



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

December 13, 2023 – 9:00 am

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Cindy Lignar *
Clinton: Karl Kilduff *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Carol Doak-Jones *
Durham: Brendan Rea *
East Haddam: Irene Haines *
East Hampton: David Cox
Essex: Carey Duques
Haddam: Bob McGarry *
Killingworth: Eric Couture *
Lyme: David Lahm *
Middlefield: Jim Irish *
Middletown: Ben Florsheim *
Old Lyme: Martha Shoemaker *
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:

Rep. Chris Aniskovich, Rep. Christine Palm, Rep. Devin Carney, Rep. Irene Haines
Sen. Norm Needleman, Sen. Christine Cohen, Sen. Matthew Lesser
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
Nicole Velardi, DEMHS
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor
Kathryn Russell, Deep River
Pat Bandzes, Chester
Betsy Gara, COST
Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office
Martin Henry, Henry, Raymond & Thompson (auditors)

RiverCOG

Staff Present:

Sam Gold, Eliza LoPresti, Robert Haramut, Kevin Armstrong, Susie Beckman, Margot Burns, Brendan Geraghty. Megan Joufflas, Janice Ehle/Meyer, Marcos Gonzalez

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M. The meeting was conducted via Zoom and in person at The Katharine Hepburn Cultural & Arts Center in Old Saybrook.

2. Public Speaking

Brett Elliot, Director of The Kate, welcomed everyone. Mr. Fortuna welcomed everyone to Old Saybrook.

Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor, stated that there is a deadline of Dec. 31 for towns to submit paperwork to receive their \$10,500 for early voting so please check in with registrars to make sure that deadline will be met. Early voting locations need to be designated; this does not have to be a polling place. Town committees are up for nominations, caucuses, re-elections, the deadline for changing party for a primary is Jan. 2.

Laurie McElwee, Regional Mobility Manager, thanked Mr. Irish for utilizing her services in Middlefield. Mr. Gold, Mr. Comerford and Ms. Cruz went to bat for her position this year, she thanked them.

Ms. Haines moved to move item 4, discussion with area legislators on 2024 legislative agenda, up to be next on the agenda. Second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimously approved.

3. Discussion with Area Legislators on 2024 Legislative Agenda

Mr. Gold went over the highlights of the legislative agenda, which can be found [here](#). Ms. Haines suggested moving the public safety issue up to be higher on the agenda.

Rep. Carney talked about solid waste as a big issue. He also mentioned the right to read program that is expensive and falls short of what is needed in our region, as our school systems are largely without reading deficits. It's a one size fits all solution provided by the state DOE that will be coming out soon. He reminded all that the bottle deposit will be going up to \$0.10 in January. He also mentioned that the Shore Line East line that was cancelled never recovered after Covid and was heavily subsidized.

Sen. Cohen is part of the working group formed by Sen. Needleman around the waste issue. Some towns are working with the zero waste pilot program. As part of the new bottle bill there was grant funding that opened up to help supplement redemption centers but there hasn't been much uptake on that so far. Shore Line East is one of her top issues this session, especially as there is talk of housing and TOD.

Sen. Lesser stated that he lives in Middletown, one of the communities participating in a pilot pay as you throw waste program. He discussed the challenge with the state budget as they are already over the spending cap and without the ARPA funds increases will be difficult, so investing in local projects will be strained.

Rep. Palm discussed how important it is for the CEOs to participate at the state capital. She mentioned the EPR bill on tires and how many people came out to testify on that. Out of 122 people that spoke, 97 of them were lobbyists against the environment. Only 22 were citizens. She stated that the waste and aquatic invasive species issues stood out on our agenda and hopes that all the legislators on the shoreline can make a united front on these issues.

Ellen Graham of Sen. Blumenthal's and Erin McBride of Sen. Murphy's offices discussed items that are being worked on currently in Washington DC.

Julia McGrath of Rep. Courtney's office will share a legislation overview with everyone. He is pushing for the low income heating assistance, as federal support was recently dropped. Chairman Salvatore asked about grants for drainage; Ms. McGrath will take a look and get back to him for January. There is nothing for December.

There was further discussion on cuts to the Shore Line East at this time.

4. Adoption of the 2024 Legislative Agenda

Mr. Hall moved to adopt the 2024 Legislative Agenda with the change mentioned by Ms. Haines. Second by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimously approved.

5. Presentation of 2024 Audit: Martin Henry of Henry, Raymond & Thompson

Mr. Henry presented the audit of the financial statement for FY23. RiverCOG is a healthy entity, with 1.8 million in assets and \$250,000 in liabilities. The audit opinion is unmodified (good), there are no deficiencies in internal controls and the audit was clean, both state and federal.

a. Approval of Fiscal Year 2023 Audit

Mr. Fortuna moved to approve the FY23 audit, seconded by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimously approved.

Discussion: Mr. Gold thanked Paula Fernald, Financial Administrator, because she does an amazing job with the COG's financials. Thank you for an excellent report card.

6. LCRVMPO Business

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

Ms. Haines moved to approve the minutes of the October 25, 2023 regular meeting; second by Mr. Curley. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Approval of 2024 Meeting Dates

Ms. Haines moved approve the 2024 meeting dates; seconded by Mr. Florsheim. Vote was unanimously approved.

Discussion: A November meeting was added to the 2024 calendar on the third Wednesday. This can be cancelled if it is not needed.

c. FY 21 TIP Amendment 31

- i. Old Lyme/East Lyme, 0104-0117, NHPP, X7, Reconfigure exits 71 and 72 and improve safety and operations on I95 southbound, 2024, PD, \$3,850,000, 90/10/0, New project

- ii. Old Lyme/East Lyme, 0104-0117, NHPP, X7, Reconfigure exits 71 and 72 and improve safety and operations on I95 southbound, FYI, ROW, \$40,000, 90/10/0, New project
- iii. Old Lyme/East Lyme, 0104-0117, NHPP, X7, Reconfigure exits 71 and 72 and improve safety and operations on I95 southbound, FYI, FD, \$3,000,000, 90/10/0, New project
- iv. Old Lyme/East Lyme, 0104-0117, NHPP, X7, Reconfigure exits 71 and 72 and improve safety and operations on I95 southbound, FYI, CON, \$0, 90/10/0, AC Entry, New project
- v. Old Lyme/East Lyme, 0104-0117, NHPP, X7, Reconfigure exits 71 and 72 and improve safety and operations on I95 southbound, FYI, CON, \$21,617,000, 90/10/0, AC Conversion, New project
- vi. Haddam, 0060-0160, STPH, X7, Replace two T-type intersections with roundabouts and bridge 00622 on RT 82/154, 2024, CON, \$11,500,000, 80/20/0, AC Conversion, Increase estimate from Fed \$3,740,000 to \$9,200,000

Mr. Florsheim moved to approve TIP Amendment 31, items i. – v.; seconded by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Mr. Florsheim moved to approve TIP Amendment 31, item vi. Second by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimous in favor.

d. CTDOT Active Transportation Microgrant Program

The safe routes to school program will appear this spring. CT DOT is still drafting guidance on the microgrant program, the distribution will occur to schools, non profits and municipalities. Grants will be \$5,000 or less for things like bike fleets, helmets, locks, safety, etc. This will be solicited through COGs on a bi-annual basis. \$800,000 will be available for next year.

e. Other Transportation (Community Connectivity/TRIP, ALT Study, SS4A, TCP)

In November the state announced about \$12,000,000 in community connectivity grants; East Hampton received one for the village center. There are 2 TRIP applications; CT DOT was in touch with Haddam about theirs so that will be moving forward shortly. The second advisory committee meeting for the Air Line Trail study will be happening soon. There were four responses to the RFP for the SS4A project, they will be reviewed shortly.

Ms. Joufflas stated that she and Mr. Gold were recently in Washington at federal DOT to talk about the Thriving Communities project. This is a 2 year program. There is a scope of work being finalized with the consultant, WSP, to work on TOD for the four transit stations in the region.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. Election of Officers for 2024

Ms. Shoemaker moved to nominate David Cox as Vice Chairman and Ryan Curley as At-Large member of the Executive Committee; seconded by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Ms. Lignar moved to approve the slate of officers for election to the executive committee for 2024; seconded by Mr. Florsheim. The slate includes Tony Salvatore (Chair), David Cox (Vice Chair), Carl Fortuna (Treasurer), Bob McGarry (Secretary), Irene Haines (At-Large), and Ryan Curley (At-Large). The vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

The grant for the update will be submitted within the next two weeks, please calls Ms. Burns with any questions about the program. Having an up to date plan will affect public assistance funding availability after a disaster declaration.

c. Regional Waste Authority Grant

Ms. Ehle/Meyer stated that we were verbally told we'd be receiving this grant. Funds will be used to hire an engineer/consultant to make a plan for the region. The scope will be to look at all the different options and will be done with close conversation with Sen. Needleman. The board will be kept informed.

d. Climate Pollution Reduction Grant – Hartford MSA

The CPRG has been awarded to state MSA's; our region is part of the Hartford-East Hartford-Middletown MSA. We are sub-consultant to CRCOG on this project. We have created an agreement to assist with our efforts on this project.

i. Agreement with CRCOG for Funding

Mr. Florsheim moved to approve the agreement with CRCOG for funding; second by Ms. Shoemaker.

Discussion: We are to be paid \$60,000, but are asking for more because of the amount of work that RiverCOG staff is doing. Please take a look at the memo that was sent out yesterday and fill out the included survey as the group will be looking at municipal projects and priorities that are ready to or that you would like to work on. To be eligible for funding, projects need to be included in the first phase and a broad coalition of projects will be needed to put an application together.

e. Digital Documents License Purchase Authorization

Mr. Curley moved, and Mr. Couture seconded, to authorize RiverCOG to enter into contract with MetroCOG to participate in their Laserfiche Cloud shared services initiative with AIS in the amount not to exceed \$55,000. Vote was unanimously approved.

Discussion: Chairman Salvatore stated that this is a good move in the right direction, it will be cost effective; if towns were to do this themselves it would be tens of thousands of dollars.

f. DEMHS Fiduciary Report

Nicole Velardi from DEMHS mentioned that updated proxy letters need to be put in. Emergency management plans are due at the end of this year along with the EMPG applications which are due March of 2024.

Ms. Beckman stated that RiverCOG hasn't been receiving enough funding from the DEMHS program to cover the cost of the fiduciary responsibilities for Region 2. They will be looking at improving existing processes.

g. Veteran's Committee Update

The second meeting of the committee will be coming up in January. We are now getting some clarification on specific points in the public act, in particular, whether a town has to have a committee or a representative or both.

h. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

The LCRLT is applying for a grant from the US Forest Service for forest management plans. There is a 50/50 match for open space forested parcels. The annual meeting will be Thursday, Dec. 21 at 5:30 pm.

i. Aquatic Invasive Species Update

Ms. Burns is looking to work with partners on public outreach in towns around lakes. There is money available through the Army Corps project to help towns with this. Please let her know if hydrilla is found in your town.

6. Chairman's and Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold gave the financial statement for November 30. The STIF account holds 1.78 million and the checking account has \$65,881.

Mr. Gold asked that if items come up in the legislative session that members want him to weigh in on, to let him know.

Chairman Salvatore discussed the property tax on cars and that the standard MSRP depreciation will not be used, it is moving to 80%. That is on hold right now but it will happen and the assessors need to be aware of this.

Chairman Salvatore testified on the possible MPO study by ACIR. As a result it appears that the Governor does not even have the power to merge MPOs as CEOs have the power of consolidation. Mr. Gold has been asked by ACIR to write the report on this subject, with Matt Hart.

7. Other Business

Mr. Wright commended Mr. Gold and RiverCOG staff.

Mayor Florsheim stated that there is a new task force to study the car tax situation, that he is a part of. There is discussion about possible repeal and replacement; he will provide updates.

Chairman Salvatore commended the COG staff and particularly Mr. Gold for an outstanding job and for being on boards throughout the state.

Mr. Gold mentioned the two upcoming public outreach meetings for the CPRG.

8. Adjournment

Mr. Hall moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:37 am; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti