



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

DRAFT MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

January 22, 2025 – 9:00 AM

RiverCOG Members:

Chester: Cindy Lignar *
Clinton: Michelle Benivegna
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: Michael Pelton *
Westbrook: John Hall *

MPO Members:

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce: Darlene Briggs *
Estuary & Middletown Area Transit Districts: Joe Comerford *

*present

Others Present:

Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office
Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
Laurie McElwee, Kennedy Collective
Jen Brady & Christina Mendoza, FHWA
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Nicole Velardi, DEMHS
Joel Severance, CERT

Staff Present:

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

RiverCOG

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:03 AM. The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

Ms. Jones moved to bring item 5d up to be item 5a, second by Jim Irish. The vote was unanimous in favor.

2. Public Speaking

a. Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office

Ms. McBride informed the group that the delegation recently announced \$220 million to New England, Alaska and Hawaii to help small medium sized farmers receive agricultural relief or aid for losses they experienced in 2023 and 2024.

Also, earlier this month, the Social Security Fairness Act was signed into law and Senator Murphy was a co-sponsor of this legislation.

She also informed the group that they passed a continued resolution in December that would keep the government funded until March.

b. Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office

Rep. Courtney is now on the house armed services, education, and workforce committees. He has reintroduced the Long Island Sound restoration and stewardship act, to be funded through 2029. As executive orders are combed through, she will share more information on what that means to the RiverCOG region.

c. Laurie McElwee, Kennedy Collective

Ms. McElwee had the chance to speak at Luther Ridge to help keep them in the loop about transportation options through RVT and other transit providers. If someone in your town could use this information, please reach out to her.

3. Regional Housing Needs Assessment Methodology (motion)

Ms. Jouffas gave a presentation on the RHNA that was created by the Regional Housing Committee which can be viewed [HERE](#).

Mr. Cox moved to endorse the use of the Regional Housing Needs Assessment Methodology for use in the update of the Regional Housing Plan and to inform future conversations around housing. Second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimously approved.

4. Regional Election Advisor

a. MOU with Secretary of the State (motion)

Ms. Haines moved to authorize Mr. Gold to enter into an MOU with the Secretary of the State's Office for \$25,000 to fund the position of Regional Election Advisor; second by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimously approved.

Discussion: Mr. Gold paused contract discussions with Ms. Conklin until he is able to get the state funding, though he authorized her to work on a month-to-month basis because of new regulations.

b. Activities Update

Ms. Conklin has given Mr. Gold an update regarding town concerns regarding FOI requests from the organization Fight Voter Fraud. The state has been notified that many of the requests are being dropped. Towns may hear information from the state if the request was very specific versus some of blanket requests for voter data.

As for why, some are saying the organization is having funding issues, but as per Ms. Conklin, it may be hearsay at this time.

New tabulators are starting to be processed in towns that are state funded and they will be setting up training for their use.

Ms. Conklin is in touch with the newly sworn in registrars in multiple towns and will be working with them.

5. LCRMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of the December 11, 2024, Regular Meeting (motion)

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2024, regular meeting; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimously approved.

b. Approval of Minutes of the December 20, 2024, Special Meeting (motion)

Ms. Jones moved to approve the minutes of the December 20, 2024, Special meeting; second by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimously approved.

c. 25 TIP Amendment 05 (motion)

- i. New Haven UZA, Various, 0170-3742, CRPNH, X6, Detection upgrades at various traffic signals, FD, 2025, \$180,400, 80/20/0, New project
- ii. New Haven UZA, Various, 0170-3742, CRPNH, X6, Detection upgrades at various traffic signals, CON, 2026, \$3,000,000, 80/20/0, New project
- iii. New Haven UZA, Various, 0170-3742, CRPNH, X6, Detection upgrades at various traffic signals, CON, 2027, \$2,310,000, 80/20/0, New project

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 05, items i.– iii. second by Ms. Lingar. Vote was unanimously approved.

d. 2024 Obligated Project List

Mr. Haramut informed the group that 23 CFR 450.334 requires MPOs publish or make available for review an annual listing of projects in which federal funds were obligated the preceding year. The list is consistent with the current categories in the TIP. The spreadsheet was sent out with the agenda and shows all the lists of projects obligated and granted in federal fiscal year 2024.

6. Electronic STIP (ESTIP)

Mr. Haramut explained that DOT is moving to an electronic cloud-based process using a California based company called Eco Interactive Solutions. It is a project tracking module used by about half the country. This will ideally cut down on the back and forth with spreadsheets.

7. Transportation Rural Improvement Program (TRIP)

As per Mr. Haramut, this is state program. Last fall, project solicitations were sent to eligible towns. Mr. Haramut followed up and so far, there are two interested towns. He reminded the group they must be submitted to DOT by February 7th. Unlike most of the federal projects, these will not be ranked by the MPO board as they have in the past. They will be going to DOT and will be ranked at a statewide level.

8. Active Transportation Microgrant Program

Mr. Haramut explained that last year this was a state pilot program for active transportation grants of \$5000 or less. It was just recently increased for this calendar year from \$500,000 to \$750,000. Applications will continue to be accepted on a quarterly basis and forwarded to DOT at the end of each quarter.

9. Other Transportation

Mr. Haramut shared information on the below additional transportation updates:

Loop Trail

Mr. Haramut informed the group that he hoped to have the Loop Trail draft report out for review soon.

SS4A

For SS4A, they are in the process of finalizing a safety analysis, a mapping tool takeaways and public meeting summaries. This information will be posted on the project website.

UPWP

The 2026-2027 UPWP is currently under development. He hopes to have this for endorsement in April by the MPO board.

Mr. Gold added that he is talking to Laura Francis at South Central Region about the potential of a Raise grant or for the implementation of the Central Connecticut Loop Trail study, which is wrapping up. This would mean potentially two or three MPO projects along this corridor.

Mr. Salvatore added that he attended a meeting in Middletown with Mr. Wright of DOT and noted that the state is moving along with traffic light removals. The goal is to reduce the number of crashes at two intersections.

10. Estuary Transit District Update

Mr. Geraghty provided an update on the Tap and Ride program which was launched in October. They have also completed a process for seniors and riders for disabilities to now access a 50% off discount.

There are plans for 4 bus shelters in key locations Middletown.

They will be installing bus stop signs across the region. They will be getting submissions from installation contractors to review.

Service expansion is going well, and they are seeing good ridership on the weeknights, Saturday nights and Sundays. They are also seeing good ridership on the XtraMile program.

Two electric buses will be going on the road relatively soon.

6. LCRVCOG Business

a. FY26 RiverCOG Dues (motion)

Mr. Gold informed the group that the Executive Committee met last week to discuss four different dues proposals, a 0% increase, 1% increase, a 2% increase and a 3% increase. The proposal that was endorsed by the Executive Committee was a 2% increase. The total increase across the 17 municipalities is \$4522 for total dues amount of \$230,596. He explained that in the memo, the suggested motion is to approve RiverCOG's fiscal year 2026 dues and a base payment of \$6660.45. Then a per capita increment of 66.6 cents using the Connecticut Department of Health 2023 population estimates.

Ms. Jones moved to adopt the 2% increase in dues. Seconded by Ms. Haines. The vote was unanimously approved.

b. 2025 Household Hazardous Waste Program Dues (motion)

Ms. Ehlemeyer has been working on the 2025 hazardous waste and paper shredding events. There are 7 hazardous waste events, and four paper shredding events held on Saturdays in the same locations as last year. They will be continuing to use MXI as a vendor for one more year. At the end of this season, she will be sending out RFPs to explore options.

Regarding budget, there are 2 parts. There is the operation and management part and the dues assessment. The Executive committee was presented with this budget, and there is now a recommendation from them to hopefully pass a motion on this new budget for fiscal year 2026.

Ms. Jones made a motion to accept the total Household Hazardous Waste budget of \$196,010.00; seconded by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimously approved.

c. Aquatic Invasive Plant Removal Project Dues (motion)

In 2023 RiverCOG received the aquatic invasive species grant from Connecticut DEEP. RiverCOG has requested an extension that would effectively make the 2 year grant a 4 year grant. In addition, they have requested an adjustment to the gas money line item.

In discussion with the Executive Committee, they felt that \$150.00 due for each town would be appropriate, which equates to a total budget of \$712.00 in fiscal year 2026.

Mr. Cox made a motion to accept Ms. Burns's recommendation of a \$150.00 assessment for fiscal year 2026. Seconded by Ms. Haines. The vote was unanimously approved.

Ms. Burns also shared that the 50/50 cost share program through the Army Corps for Hydrilla mitigation has been approved.

She is also working on the water chestnut program and hopes to have funding for that this year.

d. GIS Digital Parcel Project

As per Mr. Armstrong Office of Policy and Management has put forth to all the COGS a grant program for parcel and CAMA data improvements. They are providing money to RiverCOG to do work for OPM to town systems. Ultimately that does require the town's involvement even though RiverCOG is not allowed to give money directly to the towns from the federal funds. Mr. Armstrong will be focusing on Middletown, Killingworth, East Hampton, Haddam, and Durham where there is CAMA information, but no parcel information. He will be working with the town's existing GIS vendors and closely with assessors, so they are aware of any possible changes. The towns that are in the camera group, meaning that work with the assessors needs to be done more directly, are Old Lyme, Haddam, Westbrook, Deep River, and Durham. The funds are good until the end of the calendar year 2025.

e. Legislative Update (view the legislation tracker [HERE](#))

Mr. Gold shared the bill tracker spreadsheet with the group which is being updated and maintained by Ms. Beckman and Ms. LoPresti. The link leads to a list of public hearing dates which are hyperlinked and the status of whether those bills have passed or moved on to the House or Senate.

f. Regional Waste Authority Study RFP

Ms. Ehlemeyer briefed the group on the study to look at waste and recycling that the region does and finding alternate solutions that would save money and working with the difficulties of the MIRA transfer station closing, forming either a regional waste authority, joining another one or finding a different solution that would work for the region, working with our consultant, RRS Resource Recycling Services and working on the contract with them. She hopes to start the study in February.

g. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Ms. Burns reported that they have received proposals for the grant and have a committee together to interview for the proposals and have the city planner from Middletown and town planners from Portland and East Haddam. Mr. Gold, Ms. LoPresti, and Ms. Burns of RiverCOG are on this Committee. The proposals are good for 120 days; however the grant has not been received yet.

7. DEMHS Update

Ms. Beckman reported to the Executive Committee last week that the Region 2 Representative and the regional emergency planning team have voted to go with another fiduciary agent. After the end of the 2023 grant year, which will conclude in 2026, RiverCOG will no longer be a fiduciary agent for DEMHS Region 2.

8. Chairman's and Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold gave RiverCOG's financial report. As of December 31st, 2024, the Council completed six months of fiscal year 2025 and overall spending is within the parameters of the adopted \$3.3 million budget. Items that are running high are dues subscriptions, professional development seminars, conferences and the travel budget, but any overtures will be covered by other items running under. As of the end of the year, the STIFF account totaled 1.8 million and the Liberty checking account was 182,580.00. The checking account balance is running high, as DEEP gave an advance on the Regional Waste of \$40,000.00 of \$125,000.00 and the balance of the checking account is as of the end of the year was \$183,000.

9. Other Business

Ms. Haines added that there was a press conference up in Hartford with the Republicans and that hopefully solutions will be included in the Democrat's bill. She hopes that as of next month, things will be a lot more concrete as far as the actual wording of bills. The deadline to get anything in as a legislator is over, but the committees and the leadership are putting things together.

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10. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:57 a.m. Seconded by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Rolison

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