



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

April 26, 2023 – 9:00 am

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Charlene Janecek
Clinton: Karl Kilduff *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Angus McDonald *
Durham: George Eames
East Haddam: Irene Haines
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Carey Duques
Haddam: Bob McGarry *
Killingworth: Nancy Gorski *
Lyme: David Lahm *
Middlefield: Jim Irish * & Bob Yamartino *
Middletown: Ben Florsheim *
Old Lyme: Tim Griswold *
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, Rep. Courtney's Office
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor
Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Carl Zimmerman, CT Office of GIS
Lenore Grunko, Deep River
Representative Christine Palm
R. Vizard

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Eliza LoPresti
Robert Haramut
Kevin Armstrong

RiverCOG

Megan Jouflas
Brendan Geraghty
Janice Ehle/Meyer
Paula Fernald
Susie Beckman
Torrance Downes

1. **Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions**

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

Mr. Cox moved to add an agenda item and make it 5)j: EPA Air Quality Grant Endorsement. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

2. **Public Speaking**

Carol Conklin - Regional Election Monitor: Ms. Conklin stated that the registrars attended a training recently. Many are prepping for municipal referendums. There will be a moderator training class in May. Early voting is not projected to be implemented for this fall, the target time frame is now August of 2024. Instead of calling sites where early voting will take place polling sites, they will legally be called voting locations in order to get rid of strict standards surrounding polling sites. Right now it's looking like there will be 10-day voting and three people will be needed each day; one of each party and a moderator. There was discussion on the fact that extending absentee voting would be more cost-effective for all involved. All are asked to call representatives to emphasize the 10-day bill, as other bills include 14 days of voting.

Julia McGrath – Rep. Courtney’s Office: Ms. McGrath stated that community project funding has been announced for this year; two projects in the RiverCOG region were chosen. One is for the Roger Tory Peterson nature center in Old Lyme for the riparian border along the Lieutenant River and the other is sidewalk connections in the town of Essex. Grants such as the clean school bus and protect discretionary grants are currently open for applications.

Erin McBride – Senator Murphy’s Office: Ms. McBride discussed the community projects (earmarks) from their office, which are still being worked on. The projects will be posted on Sen. Murphy’s website in late May or early June. Appropriations will need to fund the projects in the summer, and Congress will need to sign them into law, so it’s anticipated that money will be received in early 2024. Sen. Murphy is hosting farm bill round tables and will be looking to build events in the RiverCOG region this summer.

Representative Christine Palm asked that anyone email her regarding bills of concern, she can find out from committee chairs where they are in the legislative process. She emphasized that they need to hear from municipalities on bills that affect them. She also mentioned a presentation she created that is about 20 minutes long, explaining the civic engagement process, that is available to CEOs.

3. **Presentation – State Strategic Geospatial Plan – Carl Zimmerman**

Mr. Zimmerman asked for municipalities’ help in filling out a survey about how to use GIS data. This is a new initiative, statutorily driven. He is leading a tech working group on this topic. They are

looking at concerns about critical issues such as climate change. A 5-year strategic plan will be created.

Mr. Gold asked about the status of the statewide parcel layer. Mr. Zimmerman stated that they are first updating all the parcel and CAMA data, and working to improve the process so there is more consistent data. A survey of the towns will not be included in the statewide layer project. Mr. Gold pointed out that this could be problematic because the boundaries between towns don't all match up when each town does its own and everything is done piecemeal.

4. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of March 29, 2023 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meeting

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the March 29, 2023 special meeting; second by Mr. Lahm. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. TRIP Screening & Prioritization: Haddam Center Sidewalks, Lyme Mitchell Hill Improvements (motion)

Mr. Haramut reported that applications were received from Haddam and Lyme. Our region is able to submit two applications; CT DOT will be accepting thirty throughout the state. This is a pilot program which the state intends to make permanent after three years. About \$500,000 per project will be available.

In the statewide screen criteria of the applications, Haddam was ranked first, then Lyme. Mr. McGarry and Mr. Lahm discussed their projects with the group. The Lyme project is work on Mitchell Hill Rd., which is considered to be dangerous; two cars cannot pass on the road, and there is a steep drop off on one side. The Haddam project is sidewalk work through the center of Haddam.

Mr. McDonald moved to approve the prioritization of the projects, in the order of Haddam then Lyme, and forward the list to CT DOT. Second by Mr. Hall. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. Draft FY24 & 25 UPWP

The UPWP is a work plan for all the COG's transportation projects from 7/1/23 to 6/30/25. The draft will go to the state and to the federal government. There will be a thirty-day public comment period, then we will be requesting adoption at the May COG meeting.

d. Other Transportation Updates (ALT-FCT Study, Future Corridor Studies, etc.)

The chosen consultant for the Air Line Trail connector study was met with. We are awaiting the project authorization letter from CT DOT to proceed.

A request was put into CT DOT to find out when the next round of corridor studies will be solicited. There are currently two towns interested.

e. Update from Estuary Transit District

Mr. Geraghty stated that the transit district is now operating as River Valley Transit. There are a series of proposed route changes, a lot of outreach has been and is being currently done. There is an online form on the website for anyone that would like to chime in. Some of the planned bus terminal upgrades are bogged down by supply chain issues, but have been moving forward. They put in an application for a statewide microtransit grant. This is for on-demand services in Middletown, Madison, Guilford, and East Hampton. Mr. Geraghty requested a letter of support from the COG for the grant.

Mr. Fortuna moved to create a letter of support for ETD's grant application; second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. FY 2023 Auditor Appointment (motion)

RiverCOG went out to bid for a new auditing firm. Two RFP responses were received. One was from our current firm and the other was from a new firm that was twice the price. The Executive Committee has seen the information and is recommending that we stay with the current firm of Henry, Raymond, and Thompson.

Mr. Fortuna moved, with Mr. Cox's second, to appoint Henry, Raymond & Thompson, LLC as RiverCOG's auditor for Fiscal Year 2023, and the subsequent two to three years. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Aquatic Invasive Species Program Update – Boat Purchase (motion)

RiverCOG has been awarded a \$63,700 grant from CT DEEP to implement an aquatic invasive species program. Of that, \$23,000 has been allocated for purchase of a boat and equipment for the boat. Ms. Burns has been doing extensive outreach and research and has located a boat in Indiana. RiverCOG has already put down a \$500 deposit to secure the boat.

Mr. Fortuna moved to authorize the agreement with CT DEEP for the \$63,700 aquatic invasive species grant program and to purchase the jon boat and equipment in an amount not to exceed \$23,000. Second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Mr. Gold stated that if anyone has a place to dock or store the boat, mid-region, please let us know.

c. Lower Connecticut River Land Trust Update

The land trust is discussing the idea of taking conservation easements. Right now if a local land trust goes under, the land they hold could revert to towns. LCRLT would like to act as a backup to that process by holding land easements as needed. There will be a

future meeting with RiverCOG and the land trust representative to further explore the idea.

d. Update on CEDS

Ms. Jouflas reported about 70 comments were received and dealt with for the draft CEDS. All materials are up on the website now, to be found at www.rivercog.org/plans/ceds/documents.

Mr. Cox moved to adopt the CEDS and authorize that it be sent to CT OPM and DECD. Second by Mr. Irish; vote was unanimous in favor.

e. Household Hazardous Waste Update

Ms. Ehle-Meyer reported that the first collection was held in Clinton. It was up about 26% from last year's Clinton collection.

Residents are now being asked to bring batteries to the electronic bins/sheds at the town transfer stations rather than the HHW collections, as this is no additional cost to the towns. There have been recent fire issues due to lithium batteries. For safety, those batteries should be taped. We will be providing educational resources on the HHW page of our website shortly.

CT DEEP should be responding soon to the regional waste authority grant application. They plan to contact applicants with questions.

Deep River has been doing food composting. Mr. McDonald reported that they are off to a good start and have reduced their tonnage out of the transfer station by about 25 tons. That includes more than the estimated 7 tons/month of food scraps, so maybe folks are paying more attention to what is in their garbage. Right now the program is voluntary but there are 65-70% participating.

f. Regional Agricultural Council Update

Ms. Ehle-Meyer reported that three new farmers are applying to use the no-till equipment. The new trailer has arrived, it is now being fitted for side rails and the decking is being waterproofed.

CT RC&D has applied for a Dept of Agriculture grant to open four equipment hubs in the state. The RiverCOG grant for the no-till equipment will expire at the end of October, so we are looking at RC&D's program to continue the use of the equipment.

Through the DECD grant, farmers have been working with Healthy PlanEat. Twenty-eight farmers have been contacted to join. The contractor has been working with SEO and

digital marketing specialists and has added new pick-up sites in Deep River and Killingworth. Two new farms have joined so we now have farms in Middlefield, Deep River, and maybe Killingworth, participating.

There is a compost bin and rain barrel sale happening now, pick up will be this weekend.

g. Update on Regional Housing Plan and Committee

The first meeting of the RHC will be May 16. There has already been a lot of interest from other COGs and housing organizations about this.

One of the recommendations of the housing plan was to do a TOD study. To that end, RiverCOG, in partnership with Old Saybrook, Westbrook, and Middletown, have been awarded a Thriving Communities grant to do one. We will be provided with technical assistance for creating the plan over the next two years.

h. DEMHS Update

Mr. Downes reported that the oldest grant will be expiring on June 15th. Region 2 will have spent it down to \$0.35 at that point. A new grant will replace this one in October, budgeting for that will start soon. There will soon be a Region 2 field day, details to come.

i. Legislative Update

Mr. Gold discussed his testimony on SB 1240, an act concerning the mill rate for commercial and industrial real property, implementing a municipal tax revenue sharing program, and establishing tax credit.

There was discussion on implementation of early voting. RiverCOG will create a letter from all the CEOs expressing concerns such as recorded in Mr. Gold's earlier testimony on bills about early voting. Towns are concerned about their Registrars leaving, and the ability to maintain necessary staff levels for the extra time. There are also logistic concerns about where voting would actually take place and how that would work within schools. The general consensus was that RiverCOG will draft the letter, which will be signed by all and sent to area legislators.

j. EPA Air Quality Grant Endorsement

The EPA is giving the three metropolitan statistical areas in CT \$1 million each to do air quality planning. We are included in the Hartford project, which is also part of the \$3 million going to DEEP for the same thing. There is concern about duplication of work, but within the three MSAs they are planning to work in an efficient way together. The goal is to come up with projects that will win implementation funding. Mr. Gold asked for endorsement for the Hartford MSA application.

Mr. Cox moved, and Mr. Lahm seconded, to support the application for the air quality plan. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Middlesex County is part of this MSA. Lyme and Old Lyme are not, but we can add them as additional towns. In the letter it will be clear that all our 17 towns are part of the project.

5. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold reported on the finances; spending is currently within parameters of the adopted budget. He previously talked to the executive committee about going over the salary line item because Mr. Downes has stayed in his position longer than expected. Repairs and maintenance will be over budget too, because of heating and cooling system failure, which is now fixed. This will all be covered by other items being under budget, so overall we are fine.

6. Other Business

None.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:40 am; seconded by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti