



# 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

March 27, 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: 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:

Julia McGrath & McKenna, Congressman Courtney's Office  
Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office  
TJ Magnoli, Eversource  
Alison Dvorak, Senior Resources  
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor  
Taylor Funk, Civic Lift  
Evan Dobos, Civic Lift  
Grayson Wright, CT DOT  
Phil Goff, VHB

#### Staff Present:

Sam Gold, Eliza LoPresti, Robert Haramut, Kevin Armstrong, Susie Beckman, Margot Burns,  
Megan Jouflas, Janice Ehle/Meyer, Marcos Gonzalez, Paula Fernald, Lori Kolar

# RiverCOG

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 RiverCOG office.

2. **Public Speaking**

Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor, reported that the first day of early voting went smoothly, but leading up to it there were challenges and many changes from the state. They sent the final instructions only on Sunday. There is a live Zoom available all day for registrars to ask questions of the Secretary of State's office. On April 4 there is a call to get feedback while the legislative session is still active.

Mr. Gold noted that he reached out to the SOS office regarding funding for the Regional Election Advisor position, as they were supposed to give each COG \$25,000. No MOU was received from that office yet, so he asked the legislature to amend the existing bill so as not to require a MOU by March 1 in order to receive funding.

Erin McBride of Senator Murphy's office stated there will be a webinar on April 15 for COGs and CEOs with the National Endowment for CT Humanities and Arts. The deadline for the earmark applications is April 14.

Julia McGrath of Congressman Courtney's office stated that the budget has arrived, so there is not a shut down looming. They won't get guidance on the congressional earmark program until after the fiscal year passes, which could be after the senate closes theirs. DEEP is allowing eligible challenges to the BEAD program through mapping. Local governments are considered challengers. There is a new Active Transportation grant program, MPOs and local governments can apply. There is a deadline of June 17, with a webinar on April 9.

Mr. Gold noted that the senate earmarks have to be applied for through DOT and need to be on the STIP. He asked if the congressional earmarks will be the same. Ms. McGrath didn't yet know but in the past the projects needed to get placed on the STIP after they were accepted.

3. **Presentation – Central CT Loop Trail Study, VHB, Phil Goff**

Mr. Goff gave an update on the study project, which is now about one-third of the way through. The presentation can be viewed at 20:30: <https://youtu.be/EW-QrQVBQgl>

4. **Presentation – Civic Lift, Taylor Funk & Evan Dobos**

Mr. Dobos presented the software, which web crawls and find events, aggregating them in one spot. The presentation can viewed at 38:38: <https://youtu.be/EW-QrQVBQgl>

5. **LCRVMPO Business**

a. **Approval of Minutes of February 28, 2024 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Regular Meeting**

*Mr. Couture moved to approve the minutes of the February 28, 2024 regular meeting; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

b. **FY 21 TIP Amendment 34**

- i. Middletown, 0082-0327, STPA, X6, Install pedestrian bridge over RT 9, PD, 2024, \$581,000, 80/20/0, New project

- ii. Middletown, 0082-0327, STPA, X6, Install pedestrian bridge over RT 9, ROW, FYI, \$100,000, 80/20/0, New project
- iii. Middletown, 0082-0327, STPA, X6, Install pedestrian bridge over RT 9, FD, FYI, \$3,753,000, 80/20/0, New project
- iv. Middletown, 0082-0327, STPA, X6, Install pedestrian bridge over RT 9, AC Entry, CON, FYI, \$0, 80/20/0, New project
- v. Middletown, 0082-0327, STPA, X6, Install pedestrian bridge over RT 9, AC Conv., CON, FYI, \$34,983,000. 80/20/0, New project

*Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 34, sections i. through v.; second by Ms. Lignar. Vote was unanimously approved.*

- vi. Middletown, 0082-0328, STPA, X6, Expand truck parking area at rest area I-91 NB, CON, 2024, \$2,760,000, 80/20/0, New project

*Ms. Haines moved to approve TIP Amendment 34, section vi.; second by Mr. Hall. Vote was unanimously approved.*

- vii. Westbrook, 0154-0130, TAPNH, X6, Sidewalk improvements along RT 1, PD, 2024, \$200,000, 80/0/20, New project
- viii. Westbrook, 0154-0130, TAPNH, X6, Sidewalk improvements along RT 1, ROW, FYI, \$100,000, 80/0/20, New project
- ix. Westbrook, 0154-0130, TAPNH, X6, Sidewalk improvements along RT 1, FD, FYI, \$200,000, 80/0/20, New project
- x. Westbrook, 0154-0130, TAPNH, X6, Sidewalk improvements along RT 1, CON, FYI, \$1,480,000, 80/0/20, New project

*Mr. Hall moved to approve TIP Amendment 34, sections vii. Through x; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimously approved.*

**c. 25 Draft TIP Presentation**

Mr. Haramut's presentation can be found [here](#). The draft 2025-2028 TIP is open for public comment until April 15. This board will be asked about approval at the April MPO meeting.

**d. Other Transportation – Active Transportation Micro Grants, FTA Sect. 5310, Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program, Municipal Grant Program (MGP)**

There were two active transportation micro grant submissions; one from Camp Ingersoll YMCA and one from Cromwell PD. These will be submitted to CT DOT; there is no prioritization, they are first come, first serve.

The FTA 5310 applications are due April 10. This year they have opened both the traditional (capitol) and non-traditional (operating) applications for lift equip vehicles.

TAP applications are due May 10. We will likely receive a project this year because the Hartford TMA didn't in the last round.

The mini grant program is typically coordinated by River Valley Transit, which is the entity for most of the towns. These are due May 15.

e. **Update From Estuary Transit District**

Mr. Comerford stated that fixed route service expansion will occur May 28, along with the start of two of their three microgrant routes and the annual park connect service to Hammonasset with the new trolley. This STIP included funding for Saturday service from Old Saybrook to Middletown through FY 25 or 26. The pilot open fare technology program will begin in September. This is a 6 month program in which RVT is the pilot for the whole state. Riders will be able to pay directly with a card, without a ticket, and will be able to transfer for free within two hours. RVT is starting another pilot program for CDL driver training. Mr. Comerford mentioned he is watching PA-2240 because it holds their funding flat after this year. Following this, there was a discussion on costs and logistics for purchasing mandated electric buses.

6. **LCRVCOG Business**

a. **Authorization to Join WestCOG's Grant Application & Possible State Grant Partnerships (motion)**

The grant applications are for CPRG implementation and are due April 1. The WestCOG application is for climate-friendly model land use regulations and model policies and standards and to work with municipalities to adopt technical support.

*Ms. Haines moved to approve joining WestCOG's grant application; seconded by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

The state is looking for a letter of support for their application; we could be a subrecipient of the funding. The project includes four applications for a medium and heavy duty zero-emissions vehicle incentive program; replacing diesel powered construction truck attenuators in state vehicles; expanding the state's program to remove health and safety barriers for weatherization; and for food waste diversion programs.

*Ms. Haines moved to approve a letter of support for the state's grant application; second by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

*Discussion: Mr. Cox asked Ms. Jouflas if she is ok with all of this work. She answered that it depends on whether the grant is won, but we do have staff to help. Mr. Gold noted that we are not the primary applicant on these grants, but statewide applications are*

*more competitive. Ms. Jouflas noted that CRCOG has additional staff and will request funding from the state as well.*

**b. Appointment of New Gateway Member, Clayton Penniman (motion)**

*Ms. Lignar moved to approve the appointment of Dr. Clayton Penniman as the RiverCOG south representative to the Gateway Commission; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimously approved.*

**c. Economic Development District Update**

Mr. Gold reported that we received a letter of support for our federal EDD application from the Governor after 7 months. The Regional Economic Development Committee has met twice with great participation from the towns.

**d. Household Hazardous Waste Update**

The first HHW collection of the season is coming up on April 20 in Clinton. Ms. Ehle/Meyer and Mr. Gold are in conversation with Blue Earth about a decentralized option for composting. The Middletown council has comments on the HHW interlocal agreement, if there are substantial changes they will be brought to the HHW subcommittee. There is a compost bin and rain barrel sale running until May 5.

**e. Regional Agriculture Council Update**

The RAC is still looking for representatives from Cromwell, Essex, Middlefield, and Old Lyme.

**f. Digital Documentation Update**

The program is set to begin in April with 12 licenses and customization available from Laserfiche. Cromwell, Portland, Middlefield, and Essex have expressed interest and are at the front of the line. Please let Mr. Armstrong know if other towns are interested, the licenses can be used for a single department or for an entire town hall.

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

The annual Melvin Woody Conservation Award was given to Torrance Downes. Ms. Burns read the following into the minutes:

As the most ardent supporter of the Land Trust Exchange (LTE) since its inception and the guiding voice to the transformation and growth of the LCRLT from a conservation tool of the Lower Connecticut River Gateway Conservation Zone to a broader geography that encompasses the 17 communities of the RiverCOG region the annual award is named in Melvin Woody's honor. Melvin has been a member of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission since 1973 and served as its Chair for many years. The

Commission is responsible for protecting over 1,000 acres within the Gateway Conservation Zone and supported many environmental studies and restoration projects.

From the Town of Old Saybrook

Torrance dedicated his career to promoting and protecting the beauty, health and significance of the LCRR through his work with CT DEEP, the Lower Connecticut River Council of Governments (RiverCOG) and other affiliations. His efforts have resulted in the preservation of many acres of open space and will continue to do so through plans and regulations that he has helped to develop. Torrance's many roles have directly benefited Old Saybrook.

Torrance has always made himself available to lend his expertise to his community and has been involved in countless efforts to preserve and enhance the natural and historic qualities of not just Old Saybrook but the greater LCRR. As a long-time resident who raised his family in Old Saybrook, Torrance and the Downes crew have volunteered in many community service projects. We are grateful for his many contributions.

At this time Ms. Burns gave an update on the CT River Hydrilla project. Through Sen. Blumenthal's office, the Army Corps project was funded for 2024. They will do our pilot project this summer and start projects further north in the river. There will be public meetings on May 29<sup>th</sup> at Goodwin University, June 4<sup>th</sup> at Middletown City Hall, and June 27<sup>th</sup> at East Haddam Town Hall.

**h. DEMHS Reminder/Update**

MOAs and resolutions have gone out, please sign them and get them back as soon as possible. Ms. Velardi mentioned that CCM's emergency management symposium will be April 23 in Niantic, there is a migrant response planning workshop on April 25. Please send in proxy letters for REPT meetings. They are meeting to update the bylaws but are having problems making quorum. EPMG grants are due March 31.

**i. Office Space Update**

Mr. Gold reported that the COG's lease is up in July. He is in negotiations with the landlord, who wanted a large rent increase. Staff is looking at other options in the area. Mr. Gold and the executive committee had a discussion and came up with a number they are comfortable spending.

**7. Chairman's & Executive Director's Reports**

Mr. Gold gave the financial report: The STIF account has \$1,794,315 and the checking account holds \$48,897 as of the end of February. He also gave a legislative update, recapping the bills that are out there and testimony that has been given.

**8. Other Business**

None

**9. Adjournment**

*Mr. Hall moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:01. Seconded by Mr. Couture; vote was unanimous in favor.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Eliza LoPresti