



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

145 Dennison Road Essex, CT 06426 | +1 860 581 8554 | www.rivercog.org

Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments And Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

January 24, 2024 – 9:00 am

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Cindy Lignar * (until 10:30)
Clinton: Karl Kilduff *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Carol Doak-Jones *
Durham: Brendan Rea
East Haddam: Irene Haines * (until 10:15)
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Carey Duques * & Norm Needleman * (until 9:30)
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 * (until 10:15)
Estuary & Middletown Area Transit Districts: Joe Comerford *

*present

Others Present:

Congressman Joe Courtney
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
Matthew Reich, Congressman Courtney's Office
Nicole Velardi, DEMHS
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Kathryn Russell, Deep River
Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office
Joel Severance, CERT
TJ Magnoli, Eversource
Wendy Rego, CEN
Rachel Collard, CEN

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 9:01 A.M. The meeting was conducted via Zoom and in person at the RiverCOG office.

2. Congressman Courtney – Legislative Outlook 2024

Congressman Joe Courtney discussed the government’s current operation on a continuing resolution and how that affects the region, his work with Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro on funding the budget, the National Defense budget passing, Amtrak’s efforts on behalf of the Shoreline East route, the PRO Housing application in relation to EB’s hiring spree and not having enough housing for their workforce, and more. He then answered questions.

Chairman Salvatore asked about federal money that might be available for flooding/drainage projects. Rep. Courtney discussed disaster declarations due to the latest flooding, and that FEMA and/or hazard mitigation money could be available. Ms. Velardi (DEMHS) stated that they have an open flood mitigation assistance application, but no funding is attached to it. Ms. McGrath will look into this further.

Mr. Gold mentioned that the COGs are discussing match funding from the state for federal grant applications.

3. Public Speaking

Sen. Norm Needleman clarified that the upcoming EV bill will include hybrids and that it is to make sure that we’re meeting the goals toward the electrical grid. He mentioned that he is hoping that trash is talked about in the upcoming legislative session. Essex is now trying to figure out what to do with the transfer station. He discussed energy as a potential topic in the legislature as well.

Erin McBride of Sen. Murphy’s office noted that she checked in with towns after the flooding and that they should follow up with her if needed. The RAISE grant is now open.

Mr. Gold read Regional Election Advisor, Carol Conklin’s report: she will work with the secretary of state and Mr. Gold on a new MOU. Funding for her position went to \$25,000 from the state. She will work closely with the towns on early voting.

Rep. Haines clarified that on Feb. 1 they will be in special session about the EV bill that Sen. Needleman referenced. The bill is that as of 2035 only EVs and hybrids will be sold (new) in the state. She urged those against the bill to make their voices heard and to suggest that it should be in regular session as there are too many questions that still need to be answered.

Mr. Comerford stated that they are facing the fact that the state gives River Valley Transit 20% of their funds, which they cannot give them for diesel vehicles. Just yesterday they received the power study from the Middletown facility, which is easier than the shoreline facility, as those plans may need to be changed to accommodate electric vehicles. Electric busses are a 5 to 1 replacement for diesel.

4. **Presentation – Wendy Rego, CEN**

Ms. Rego and Ms. Collard of the Connecticut Education Network gave a presentation on the availability of fiber broadband to municipalities. Their presentation can be found [here](#).

5. **LCRVMPO Business**

a. **Approval of Minutes of December 13, 2023 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Regular Meeting**
Mr. Kilduff moved to approve the minutes of the December 13, 2023 regular meeting; second by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. **Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Regional Safety Action Plan Consultant Authorization**
Mr. Couture moved that the Executive Director may enter into contract negotiation and execution with FHI Studio for the SS4A plan for \$225,000 or less; second by Mr. Curley. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. **FY 21 TIP Amendment 32**

- i. Middletown, 0082-0218, STPH, CC, Removal of traffic signals on RT 9, FYI, ROW, \$1,740,000, 80/20/0, Move from FY 24 to FYI

Mr. McGarry moved to approve TIP Amendment 32 i; second by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimously approved.

Discussion: Middletown, Cromwell, East Hampton & Portland met with CT DOT on the Route 9 lights. It was asked whether we wanted to wait until Middletown and Portland are satisfied with the project to approve this portion of the amendment. Mr. Haramut stated that the amendment buys another year of planning and moves the project to FY25 (from FY24). This gives the state additional time to meet with the towns and have more public involvement. If the amendment is not approved, they would keep designing. If Middletown and Portland are not happy, they will have another chance to change it. Mr. Curley noted that Portland's objection to the plan is that it will remove the exit on Route 9 north that is now used to get onto the bridge and the lights at Washington Street. There will be a new exit before the boat club that will funnel cars down Main Street or deKoven Drive. There is not a solution that makes any towns feel good in the long run. Mr. Haramut suggested CT DOT could come to a meeting at some point to discuss this. Mr. Cox recommended to approve the amendment and monitor the situation. Mr. Wright stated that the board will be given other opportunities through other phases of the project and that CT DOT can get the project manager to a meeting.

- ii. District 2, 0172-0524, CRPA, X6, Replace highway illumination at various locations, 2024, CON, \$0, 80/20/0, Add AC entry
- iii. District 2, 0172-0524, CRPA, X6, Replace highway illumination at various locations, 2024, CON, \$6,925,000, 80/20/0, Add new phase
- iv. District 2, 0172-0524, CRPA, X6, Replace highway illumination at various locations, FYI, CON, \$6,250,000, 80/20/0, Add new phase

Mr. Hall moved to approve TIP Amendment 32 ii, iii, and iv; second by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimously approved.

- v. Clinton-New London, 0027-0127, NHPP, X6, Replace highway signs and supports on I-95, 2024, CON, \$0, 90/10/0, AC entry, New project
- vi. Clinton-New London, 0027-0127, NHPP, X6, Replace highway signs and supports on I-95, 2024, CON, \$24,550,000, 90/10/0, AC conversion, New project

Mr. Fortuna moved to approve TIP Amendment 32 v and vi; second by Mr. Hall. Vote was unanimously approved.

d. FY 2023 Obligated Project List

The list of approved projects will be published on the website.

e. Other Transportation (SS4A, TCP)

SS4A was previously discussed. Ms. Joufflas reported that the work plan has been received for the Thriving Communities project, and the schedule approved by US DOT. The official kick off will be in February and will last 18 months with robust public engagement.

f. Update From Estuary Transit District

Mr. Comerford stated that their facility projects are slowly moving along. They are wrapping up the master plan for the Middletown maintenance facility and hoping that the state will select that project for funding coming from the FTA. The environmental study at the shoreline facility is ok, though the electric study is impacting this. Starting March 1 there will be the addition of Sunday service and the microtransit pilot project will begin in June.

Mr. Geraghty reported that they are looking at the results of the October service changes and improving and making tweaks as necessary. They applied for a grant for a Middletown to New Haven route that could connect with the train and larger bus lines.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. FY 25 RiverCOG Dues (motion)

Mr. Curley moved to approve a dues increase of 3%, seconded by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: We are using the 2021 DPH population data because there is a known problem with the 2022 data. The total increase is \$6,554.

b. Household Hazardous Waste Budget (motion)

Mr. Fortuna moved to approve the budget and 1% HHW dues increase as presented, second by Ms. Lignar. Vote was unanimously approved.

Ms. Ehle/Meyer reminded everyone that the dues are only part of the cost, there are additional costs of disposal once the events take place. The schedule for 2024 is set, as Deep River Town Garage is going to be used for the collection in the central part of the region. We are working on a new interlocal agreement, this will be on the agenda for the next meeting. She is looking for more members to join the HHW subcommittee. The facility in Essex has been officially closed with approval from DEEP.

There was a discussion about MIRA, as the MIRA towns received a letter with a budget adoption request. Mr. Fortuna discussed that MIRA will be supporting systems until June 2027 with the tip stabilization fee. They want everybody to go out to bid, but this was just done. CCM has started a president's committee on waste management, which Mr. Fortuna is part of. They will recommend long and short-term solutions for waste management to the legislature. A lobbying firm has been hired to help with this.

Ms. Ehle/Meyer noted that can and bottle returns are up to \$0.10, though there are no large volume redemption centers.

c. Economic Development District (EDD) Roster (motion)

Mr. Couture moved to approve the roster for the economic development district; second by Mr. Hall. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: The term of service is three years. Ms. Jones asked if the person from Deep River has been on for a long time; Ms. Beckman replied no, this is a new committee, and that they were recommended by the Middlesex Chamber, and has been involved. She was also chosen because of the industry she represents. Ms. Jones stated that she supports the person chosen for Deep River. Mr. Gold explained that this is the next step to be recognized as a federal EDD, which makes us eligible for more grants.

d. Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) Public Comment

The Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP) draft will post shortly and will be open for public comment. The projects in the draft are implementation grant ready. There will be two public hearings in early February, we will send out materials shortly.

e. Building Search Committee

The lease on the RiverCOG office expires at the end of July 2024. Mr. Gold believes the landlord will ask for a rent increase as we haven't had one for 7 years and some substantial heating and cooling upgrades were recently made. Staff are considering looking for a building to purchase. It was decided that the executive committee will serve, along with RiverCOG staff, as the building search committee and that a realtor should be engaged, possibly Leslie Strauss.

f. Regional Agricultural Council Update

The no-till grant has expired, CT RC&D are taking over and designing a new equipment hub for the region. When this program is complete, the COG board will have to approve what happens with the equipment, since the COG owns it. There are some new RAC representatives, they may be contacting the CEOs with questions. The RAC will be creating a database of PA 490, who has right to farm, and who has agriculture in their POCD.

g. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

The LCRLT held their annual meeting at the end of December. Tom Worthley gave a presentation on the state of regional forests. The LCRLT is applying for a US Forest Service grant to create forest management plans, they will find out in April if the application was successful. An anonymous \$50 donation was made in December. They will also apply for a technical assistance grant by March 1 to update the regional conservation plan; they will ask the COG for a letter of support in February. The small grant stewardship program recently paid for tree work in the town of Essex.

h. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Ms. Burns has submitted the grant application which passed preliminary review by DEMHS. All towns but Old Saybrook and Westbrook are participating.

Ms. Burns gave a hydrilla update at this time. Applications are in to DEEP, and if approved there will be public meetings in early May. Public outreach by the Army Corps will occur, they would like to get the marina owners together as well.

6. Chairman's and Executive Director's Reports

Chairman Salvatore noted that this will be Mr. Kilduff's last meeting as he is leaving Clinton for Weston; he wished him well and stated it's been a pleasure serving with him.

Mr. Gold gave the financial report – at the end of December there was 1.8 million in the STIF account and \$28,542 in the checking account.

7. Other Business

Mr. Severance, representative for the Citizens Emergency Response Team (CERT), stated he met with DEEP and the statewide citizens corps council to request a budget increase from the feds for training and equipment for emergency response teams.

8. Adjournment

Mr. Curley moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:01 am; second by Ms. Jones. Vote was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti