



# Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

145 Dennison Road Essex, CT 06426 | +1 860 581 8554 | [www.rivercog.org](http://www.rivercog.org)

## Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments And Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

### DRAFT MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

November 20, 2024 – 9:00 am

#### RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Pat Bandzes \*  
Clinton: Michelle Benivegna \*  
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore \*  
Deep River: Carol 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, Congressman Courtney's Office  
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor  
Grayson Wright, CT DOT  
Ellen Graham Senator Blumenthal's Office  
Jen Eichenberg, CT Rides  
Laurie McElwee, The Kennedy Collective  
Michael Ahillen, Hannah Brockhaus, FHI Studio  
Kathryn Russell, Deep River

#### Staff Present:

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

# 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.

*Ms. Haines moved to add the 2025 COG & MPO Meeting Dates to the agenda as item 3g. Second by Mr. Lahm; vote was unanimous in favor.*

2. **Public Speaking**

**Erin McBride of Senator Murphy's office** was not present, but Mr. Gold read her briefing. This included the deadline of Dec. 20<sup>th</sup> for the federal government to fund themselves and avoid a shutdown and operate on a continuing resolution. Spending packages may or may not be funded. The assistance to firefighters grant application closes Dec. 20<sup>th</sup>. CT will receive \$77.8 dollars from the low income energy assistance program, the CT Port Authority will receive \$5.3 million to acquire a mobile shore power unit.

**Ellen Graham of Senator Blumenthal's office** added that they are focused on confirming judges and waiting for the continuing resolution to fund the government.

**Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor**, stated that the election went smoothly with early voting taking the brunt of the crowd. The state is surveying registrars on early voting by Nov. 30 to help inform legislation. Haddam, Killingworth, Clinton & Middletown were selected for random state auditing to see how well the machinery performed against the official voter list.

*Ms. Jones moved to bring item 4a Regional Election Advisor Contract, up to be item 2a; second by Mr. Lahm. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

- a. **Regional Election Advisor Contract – Authorization to enter into a new two-year contract:** Ms. Conklin's contract is up. The State should be funding the position through RPIP at \$25,000/year. We never received that funding mostly because an MOU never came through the Secretary of State's office. Mr. Gold would like to negotiate a contract with Ms. Conklin and then use that to pressure the SOS office for a scope of work, so that scope can be part of the contract. We have been funding her position through the Regional Services grant and we would continue to do so if we don't receive the funding by March 1.

*Ms. Haines moved that Mr. Gold is authorized to negotiate the Regional Election Advisor contract, use it as leverage to obtain funding from the state, then bring it back to the Council; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

*Discussion: Mr. Fortuna asked that the REA and Mr. Gold refresh the board with a job description and to get an idea of hours worked for fair compensation. Mr. Gold stated that he receives a monthly report from the REA, and as the funding goes up the oversight will be commensurate with that additional funding. Also, there is the assumption that with more funding comes more responsibility. Ms. Conklin noted that the no-excuse absentee ballots could add to her work next year, but that will depend on what happens during the legislative session. There could be more work due to registrar change-over and the state voter database upgrade rollout, so there is quite a bit more work coming forward. Mr. Gold noted that if we get the state money, the funding will effectively double; he will work with Ms. Conklin on what oversight of that will look like. Mr. Salvatore suggested that as Mr. Gold works with Ms. Conklin he can address some of Mr. Fortuna's questions.*

**Laurie McElwee, Mobility Manager**, attended the ageing CT symposium – Joe Comerford and she were spotlighted for what they do for transportation and the services that other regions don't have.

**Julia McGrath of Congressman Courtney's Office** stated that congress' goal for this session is to work on the farm bill. She will be checking in on pending grants early next year because of the administration transition.

### 3. LCRVMPO Business

#### a. Approval of Minutes of October 23, 2024 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Regular Meeting

*Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the October 23, 2024 regular meeting; second by Mr. Couture.*

*Discussion: Ms. Rolison sent out a revised version of minutes earlier this morning. Chairman Salvatore was present during the meeting, the minutes will be amended to reflect this.*

#### b. Michael Ahillen, FHI SS4A presentation 33:54

Mr. Ahillen gave a presentation on the Safe Streets and Roads for All comprehensive safety plan. Presentation can be found [here](#).

#### c. 25 TIP Amendment 03 (motions)

##### i. Various, Various, 0170-WCPP22-23, WCPP, X6, Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program Grant, ALL, 2025, \$460,000, 80/0/20, New project

*Mr. Cox moved to approve 25 TIP Amendment 03. Second by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimous in favor after discussion.*

*Discussion: Mr. Cox noted that the amendment numbers don't match up with the budget description in the grant. He asked if it should represent the state at \$20,000 and the local share at \$77,000. Mr. Haramut will go back and take a look to make sure it's correct before it's sent out. The numbers were not exactly matched up. This information can be found on page 13 of the grant. Mr. Haramut believes it was not included in the state side because it is less than 1% so it was just written out at 80/20 match. Mr. Cox requested that whatever is correct should be in the grant as we should not acknowledge more on the local end than we should.*

#### d. 2025 Safety Targets (motion)

*Mr. Cox moved to accept the resolution for 2025 Safety Targets and authorize the Secretary to sign said resolution. Second by Mr. Curley. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

#### e. Other Transportation (Central CT Loop Trail, TRIP, etc.)

Public meetings for the SS4A project will occur in December. The CCTLT public meeting is tonight in Middletown. The TRIP NOFO is out and applications are open, please send them to Mr. Haramut by January 31; unlike last year the applications will not be prioritized by the COG. The project to remove lights on Rt. 9 will be setting up individual town meetings shortly.

**f. Update from Estuary Transit District**

Mr. Geraghty reported that the tap & ride program has been successful (debit/credit card readers on the busses). The Middletown holiday trolley route will open after Thanksgiving. Bus shelters are being installed in four locations in Middletown. There is a RFP being worked on for moving RVT from a flag stop system to actually having bus stops across the region.

**g. Draft Meeting Dates for 2025 (motion)**

*Ms. Haines moved to approve the 2025 meeting dates, second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimously approved.*

**4. LCRVCOG Business**

**a. Regional Election Advisor Contract:** This item was discussed earlier in the agenda.

**b. Legislative Agenda Draft**

The draft agenda was discussed. Mr. Gold asked for comments, additions, and subtractions so there can be a final draft ready for December 2<sup>nd</sup> in preparation for the December 11<sup>th</sup> legislative meeting.

**c. Regional Waste Authority Study RFP**

Seven responses have been received, three or four will be selected for interviews on December 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. DEEP commissioner would like to meet with the CEOs to discuss waste issues.

**d. HHW Update**

340,935 pounds of waste were collected at this year's collections, this represents an increase of 21% over the 2023 season. However, there was a decrease in 2022, so this averages out to about a 7% increase each year. Ms. Ehle/Meyer is organizing paper shredding events for next year, she discussed a possible hard drive collection at one of the events, the CEOs did not seem interested.

**e. Shoreline Basic Needs Task Force Update**

Dates for meal schedules and food pantries were distributed. Ms. Ehle/Meyer highlighted the 211, 988 phone systems.

**f. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update**

We should be getting the final documents to move forward with the grant at the end of the year. The RFP has been done, we just need to decide the best time to send that out. Mr. Armstrong is putting together a map of past projects to help facilitate future conversations.

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

The second meeting for the update of the conservation plan is happening tomorrow. Dr. Ben Sperry from the Army Corps will present at the annual meeting on December 19<sup>th</sup>.

**h. Aquatic Invasive Species Update**

Ms. Burns asked if we can extend the grant for two more seasons, this should not be a problem. There is money for fuel left in the budget, which could potentially be used to pay for the dock and boat needs. We are looking for a site to bring the pulled hydrilla, Ms. Burns has been using her back yard for 20-30 pickup truck loads worth.

**i. CGS Section 8-3j Municipal Compliance Report to OPM**

OPM was in touch to report on towns that are not compliant with the zoning text change regarding home day cares. The town that are listed as non-compliant are Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Hampton, Lyme, Middlefield, Middletown, Old Lyme.

**5. DEMHS Update**

Ms. Beckman reiterated that the COG requested an additional \$5,000 for fiduciary services; this was denied by REPT leadership. They are seeking a new fiduciary agent and she has been directed not to do any further work on the upcoming grant. There should be a report in December as to where they are in finding a new fiduciary. Ms. Beckman has been able to catch up on some of the deliverables in the meantime. Mr. Gold reported that Attorney Mednick is looking at the MOA process and whether it could be a longer-term agreement instead of yearly, town-by-town, as MOAs from years ago are still being collected on grants that are already spent.

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

Mr. Gold reported that spending is within budget parameters; the STIP account holds \$1.9 million, the checking account \$61,469.

Mr. Gold asked the members on Executive Committee to let him know if they are willing to serve another year; if not we need a nominating committee. Elections will be held in January.

**7. Other Business**

Next COG Meeting December 11, 2024 – legislative meeting, 12:00 in Cromwell.

**8. Adjournment**

*Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:35 am. Seconded by Ms. Jones; vote was unanimous in favor.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Eliza LoPresti