and make it optional and hopefully restore some funding for the position.

There was discussion on the logistics of early voting and whether it would be similar to a regular election day, which will cause issues with staffing and space requirements. It is Ms. Conklin's feeling that it will be like the ballot box system that was set up during the pandemic rather than set up like the actual election day.

Laurie McElwee – South Central Mobility Manager: Ms. McElwee is happy to set up appointments to discuss the services she offers for those with disabilities, seniors, and vets. She can help with reduced fare applications and more for residents.

Ellen Graham – Sen. Blumenthal's Office: Ms. Graham stated that directed spending (earmarks) is going to be allocated soon. The picks from the Senator's office will be sent to the appropriations committee within the next few weeks.

Julia McGrath – Rep. Courtney's Office: Community project funding (earmarks) project picks will be decided upon shortly. If any projects that were submitted are not chosen they will gladly give letters of support for the senate side upon request. She has lately gotten questions on the justice 40 aspects of federal funding and how the numbers will impact towns that don't have as much staff and are overwhelmed for working on those requirements. Her office will put together a resource for the towns and they will be sending a survey out about this.

TJ Magnoli – Eversource: The Eversource community grants program is giving up to \$2,500 for non-profits. He asked people to reach out to him about the program.

3. Resilient CT 2.0 – Dave Murphy & Mary Buchanan

Mr. Murphy and Ms. Buchanan presented what they've done on the project so far. They are looking for towns to work with on two or three projects in the region that would be state funded. The goal is to create a concept design and a benefit/cost analysis then they can help the town apply for federal funding. To make it work they need a local champion within the town and to do some public engagement. Ms. Haines stated that East Haddam will work with them.

4. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of February 22, 2023 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting

Ms. Haines moved to approve the minutes of the February 22, 2023 meeting; second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. FY21 TIP Amendment #24 (motion)

- i. **Statewide, 0170-3682, EVFP, X6, NEVI program phase I admin., PL, FY23, \$1,000,000, 80/20/0, New project**
- ii. **Statewide, 0170-3684, PRPL, X6, Resiliency improvement plan and vulnerability assessment, PL, FY23, \$750,000, 80/20/0, New project**
- iii. **District 1, 0171-0496, STPA, X6, Replace, rehab or remove retaining walls in pod 1A, PD, FY23, \$1,184,000, 80/20/0, New project**
- iv. **District 1, 0171-0496, STPA, X6, Replace, rehab or remove retaining walls in pod 1A, FD, FY24, \$498,000, 80/20/0, New project**
- v. **District 1, 0171-0496, STPA, X6, Replace, rehab or remove retaining walls in pod 1A, ROW, FY24, \$100,000, 80/20/0, New project**
- vi. **District 1, 0171-0496, STPA, X6, Replace, rehab or remove retaining walls in pod 1A, CON, FYI, \$8,674,000, 80/20/0, New project**
- vii. **Statewide, 0170-2668, CMAQ, X6, Statewide TDM – NY/NJ/CT moderate, OTH, FY23, \$2,539,000, 80/20/0, New project**
Mr. Kilduff moved to approve TIP Amendment #24; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. FY 21 TIP Amendment #25 (motion)

- i. **District 2, 0172-0529, STPA, X6, Replace, rehab or remove retaining walls in pod 2a, ROW, FY24, \$100,000, 80/20/0, New project**
- ii. **District 2, 0172-0529, STPA, X6, Replace, rehab or remove retaining walls in pod 2a, CON, FYI, \$6,818,000, 80/20/0, New project**
- iii. **Statewide, 0170-3688, STPA, X6, ALT/FHCT connector study, PL, FY23, \$350,000, 80/10/10, New project**
- iv. **Statewide, 0170-5025, STPA, X6, Install and remove overhead sign supports at various locations, CON, FY23, \$10,400,000 80/20/0 New project**
Ms. Haines move to approve TIP Amendment #25; seconded by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimously held in favor.

d. Metropolitan Transportation Plan Endorsement

Mr. Fortuna moved to endorse the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Mr. Gold thanked Mr. Haramut and other staff for an excellent job on the plan.

e. Air Quality Control Endorsement

All projects in the MTP do not create any additional air quality control problems as the state's modeling shows.

Mr. Fortuna moved to accept the Air Quality Control report; seconded by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

f. Other Transportation Updates (TRIP, ADA)

There are three LOTCIP projects in Clinton, Haddam, and Middletown with commitment to fund letters. The numbers are expected to increase because of costs/inflation. Old Lyme, Middlefield, and Chester are looking at projects. Once the formal solicitation is done these will be ranked. Funding should be available by FY26.

The Clinton LOTCIP job estimate has gone from \$400,000 to \$729,000. This is half due to inflation and rest due to additional permitting work, pavement rehab, and traffic controls.

Mr. Fortuna moved to support the increase for the Clinton project. Mr. Lahm seconded. Vote was unanimously taken in favor.

The TRIP applications are due March 31. We have received one application from Haddam; our region can submit two.

Towns that haven't completed the state's ADA survey should please do so.

g. Update from Estuary Transit District

Mr. Geraghty stated that they will be unveiling their new branding this Tuesday. The unified transit districts will now be called River Valley Transit. They are now proposing route and schedule changes and are doing extensive public outreach for input. There will be new technology implemented such as display screens with real-time scheduling, auto voice announcements for stops, and automatic counters for riders. The extra mile pilot project that was occurring in Middletown is over, but they are looking at potential new extra mile zones in the region due to microtransit funding opportunities from the state.

Mr. Comerford added that they received word that they will be receiving more relief funds, which have been instrumental to them due to increased project costs and other challenges throughout the pandemic. They have also received grant funding for another part of the transit study, which is moving to designated bus stops rather than flagged stops.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. Adoption of Bylaws

Mr. McDonald moved to accept the bylaws; seconded by Mr. Kilduff. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Regional Waste Authority Program Grant Endorsement

CT DEEP is offering a grant program statewide for planning of or projects of regional waste authorities. RiverCOG is looking to apply for a grant to create a RWA and/or join an existing one. It will include funding for due diligence of transfer from MIRA and looking at keeping the Essex site, and staff time. Rather than individual letters of support from municipalities, we are asking for one letter from RiverCOG with members' signatures on it. Madison will also be signing the letter. There is value here for the towns who do not currently use the Essex site as there is potential for a RWA to handle future programs, like HHW or something new. Mr. Gold also had conversations with ECCRA, which is owned by Middletown, who may have additional capacity, and with CRCOG who formed a RWA in 2010 but has yet to use it for anything, but could be an optional partnership. For now we are only committing to doing the study for the purposes of this grant.

Mr. McDonald moved to support RiverCOG's grant application for a study of RWA options. Seconded by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Mr. Fortuna moved to add an agenda item: endorsement of letter of support for Middletown's RWA grant application as item b)i. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

i. Endorsement of letter of support for Middletown for the DEEP RWA grant application

Middletown is looking for grant funding to expand their facility in Lisbon. The regional interest is that expansion at this plant could possibly benefit our towns.

Mr. Hall moved to endorse the letter of support for Middletown's RWA grant application to CT DEEP. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. Regional Agricultural Council Update

The trailer will be registered this week so it can be brought around to different farms. A farmer in Middlefield just applied to use a piece of equipment, so word is spreading. The RAC is having difficulties keeping board members on their committee. They are looking for representatives from Cromwell, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Lyme, Middlefield, Old Lyme, and Westbrook.

d. Update on CEDS

Ms. Jouflas reported that the public comment period was extended. About 70 comments were received, she is expecting to have a final draft in mid-April. Mr. Gold added that this project is being funded through a grant from the US Economic Development Administration. One of the tasks of that grant was for long-term recovery, which has

concluded. There was money left over in that task so it was moved to the CEDS project, which will now include an appendix that looks into essential businesses that each town has but typically aren't part of emergency planning processes, such as grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, etc. This will enable towns to partner with private businesses in town that are essential for disaster recovery efforts. Once the COG approves the CEDS it has to go to the state for approval, then to US EDA for federal approval. RiverCOG was advised to ask EDA for designation as a federal economic development district at the same time. Both processes could take a while. All other regions in the state have put in EDD applications, we are the last to do so.

e. **Lower CT River Land Trust Update**

Ms. Burns reported that there is a small stewardship grant open for a total of \$1,500, open to land trusts and communities. This was made possible by a donation from GSB. The number of applications funded will be dependent on the number received. The smallest award will be \$500.

f. **Aquatic Invasive Species Program Update**

Ms. Burns reported that we were awarded a \$63,700 grant from CT DEEP for the aquatic invasive species program that includes funding to purchase a boat and for seasonal staff to monitor for water chestnut. There will be a workshop with the Army corps of engineers about hydrilla. They are working on funding for the next fiscal year with Sen. Blumenthal's office, who let us know that other Senators such as Murphy, Warren, Markley, Walsh, and Sanders have signed on as well.

g. **DEMHS Update**

Mr. Gold will ask Mr. Downes to email an update since he was unable to attend the meeting.

5. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Salvatore thanked COG staff for the lunch.

Mr. Gold noted there will be a celebration of life for Ed Bailey 4/23. This will be sent out to all. The financial report is that as of the end of February spending has been within the parameters of the adopted budget. There is a projected overage for salaries and employee contribution plan. Some of the overages will be going to the Executive Committee. There are additional line items where we underbudgeted so we will be fine. The maintenance line item will be over due to large issues with the heating and cooling system, but a new system was installed at the landlord's expense last month. At the end of February the STIF account totaled \$1,089,000 and the checking account held \$86,990.

6. Other Business

Mr. Gold stated that he updated the legislative tracking sheet; he has submitted testimony on 30 bills on behalf of the COG.

Ms. Ehle/Meyer stated that the household hazardous waste collections are starting; the first will be held in Clinton on April 22.

Ms. Haines thanked Mr. Gold for submitting testimony as it's important for them to hear people. She asked all those that have feelings about bills to please send in their own testimony, especially if it is about something that is not good for our small towns.

Mr. Gold stated that if COGs receive more funding he would like to hire another staff member next fiscal year. He also mentioned that our region is a minority share of the Hartford urbanized area, which received a grant for assistance on pollution clean up, so we will see if we can have a share of that to assist our own region.

7. Adjournment

Ms. Haines moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:38 pm; seconded by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti