



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 28, 2024 – 9:00 am

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Cindy Lignar *
Clinton: Abby Piersall *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Carol Doak-Jones *
Durham: Brendan Rea *
East Haddam: Irene Haines *
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Norm Needleman
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:

Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Kathryn Russell, Deep River
Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office
TJ Magnoli, Eversource
Alison Dvorak, Senior Resources
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor
Melissa Evans, UCONN T2 Program
Kevin Tedesco, CT DOT
Laurie McElwee, The Kennedy Collective

Staff Present:

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

RiverCOG

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.

2. Public Speaking

Julia McGrath of Congressman Courtney's office stated that the house is back in session today and they are hoping to avoid a shutdown by Friday at midnight. There are two pending community funding requests that would impact this COG, the River Rd. project in Essex and the Roger Tory Peterson's habitat restoration and riparian buffer zone project. The projects are not cut, but are pending until a budget is passed. The 2023 assistance to fire fighters grant closes on March 8; the Congressman is happy to provide letters of support. The PRO Housing applications are still pending. The affordable connectivity program is under threat of losing funding, it's slated to run out of funding mid-April. This could affect households in the region enrolled in this program. If people call towns about this, they can be referred to Rep. Courtney's office.

Ellen Graham of Senator Blumenthal's office stated that the senate will start its congressionally directed spending (earmark) program for FY25. Veterans exposed to toxins will automatically be enrolled in VA healthcare and will not have to apply, starting in March.

Erin McBride of Senator Murphy's office added that if you have a project in for FY24, there should be updates coming about them shortly.

Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor, reminded all that for early voting, the staffing requirement is for 1 mandatory trained moderator that is not the registrar (same as a regular election), and it's recommended that they have 2 assistants, 1 from each political party. During early voting, curbside voting and the accessible voting machine equipment will still be utilized. A country registrar is holding an information session this coming weekend at Deep River's library. She has been in touch with state officials about changing the moderator terminology for early voting, as the person running the voting room doesn't have the same training as a regular moderator, and that the moderator positions should be half day. Now, moderators work from about 4:45 am to 9:00 pm or later, and many are elderly.

Ms. Conklin was asked about the 75' rule for early voting, she believes it does not apply but she will check on that.

Mr. Gold noted that last year a bill for funding the Regional Election Advisor position was passed for \$25,000/year from the Secretary of State's office. The COG has still not received the funding, and when he was in touch with the SOS, she was unaware that there was a MOU that needed to be signed by March 1.

There were questions about curbside voting. When voting officials need to go out for curbside, a town clerk can come in and help as a moderator, but registrars cannot. The SOS's office is attempting to put out information for public education on their website.

Alison Dvorak of Senior Resources, which is an agency on aging that serves all towns, stated that they manage funding, offer services such as medicare outreach, caregiver support programs, dementia programs, funding transportation, meals on wheels, nutrition information, fraud abuse prevention, and more.

Laurie McElwee, Regional Mobility Manager, stated that she is on the board of Senior Resources and that they are a great partner and are good to speak with town staff about their services.

3. **Presentation – Melissa Evans, UCONN T2 Program, Safety Circuit Rider**

Ms. Evans discussed the program and what they can offer towns by way of services and equipment. Her presentation can be found [here](#).

4. **LCRVMPO Business**

a. **Approval of Minutes of January 24, 2024 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Regular Meeting**

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the January 24, 2024 regular meeting; second by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. **FY 21 TIP Amendment 33**

- i. East Haddam, 0040-0148, STPR, X6, Replace bridge 02698 over brook on RT 149, FD, \$760,000, 80/20/0, Increase fed from \$200,000 to \$608,000

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 33; second by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimously approved.

c. **25 Draft TIP Update and Schedule**

The 25-28 draft will be available for public comment March 15 through April 15. There will be a public information meeting March 22 and/or March 27, which will piggy back with the COG/MPO meeting. The TIP should be endorsed in the April or May meeting as it is due to CT DOT June 7.

d. **Other Transportation**

The solicitation for 5310 applications is out (elderly and disabled transportation). It is due April 2 to the COGs, and applications will be prioritized at a COG meeting.

The active transportation microgrant program, for \$5,000 or less will roll out March 1. Mr. Haramut will send guidance to eligible entities. There is no prioritization for this program.

VHB will give a presentation in March on the loop trail study.

Chairman Salvatore noted that Cromwell, Portland, Middletown, and East Hampton met with CT DOT about the light removal on Route 9. Mr. Haramut noted there were also two public meetings and will be another in April. There is concern about changing the traffic pattern.

e. **Update From Estuary Transit District**

Mr. Geraghty reported that they are expanding service to nights and Sundays and are looking to hire drivers. Small tweaks are being made in some routes. They have funding to do 3 more pilot projects starting in June, they will be in Madison/Guilford, East Hampton, and Middletown. In

late summer they will be part of an open-far pilot program, which will enable riders to pay with debit cards. In March, the message screens will be installed in buses.

5. LCRVCOG Business

a. Household Hazardous Waste Interlocal Agreement (motion)

Mr. Cox moved to approve the household hazardous waste interlocal agreement, seconded by Mr. Lahm. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Approval of the Priority Climate Action Plan (motion)

Ms. Lignar moved to endorse the Priority Climate Action Plan; second by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimously approved.

i. Grant Application for Solar (motion)

Mr. Cox moved to endorse pursuit of the multi-COG grant application for solar, second by Mr. Irish. Voted unanimously in favor.

c. Authorization to Enter into Agreement with Secretary of State for Regional Election Advisor Funding (motion)

Mr. Hall moved to approve the Executive Director entering into agreement with the Secretary of State's office for Regional Election Advisor funding. Second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

d. Employee Handbook Proposed Changes

The Executive Committee reviewed the proposed changes, which were then shared with the full board. Mr. Gold is still investigating some issues with Medicare and insurance, so this version is not ready for approval yet. He asked for comments from the board.

e. Regional Agricultural Council Update

The no-till equipment has been moved to RC&D's equipment hub. This is a three-year program, and at its end, RAC will review what happens next with the equipment. They are working with towns that are updating zoning regulations for items such as farm markets, farm stands, and farm stores.

f. SSKP Annual Report

Nine towns in the region are part of the Shoreline Soup Kitchens & Pantries. Their 2023 annual report was sent to the board and Ms. Ehle/Meyer reviewed it. The number of people accessing their services is up 40% from their pre-Covid numbers. They are looking for help from everyone, including municipalities. Thank you for helping them obtain their new refrigerated truck.

g. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

The LCRLT still has an open board position if any CEO would like to join it.

i. **RiverCOG Letter of Support for National Park Service Grant Application (motion)**

The application is for technical support to help facilitate meetings to update the regional conservation plan. There are 3 other committed parties already.

Mr. Irish moved to approve the letter of support, Mr. Cox seconded. Vote was unanimously approved.

h. **DEMHS Reminder/Update**

Ms. Beckman reported for Nicole Velardis that since they were unable to reach quorum for the February meeting, everyone should be sending someone to attend in their place or a proxy letter if they are not able to attend. Ms. Beckman and Ms. Ehle/Meyer can also serve as proxies if needed. EMDs are required to take an annual oath; please make sure that yours does so. EMPG applications for FY 20 – 23 are due at the end of March, if they are not received, your town is ineligible to receive money. The REPT is revising its bylaws, please send suggestions to Ms. Velardis. A regional disaster mental health support committee is being created, if you have someone to put on that committee please let Ms. Velardis know. There will be a regional workshop on creating migrant response plans toward the end of April. The 2024 emergency management symposium will take place April 23 in Niantic, registration is now open.

6. **Chairman’s & Executive Director’s Reports**

Mr. Gold gave the financial report: The STIF account has \$1,835,587 and the checking account holds \$61,631 as of the end of January. He reported that regarding the EDD application, DECD says the required letter of support is still with the Governor’s office and they haven’t heard anything about it. It’s been over six months, Mr. Gold will reach out to the Lt. Governor to see if she has any information. Mr. Gold reviewed some of the bills from the current legislative session; the bill tracker will be sent out to the CEOs.

7. **Other Business**

Kevin Tedesco of CT DOT stated that the transportation alternative program will be live for solicitations on Friday. The COG will do outreach, all are encouraged to apply.

Ms. Briggs posted about MCRC grants in the chat; this information will be emailed to CEOs.

8. **Adjournment**

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:23. Seconded by Mr. Fortuna; vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti