



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

June 28, 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
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
Erik Shortell, FHWA
Nicole Velardi, DEMHS
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Erin McBride, Sen. Murphy's Office
Andrew Guo, FHWA
Lisa Kidder, State Comptroller's Office
David Palmbach, CISA
Nadya Hoolahan, CT DEEP
Kevin Pisacich, CT DEEP
Ken Livingstong, FHI Studio
Keri Oram

RiverCOG

Staff Present:

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

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

Vice Chairman Griswold called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M. The meeting was conducted I person and via Zoom.

2. **Public Speaking**

Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor discussed details of the early voting bill. All towns will receive \$10,500, regardless of size. She will calculate the cost of registrars and single day coverage for the towns. She encouraged the CEOs to meet with their registrars about this and all present to write or call the bonding committee because they need more information on the funding, plus the education line item was slashed, so there is no budget to educate the public about the early voting. This will be revisited at midterm. Caucuses will be happening in July.

Mr. Gold mentioned that there were some statutory changes to the bill that created the REM position. COGs will receive \$25,000 funding should they choose to take part in the now optional program. It will now be called the Regional Election Advisor program.

Lisa Kidder, of the State Comptroller's Office talked about the My CT Savings program, which is a state-sponsored retirement plan for businesses with 5+ employees that do not offer retirement plans. This was launched to address the issue that many don't have enough saved for retirement because that will end up being a taxpayer burden. The deadline to sign up is Aug. 31, 2023, which businesses must do if they don't offer a retirement plan. This is free to the businesses and simple to manage, all they have to do is facilitate the program through their payroll. The plan is run with the Comptroller, BNY Mellon, and Vestwell State Savings.

Julia McGrath of Rep. Courtney's Office stated that they are working through the reauthorization of the farm bill. This will make it more affordable for young and underserved farmers with support for rural development, broadband, etc. The National Defense Act is out of committee, this will extend healthcare for guard and military personnel. The HUD Thriving Communities technical assistance portal is now up to coordinate and/or implement. A multi-modal discretionary grant program will be open until the end of August. CT is getting \$144 million as part of the BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access & Deployment) program through the IJA.

Erin McBride of Sen. Murphy's Office discussed the dairy round table that is coming up for the farm bill. There was a housing town hall held, which residents of RiverCOG attended. She introduced her intern, Kyle, from SCSU.

3. Presentations

- a. **Cybersecurity Training Opportunities - David Palmbach, Cybersecurity Advisor for CT, CISA:** Mr. Palmbach's presentation can be found [here](#). He is the representative for CT from the Dept. of Homeland Security who is able to offer free cybersecurity services to our municipalities. He asked that the CEOs share the presentation with their IT professionals.
- b. **Statewide Broadband Enhancement Program – Kevin Pisacich, CT DEEP:** The presentation can be found [here](#). CT DEEP is administering the federal program on behalf of the state. OPM is mapping broadband access, please review the maps at [the](#) state's website. Organizations need to do the survey found there, please share the information. There will be community meetings in August for state and local leaders; grant applications will launch mid to late 2024.

4. LCRVMPO Business

- a. **Approval of Minutes of May 24, 2023 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting**
Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the May 24, 2023 special meeting; second by Mr. Kilduff. Vote was unanimous in favor.
- b. **FY 21 TIP Amendment #27 (motion)**
 - i. **Old Saybrook, 0478-XXXX, 5307C, X6, Estuary TD admin/misc support FY23, OTH, FY23, \$325,000, 80/20/0, increase funding from \$45,000**
 - ii. **Old Saybrook, 0478-XXXX, 5307C, X6, Estuary TD facility improvements FY23, ALL, FY23, \$100,000, 80/20/0, new project**
 - iii. **Old Saybrook, 0478-XXXX, 5307C, X6, Estuary TD replace small busses FY23, ACQ, FY23, \$480,000, 80/20/0, new project**
 - iv. **Old Saybrook, 0478-XXXX, 5307C, X6, Estuary TD bus stop signage systemwide FY23, OTH, FY23, \$360,000, 80/20/0, new project**
 - v. **Old Saybrook, 0478-XXXX, 5307C, X6, Estuary TD Old Saybrook hub improvements FY23, ALL, FY23, \$50,000, 80/20/0, increase funding from \$45,000**
 - vi. **Middletown, 0422-XXXX, 3507C, X6, Middletown TD admin capital/misc support FY23, OTH, FY 23, \$300,000, 80/20/0, delete project**

Mr. Cox moved to approve FY 21 TIP Amendment #27, second by Mr. Kilduff. Vote was unanimously approved.

- c. **FY 21 TIP Amendment #28 (motion)**
 - i. **Haddam, 0060-0160, STPH, X7, Replace two T-type intersections with roundabouts and bridge at RT 82/RT 154, FY23, CON, FY23, \$0, 80/20/0, AC entry**

- ii. **Haddam, 0060-0160, STPH, X7, Replace two T-type intersections with roundabouts and bridge at RT 82/RT 154, FY23, CON, FY23, \$8,125,0000, 80/20/0, Increase from \$5,840,000 AC conversion**
- iii. **Haddam, 0060-0160, STPH, X7, Replace two T-type intersections with roundabouts and bridge at RT 82/RT 154, FY24, CON, FY23, \$4,675,000, 80/20/0, AC conversion**

Mr. Kilduff moved to approve FY 21 TIP Amendment #28. Second by Mr. Fortuna.

Discussion: Ms. Haines stated that it is nuts to do these rotaries at this point in time. There was discussion on what happens if the TIP amendment is voted down; if they say no, then the project cannot move forward and there would be a conversation with CT DOT on this. Ms. Haines stated that there should be a conversation. She does not have a problem with the rotaries, it's just that at this time it's bad. There is a pipeline going down the other side of East Haddam currently so you get stuck in two places in town on route 149l They are construction heavy and just got out of Covid. She asked how much you can do to a small area and their lifeline in and out of town. Just when bridge construction will be done, they will be ripping up the road at the end of the bridge, which is not good for the businesses. Mr. Fortuna noted that we probably don't want to vote no on this if they want the money eventually. Ms. Haines stated she wants to stop the project, or delay it by ten years so the businesses can recover. She stated she gets calls every day about the construction. CT DOT gave them a little pile of tickets for people to get on the ferry, but there is no room. She stated they are literally throwing salt on a terribly open wound. Mr. McGarry stated that the timing is horrendous and the accident rate at that section is not that bad, and there are doubts about the northern rotary going on to bridge road. The continued disruption to the businesses in that area is going to be fatal. Ms. Haines stated that people around the state think East Haddam is closed. She is waiting until the end of the summer to see the numbers of people who came to the state parks. Meanwhile, all her businesses are going away. 95% of her tax burden is on residential because they don't have businesses and she can't attract them right now. Mr. McGarry stated that the businesses on Bridge Rd. mostly depend on commuter traffic which they are not getting. Mr. Gold suggested tabling the motion until there can be further conversation with CT DOT about the project.

Mr. Cox moved to table the motion on FY 21 TIP Amendment #28 with a second by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimous in favor of tabling.

d. Other Transportation Updates

The project authorization letter for the Air Line Trail project should be coming this week. There is a draft scope for the Safe Streets For All grant. CT DOT is updating the state ITS (Intelligent Transportation System).

Mr. Gold noted that there was a special act passed to tasking the ACIR to study further consolidation of MPOs. He has asked to co-chair the committee and have our CEOs help as we were the first merger of MPOs in the state in the last round.

e. Update from Estuary Transit District

Mr. Geraghty stated that the new park connect service will run this summer, connecting Middletown with Hammonasset State Beach. They are wrapping up public outreach on the proposed service route changes. The changes will launch September 5th, but there will be a proposal update within a month. There will be answer by June 30 whether they received the microtransit grant funding that was applied for. They are finally close to installing their upgraded signs, this will hopefully be done by early July. A new website will be revealed in August.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. Revised Budget – RSG Increase

Mr. McGarry moved to approve the revised budget as presented; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

i. New Projects and Employees?

COGs will be getting additional revenue for the Regional Services Grant this year. RiverCOG will see a \$246,000 increase. Additionally, Gateway Committee staff has become more expensive and we are receiving \$25,000 for the Regional Election Advisor program. With additional funding, Mr. Gold is recommending that RiverCOG add an entry level staff position and use the remainder for consultants, which type will be determined. He would like to recreate the regional services committee and figure out expenditures that will benefit all. There was discussion on the types of regional services that could be offered. RiverCOG staff will create a short survey to send out to the CEOs to see what is most needed.

b. Household Hazardous Waste Update

Three HHW collections and two shredding events have been held this season already; the numbers have been up from last year. Ms. Ehle-Meyer is working with DEEP on a closure plan for the Essex facility.

Other waste updates: There is a grant opportunity coming up for any town that would like to put in a redemption center at their transfer station at the end of July. Information will probably be given about the Regional Waste Authority grant in 3 to 4 weeks. Right now the state is shipping ¼ of our waste out of state. Municipal transfer station permits are out with DEEP right now, and they will be offering trainings in September. The legislature approved recycling of tires at transfer stations. A MIRA dissolution authority has been created. There is a federal lithium battery recycling program starting soon.

c. Regional Agriculture Council Update

The trailer has gone in to get rails welded on to carry the drill. The program is ending in September, Ms. Ehle-Meyer is working with CT RC&D on their new equipment hubs in the region.

d. Update on Regional Housing Committee

Regular monthly meetings have been set for the fourth Tuesday at 2:00. This past meeting held a good discussion on ADUs. We are banking the information we receive about each towns' ADU process for the data dashboard as a way to assess how the legislation is working. Mr. Armstrong revealed a template for the website and also data for housing prices viewable by town. We will send the link to everyone.

e. CEDS Update

The CEDS was submitted to the EDA for approval, it is now under review. We opted not to submit for the Economic Development District (EDD) at the same time because the application is taking a long time. Ms. Joufflas is working with the Middlesex Chamber to form an EDD board. We are also working on a resiliency study which will become an addendum to the CEDS; this builds on the work of the CEDS and the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans for critical businesses in the region.

f. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

Small stewardship grants were awarded to the East Haddam Land Trust and the Town of Essex for trail maintenance. Each will receive \$750 for their projects. The grants were made possible by a donation from GSB.

g. Aquatic Invasive Species Program Update

The US Army Corps of Engineers is holding a public information meeting on their project on June 29th at Middletown City Hall. Ms. Burns encouraged everyone to attend. Water chestnut removal along the river is happening now with our partners. An informational mailer about this went out to land owners along the river. The Aquatic Invasive Species program grant was approved by the Attorney General and the boat has been purchased. It is now at Andrew's Marina in Haddam getting outfitted. We will be looking to hire seasonal staff shortly.

h. CT RC&D Update

Jeanne Davies has retired from her Executive Director position. RC&D has hired Jocelyn Leahy to replace her. RC&D has been an instrumental partner in our soil development and water chestnut programs.

i. DEMHS Update

Mr. Downes reported that the oldest grant (19ALCRA) is about to close out and has been spent down to \$82. The next two will expire in April and May of 2024. They are now budgeting for the 2023 Homeland Security Grant.

j. Legislative Update

Mr. Gold mentioned that there was a fair share (and other) housing bill attached to a greenways bill that passed the legislation. This tasks OPM with coming up with a methodology for distributing the housing burden in a future session. There is no provision to consult with the portion of the public that they are enacting the legislation for.

5. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold reported the financials. As of May 31, 11 months of the fiscal year have been completed and spending is within the parameters of the budget. The bank balances include \$1.1 million in the STIF account and \$137,000 in the checking account as of the end of May.

6. Other Business

The July COG meeting will be held at 4:00 at Penny Lane Pub in Old Saybrook. There will be a very short business meeting with the rest of the time dedicated to a happy hour to celebrate Torrance's retirement.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:10 am; seconded by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti