



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

April 24, 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
Alison Dvorak, Senior Resources
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor
Kathryn Russell, Deep River
Jane Dunbar, CT DOT
Kevin Tedesco, CT DOT
Laurie McElwee, The Kennedy Collective
Olivia Chetcuti, DEMHS
Breanna Horton, Senator Marx's Office
Senator Martha Marx

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

RiverCOG

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions

Vice Chairman Cox called the meeting to order at 9:02 A.M. The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

2. Public Speaking

Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor, reported that early voting was smooth after being a little painful in the lead-up to it. She thinks next year there could be a shorter voting period proposed (ie 10 days instead of 14). The state has received a grant that will be used to train 40 college students statewide to be moderators and poll workers, to be accessed by registrars. Chester had the highest percentage of turnout of voters for the primary, probably due to also having a referendum at the same time. Middlefield's written early voting procedures have been approved by the state to be shared with other municipalities; these have been sent to registrars already. This year towns will see a lot of movement of registrars, so if your town is looking for new people, please contact Ms. Conklin as she may be able to help you with recruitment.

Erin McBride of Senator Murphy's office stated that the congressionally directed spending program application has closed, they are now going through each one to make sure it is complete, if something is missing you will be contacted directly. Their office is open for passport assistance, if needed. There was an arts and humanities webinar recently that was well-attended. Congress has passed the bipartisan military aid package; the FTC has banned implementation of non-competes, which will affect mostly healthcare workers.

Julia McGrath of Congressman Courtney's office stated that they still have not received community project funding guidance, but it could be coming next week. It is possible that non-profits will not be eligible to apply under the HUD account this year. The two funded FY 24 projects in our region are at the Roger Tory Peterson Center and the town of Essex. CT DEEP is receiving a solar for all grant from the EPA, the funds will likely be available via the Green Bank. There is a funding forum upcoming in ECSU in late May, non-profits, municipalities, agricultural groups, and more will be given tips on applying for federal funding.

Senator Martha Marx stated that the state has stopped appropriations, so any legislation with appropriations is dying a slow death. The democrats have a budget caucus on April 30, so there will be more of an idea then on how much there is to spend. There is 200-300 million in unused ARPA funds, some will be appropriated for non-profits, higher education, and she hopes for municipal aid. Many good bills are being passed, especially those that help veterans.

Representative Haines stated that there has been a slow start in the house, she is hoping a few more bills go through. They are working on putting out a budget that shows that things can be funded as not having an operational budget is not helping the state.

3. Presentation – Senior Resources, Alison Dvorak

Ms. Dvorak gave a presentation on what Senior Resources does and how they can help seniors in our towns with a myriad of things. Her slide deck and contact information can be viewed [here](#).

4. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of March 27, 2024 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Regular Meeting

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the March 27, 2024 regular meeting; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. FY 21 TIP Amendment 35

- i. Clinton, 0027-0131, TAPNH, X6, Sidewalk extension along RT 1, PD, 2024, \$125,000, 80/0/20, New project
- ii. Clinton, 0027-0131, TAPNH, X6, Sidewalk extension along RT 1, ROW, FYI, \$100,000, 80/0/20, New project
- iii. Clinton, 0027-0131, TAPNH, X6, Sidewalk extension along RT 1, FD, FYI, \$125,000, 80/0/20, New project
- iv. Clinton, 0027-0131, TAPNH, X6, Sidewalk extension along RT 1, CON, FYI, \$1,500,000, 80/0/20, New project

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 35, sections i. through iv.; second by Mr. Curley. Vote was unanimously approved.

- v. Meriden/Middletown, 0079-0240, NHPP, CC, Interchange improvements SB and EB to SB at I-91/I-691/RT 15, CON, FYI, \$0, 80/20/0, AC entry, Move from FY 24 to FYI
- vi. Meriden/Middletown, 0079-0240, NHPP, CC, Interchange improvements SB and EB to SB at I-91/I-691/RT 15, CON, 2024, \$-\$6,250,000 80/20/0, AC conv. Delete FY 24 NHPP conv.
- vii. Meriden/Middletown, 0079-0240, NHPP, CC, Interchange improvements SB and EB to SB at I-91/I-691/RT 15, CON, FYI, \$154,000,000 80/20/0, AC conv. Increase estimate from \$118,200,000 fed
- viii. Meriden/Middletown, 0079-0240, STPNH, CC, Interchange improvements SB and EB to SB at I-91/I-691/RT 15, CON, FYI, \$0, 80/20/0, AC entry, Move from FY 24 to FYI

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 35, sections v. through vi.; second by Mr. Curley. Vote was unanimously approved.

- ix. Statewide, 0170-3732,CMAQ, X6, Statewide TDM NY-NJ-CT moderate, OTH, 2024, \$2,615,000, 80/20/0, New project
- x. Statewide, 0170-3731,CMAQ, X6, Statewide TDM Greater CT moderate, OTH, 2024, \$1,672,000, 80/20/0, New project

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 35, sections ix. & x.; second by Ms. Lignar. Vote was unanimously approved.

c. 25 Draft TIP Endorsement

Mr. Haramut noted that since the draft TIP was presented at the last COG meeting, appendix E was updated with the public involvement information up to this point. Greenhouse gas measures were revised in appendix C due to new federal rules that they don't need to be included. They are still in there, but they do not need to be adopted. Additionally, the construction phase of project 82-318, the removal of the lights on Route 9, is included in the tables.

There will be a meeting about the light removal on April 30 at Wesleyan University. There was a discussion on the light removal, with Mr. Curley updating the group that there have been proposed changes by CT DOT that make more sense to the towns involved, including alleviation of some congestion concerns on Main St. and the fact that tractor trailers will go up to Cromwell and a roundabout will be included at the Rt. 99 exit. deKoven drive will be the primary access to the Portland bridge, Rapallo Ave. will become one way, and signage will be included on Route 9 that will identify the quickest route.

Mr. Curley moved to approve the 25 TIP, second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimously approved.

d. February 2024 AQC Determination Endorsement

Mr. Cox moved to endorse the 2024 air quality conformity determination, seconded by Mr. Curley. Vote was unanimously approved.

e. MPO Planning Self Certification Endorsement

Mr. Cox moved to endorse the MPO Planning Self Certification, seconded by Mr. Curley. Vote was unanimously approved.

f. Air Line Trail Study Update

Mr. Haramut updated that VHB released the existing conditions report draft. They are still looking at preferred alignments in the area of the rail corridor in Middletown and by the new development on Newfield St.

g. Safe Streets and Roads for All Update

The agreement has been reached with FHI Studio to begin work. This will basically be an update of the regional transportation safety plan. CRCOG & NVCOG are doing similar updates. The plan should be done within 12 to 18 months.

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

Three projects were submitted in our region. Ms. Fernald will be reaching out to distribute funds. CT DOT may expand the program to include more funding and a broader range of items that a town can apply for. The grant can be applied for twice a year.

i. Update From Estuary Transit District

Mr. Geraghty reported the service expansion will occur May 28, to include some fixed routes in Middletown and the shoreline for Saturday night, Sunday and weeknight service. The new extra mile (on demand) zones will be in East Hampton, Madison, and Guilford. They are actively hiring drivers. There are new outdoor screens at the Middletown terminal and in other places. RVT is working with CT DOT to install new fare validators, which will be tap and ride ready.

The bus shelter program is being launched by CT DOT to provide upgrades to or placement of shelters and/or benches in Portland, Cromwell, Middletown and possible other locations.

5. LCRVCOG Business

a. Appointment of Auditors (motion)

Mr. Cox moved to appoint Henry, Raymond & Thompson as the auditors for FY24; seconded by Mr. Curley. Vote was unanimously approved.

b. Regional Waste Authority Grant Update

Mr. Gold stated that the COG will be receiving a two-year grant of \$627,000 from CT DEEP to do due diligence on a regional waste authority (RWA), including assessing options, and to start operations of a future RWA. The brownfields portion is not funded, but will be up to MIRA to handle. Senator Needleman has asked Mr. Gold to delay signing anything until after the end of the legislative session so he will have time to focus on this as Essex is a major stakeholder by holding the land under the MIRA facility.

i. Authorization for Executive Director to enter into agreement with CT DEEP for the Regional Waste Authority Grant (motion)

Ms. Shoemaker moved to authorize the Executive Director to enter into agreement with CT DEEP for the Regional Waste Authority grant; second by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimously approved.

Discussion: Mr. Fortuna mentioned that the group at the MIRA Dissolution Authority (MDA) is an angry group; a problem we will run into is that they do not want to go another budget cycle with tip stabilization and the RWAs will take at least a year to stand up, putting us well past the date to adopt a budget for the MDA, so it will set up an interesting conflict next year as we move into the budget season for the MDA. There are some other ideas to unload some of their other obligations before then. Chairman Salvatore added that signing of the agreement was endorsed by the executive board.

c. Update on Document Digitization

Mr. Armstrong stated that onboarding is starting for this project. He advised interested towns to choose a department to start with, then put them in contact with him. We will have 10 licenses to distribute. Mr. Armstrong will either hold a zoom meeting or an in-person visit with each participating town. After the COG meeting he will share a checklist of items to do to prepare. Over the next two months we will assess whether the program needs to be expanded. Cromwell and several other towns are interested. Ms. Duques offered to speak with any town about Essex's experience and lessons learned from recently going through this process with another vendor.

d. Update on Legislation

There is not much moving forward yet. Anything with a fiscal note is in a holding pattern. Mr. Gold has been tracking a few troubling bills, such as one that would allow affordable housing development in wetlands; he signed onto a letter with COST opposing this.

e. Household Hazardous Waste Update

The first HHW collection of the season was on April 20 in Clinton. Ms. Ehle/Meyer stated that Middletown is still working on signing the interlocal agreement, which is passing through various committees. The next events are a shredding event on May 4 and a HHW event on May 11, both in East Hampton. There is a compost bin and rain barrel sale going on now, pick up is May 5.

f. Regional Agriculture Council Update

The contract with RC&D about the no-till equipment is still in process. RAC intends to create a regional database. The representative from each town may reach out to the CEO or others in town to figure out the answers to some of the questions that they are looking into. Ms. Ehle/Meyer will send RAC specific info for municipal website. She then asked which towns are holding farmers markets this year.

g. Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Ms. Burns stated that the grants should be announced mid-summer. She is hoping to start the project by the end of the year.

h. Aquatic Invasive Species Program Update

For the hydrilla project an environmental assessment has been posted on the Army Corps website, it is open for public comment until May 4. There will be information meetings about the project at Goodwin University on May 29th, Middletown City Hall on June 4th, and East Haddam Town Hall on June 27th, all at 7:00 pm. Pilot treatment locations include Keeney Cove (Wethersfield), Portland Boat Works, Chapman Pond in East Haddam, Chester Boat Basin, and Selden Cove in Old Lyme. She is now trying to coordinate with Senator Blumenthal's office again to fund the project for next year as well.

i. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

The summer meeting will be held August 15th at 5:30 as a hybrid meeting. Those coming into the office will have dinner. A presentation by Hank Gruner is on the agenda. Mr. Gruner is a herpetologist and retired Director of Programming at the CT Science Center; his talk with center on vernal pool stewardship.

At this time, Ms. Burns and Mr. Gold discussed the initiative of working with the Town of East Haddam and others on preserving the Osaki House at Gillette Castle State Park. There is a potential earmark for rehabbing the building which would make it a space for

community organizations. The LCRLT could potentially be the fiduciary for federal grants for this project, leveraging RiverCOG's experience with this.

Mr. Irish moved to support the Osaki House project, second by Ms. Lignar. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: CT DEEP has an RFI for use of the facilities, Ms. Haines is responding to it on behalf of the town of East Haddam.

j. CT RC&D Update

Ms. Burns reminded everyone that RC&D runs an environmental review team program. Chris Swanson has just been hired as the new energy and environmental program coordinator. The ERT program is a free service to provide inventories and review services for projects you may have in municipalities or on land trust properties.

k. DEMHS Update

Ms. Beckman reminded all that signed MOAs are due by June 30. The bomb squad has offered their services for events happening in the region. Ms. Chetcuti reported that the migrant planning response workshop has been cancelled. Please submit reimbursement for the 2020 EMPG fund by May 31. There is EMPG pool funding available by application prior to May 15, which includes up to \$25,000 for EOC upgrades or \$15,000 for emergency shelter updates. FEMA preparedness grant applications are due June 3 for the national security grant program and June 24 for the port security grant program. The REPT is working on its bylaws, the next meeting will be May 17.

6. Chairman's & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold reported that he is looking at office space in Haddam this afternoon. It is cheaper than what the current landlord is asking for, he is still negotiating the lease at our current office.

The financial report is that as of March 31, we are on budget. Some line items have exceeded budget, but that will be covered by others that are under budget. The STIF account has \$1,831,422 and the checking account has \$52,202.

7. Other Business

Next month's meeting will be virtual; June will be in person, hopefully at Gillette Castle.

8. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:43 am. Seconded by Mr. Curley; vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti