



# Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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## Regional Planning Committee

### LOWER Connecticut River VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

Monday, March 24, 2025

7:00 p.m.

#### Members:

Chester	Carlie Dailey
Clinton	Lawrence Edwards *
	Eddie Alberino *
Cromwell	Nick Demetriades*
	Anthony LaCava*
Deep River	Daniel Smith*
Durham	Frank DeFelice*
East Haddam	Crary Brownell
	Debbie Langdon*
East Hampton	Michael Kowalczyk*
Essex	Carey Duques
	Thomas Pinkowish*
Haddam	Raul deBrigard*
Killingworth	Alec Martin
	Stephanie Warren*
Lyme	Mary Stone*
Middlefield	Paul Pizzo
Middletown	Beth Emery*
	Nathaniel Spencer
Old Lyme	Harold Thompson*
	Howard Margules*
Old Saybrook	Douglas McCracken*
	Michael Bender *
Portland	Chantal Foster*
	Bob Ellsworth
Westbrook	Bill Neale*
	Marie Farrell

\*Members Present

#### Staff Present:

Sam Gold  
Susie Beckman  
Megan Jouflas  
Elizabeth Rolison  
Kevin Armstrong  
Marcos Gonzalez

## RiverRPC

**Others Present:**

Laurie McElwee, Regional Mobility Manager – The Kennedy Collective

Anna Savastano, Community Relations Specialist - Eversource

**1. Call to Order**

Chairman DeFelice called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm. The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

**2. Roll Call** – Elizabeth Rolison called the roll call.**3. Seating of Alternates**

Stephanie Warren (Killingworth), and Debbie Langdon (East Haddam)

**4. Adoption of Agenda**

*Mr. McCracken moved to adopt the agenda; second by Mr. Edwards. The vote was unanimous in favor.*

**5. Public Comment****Anna Savsatano, Eversource**

Ms. Savsatano introduced herself as she is the new Community Relations Specialist with Eversource. She works out of the Madison area work center covering Branford to Old Saybrook as well as Essex, Deep River, Chester, and Middletown. She stated that she is available to the group for questions regarding Eversource and is looking forward to working with everyone.

**Laurie McElwee, The Kennedy Collective**

Ms. McElwee introduced herself as the South-Central Regional Mobility manager at the Kennedy Collective and shared her contact information in the chat.

**6. Approval of Minutes of Past Meetings**

*Mr. Neale moved to approve the minutes of the February 24, 2025, meeting; second by Mr. Alberino. Mr. McCracken and Ms. Langdon abstained. The vote was unanimous in favor.*

**7. Referrals**

Chairman DeFelice asked the Committee to please check referrals regularly. Mr. Gonzales (RiverCOG) gave a brief overview of referrals noting that they are cataloged and updated so that they are more streamlined across all folders. He reported that seven referrals had been processed recently, coming from Wallingford (two), Durham, Middletown (two), Deep River, Clinton, and Old Saybrook. Mr. Gonzales noted that no significant intermunicipal impacts were identified in any of the referrals.

To view current referrals: <https://www.rivercog.org/regionalservices/referrals/>

**8. Legislative Update**

Mr. Gold (RiverCOG) shared the Bill Tracker Document link and provided an overview of key legislative developments from Hartford.

**RiverRPC**

[View Bill Tracker Here](#)

**a. S.B. No. 12 – Connecticut Housing Act:**

- Initially introduced without any language, making the public hearing process highly controversial.
- Now includes provisions such as:
  - Working group to study barriers to starter home construction (report due in less than a year).
  - School building grant increases tied to meeting affordable housing thresholds.
  - State bond financing for affordable housing projects generating construction jobs.
  - Tenant rights provisions, requiring towns with 25,000+ residents to establish fair rent commissions.
  - By-right commercial conversions to residential properties, a topic of concern.
  - Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) pilot program to assist individuals with student debt in securing housing.
  - Increase in rental assistance vouchers for elderly, disabled, and Head Start program.

RiverCOG submitted testimony, suggesting zoning requirements to enforce plan objectives.

**b. H.B. No. 6944 – Affordable Housing Plans:**

- Requires municipalities with larger grand lists to prioritize affordable housing development.
- Mandates that plans must demonstrate a "reasonable opportunity" to build affordable housing.
- Legal ambiguity exists—some fear courts may require towns to subsidize housing.

RiverCOG has submitted testimony and opposes this due to its litigation risks for municipalities.

**c. H.B. No. 6960 – Public Infrastructure Grant Program:**

- Proposes funding for water, sewer, and road infrastructure in areas with deed-restricted affordable housing.

RiverCOG supports this and has submitted testimony.

**d. S.B. No. 1313 - Transit-Oriented Development & Density Bills:**

- Several bills aim to increase density near transit hubs (e.g., 15 units per acre within a ½ mile of transit stations).
- Concerns raised that these provisions:
  - Lack requirements for transit accessibility.
  - Remove leverage from municipalities to ensure developers align projects with transit-oriented goals.

RiverCOG submitted testimony opposing this bill due to unintended urban planning consequences.

**e. H.B. No. 7032 - A Program to assist Municipalities in developing preapproved building plans**

Mr. Gold stated that he thought this bill was generally fine but noted that most homebuyers are not likely to hire an architect, but it could potentially save the developer some money if they can use these.

- f. **H.B. No. 7148 – Concerning Residential and Mixed-Use Developments in Commercial Zone, S.B. No. 1444 – Concerning the Conversion of Commercial Real Property for Residential Use, H.B. No. No. 7063 – The Conversion of Vacant Motels into Multi-Family Housing**
- RiverCOG opposes the above, citing concerns such as
    - These bills would allow all commercial properties statewide to be redeveloped into residential units by right.
    - Incompatible zoning (e.g., housing next to heavy industry or entertainment venues).
    - Flood risks in certain areas.
    - Public safety concerns, particularly in areas with hazardous materials.
    - Many motels in Connecticut serve as emergency housing.
    - Rapid conversion policies could displace vulnerable populations.
- g. **H.B. No. 5365 – Affordable Housing Appeals Exemptions:**
- Proposes exemptions for municipalities in control protection areas
- h. **H.B. 6831 – Concerning Transit Oriented Communities**
- New "Work, Live, Ride" Transit-Oriented Bill
  - Provides financial incentives to municipalities adopting TOD policies.
  - Shifts significant oversight responsibilities to OPM (Office of Policy and Management).

RiverCOG advocates for using the Municipal Redevelopment Authority to ensure effective implementation.

- i. **H.B. No. 6831 - Airbnb & Short-Term Rental Taxation:**
- Proposes a registry for short-term rental properties and a 2.75% optional local tax.
  - Revenue from this tax would fund municipal affordable housing initiatives.

RiverCOG supports this measure, noting its potential to curb housing market distortions caused by Airbnb conversions.

#### Discussion:

Mr. Gold noted that there is strong political momentum behind housing-related bills this session.

Mr. deBrigard inquired about H.B. No. 1631, which was passed out of committee without amendments despite significant public comment. Mr. Gold responded that this was expected due to strong support from housing advocacy groups like Open Communities Alliance.

Mr. Gold confirmed that RiverCOG will continue monitoring these legislative developments and encouraged municipal leaders to engage with the bills, as public hearings are still ongoing.

#### 9. Miscellaneous: State, Regional and/or Local Planning Issues

Mr. Gold provided a comprehensive overview of the Fair Share Housing Study, initiated under a public act passed two years ago. The Office of Policy and Management (OPM) engaged Eco Northwest, a West Coast-based consulting firm experienced in housing plans, to conduct the study. Mr. Gold expressed concerns regarding the transparency of the study process, though

noted that regional councils, including RiverCOG, CCM, and COST, were eventually invited to participate in discussions.

Ms. Jouflas presented her insights on the draft housing needs assessment released in January by OPM. She explained the three proposed models used by Eco Northwest to determine the housing unit needs for the current state population, without projecting future growth.

- Baseline Model:
  - Reproduces the Open Communities Alliance model.
  - Focuses on severely cost-burdened households spending over 50% of their income on housing and at < 30% AMI.
  - Determined RiverCOG required 5,655 units and the state needed 136,246 units.
- Alternative Models (2):
  - Ms. Jouflas noted the consultants employed alternative models to provide comparative perspectives.
  - These models were not explicitly prescribed in the statute but offer valuable insights.

Ms. Jouflas also raised concerns regarding the discrepancies between the methodology applied in Connecticut versus other states like Oregon, where Eco Northwest has previously worked. The expectation is that once the study becomes public, further questions will emerge.

The meeting concluded with a consensus on the need for clearer communication from the consultants and further regional discussions to ensure fair representation of housing needs.

## 10. Adjournment

*A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Alberino; second by Ms. Langdon. The vote was unanimous in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.*

Minutes recorded by Elizabeth Rolison