



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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Regional Planning Committee

LOWER Connecticut River VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

Draft Minutes

Monday, June 23, 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
Megan Jouflas
Elizabeth Rolison
Marcos Gonzalez
Eliza LoPresti
Susie Beckman

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1. Call to Order

Chair Frank DeFelice called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and welcomed all participants. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom.

2. Roll Call

Ms. Rolison conducted a roll call.

3. Seating of Alternates

Daniel Smith for Deep River and Debbie Langdon for East Haddam were seated.

4. Adoption of Agenda

Chair DeFelice requested a motion to adopt the agenda with the addition of two items:

- **7a.** Drive-through zoning referral from the Town of Durham
- **8iii.** Planning Related Bills

MOTION: A motion to adopt the agenda as amended was made by Bill Neale; seconded by Doug McCracken.

VOTE: The motion was unanimously approved.

5. Public Comment

Chair DeFelice opened the floor for public comment. No members of the public chose to speak.

6. Approval of Minutes of the Past Meeting

MOTION: Mr. Neale moved to approve the minutes of the April 28, 2025, Meeting; seconded by Ms. Emery. There was no discussion.

VOTE: The motion was unanimously approved.

7. Referrals

Mr. Gonzales provided an update on new referrals:

- **#162 Old Lyme:** Text amendment to remove retail dealer station as a permitted use in Zone C-30. Mr. Gonzales reported that their findings revealed no adverse intermunicipal impacts.
- **#163 Old Lyme:** Special permit activities in the 8-mile Watershed Overlay; a new permitting standard was proposed for the Zoning Commission to consider when reviewing applications for a special permit within the 8-mile watershed overlay district, and it considered whether or not the adjustment improved or enhanced the protections of the 8 Mile Water district. RiverCOG found that was positive and found that there were no adverse inter municipal impacts.
- **#164 Clinton:** Repeal of floating zones – found beneficial and without intermunicipal impact.

- **#165 Portland:** Text amendments to clarify definitions and regulations related to basements, stories, and landscape buffering – no intermunicipal impact.
- **#166 Salem:** Proposed increase in excavation limits from 5 to 7 acres – found no intermunicipal impact but noted 7 acres was larger than typical regional limits.

Additional Updates:

Mr. Martin reported that Killingworth had passed zoning changes to allow active adult communities with up to five units per acre, a significant departure from its traditional two-acre zoning. Ms. Warren noted that 40% of such developments must be preserved as open space.

Referral Submission Process Update:

Ms. Rolison described recent changes to the RiverCOG referral submission system. Improvements include:

- Email acknowledgment and a public folder created for each referral.
- Referral tracking through Laserfiche with clear status updates.
- A simplified tracking system on the RiverCOG website launching in July.

8. Legislative Update

i. HB No. 5002 – Fair Share Housing and Zoning Reform

Mr. Gold announced the Governor’s veto of HB 5002 earlier that day. He expressed gratitude to committee members for their advocacy and engagement throughout the bill’s progression. Gold described the bill as containing some good ideas, but rushed and lacking transparency—particularly regarding the fair share housing methodology, which was developed without public input.

Gold noted the possibility of a special session in the fall, where a revised bill may be introduced through emergency certification, bypassing public hearings. Gold encouraged members to share input with their legislators. He pointed out that while some bill concepts—such as improved parking regulation—have merit, they require refinement. For example, cities with pre-car infrastructure face different parking challenges than most suburban towns, and regulations should reflect those differences through objective, flexible standards.

The fair share housing provisions were a central concern. Gold criticized the lack of transparency and public involvement in the underlying housing needs study and stressed that future legislation must follow a more open and iterative process. He also expressed concerns about the bill’s one-time allowance for COGs to submit alternate housing numbers, which he called unclear and unsustainable.

Ms. Joufflas agreed, highlighting RiverCOG’s prior housing needs assessment as a valuable tool in shaping conversations with COST and CCM. She noted that COGs had already begun work on an alternative proposal and plan to continue this effort to help guide any future legislation.

Multiple members weighed in:

- **Ms. Stone (Lyme)** voiced strong opposition to the bill, stating it would be disastrous for small towns without available land or infrastructure. She condemned the threat of eminent domain and emphasized the bill’s unfunded mandates.
- **Mr. Neale (Westbrook)** supported the need for proper funding and a neutral arbiter to ensure municipalities aren’t left on their own to interpret and meet complex mandates.

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- **Ms. Langdon (East Haddam)** warned that the bill’s impacts would mirror New Jersey’s fair share housing law, where municipalities were forced to take drastic actions, including seizing private farmland. She stressed vigilance, noting that East Haddam already experienced similar pressures in a local case involving Black Birch Golf & Country Club.
- **Mr. Demetriades (Cromwell)** shared that his Planning and Zoning Commission sent a formal letter to the Governor urging the veto. He emphasized that the bill ignored local infrastructure limitations and that affordable housing policy should be built through regional collaboration, not top-down mandates.
- **Mr. Martin (Killingworth)** asked for clarification on the veto override process. Mr. Gold and Susie Beckman explained it would require a two-thirds majority in both legislative chambers, which is currently unlikely.
- **Mr. Pinkowish (Essex)** suggested inviting legislative sponsors of the bill to future Planning Committee meetings to directly observe the effort and complexity involved in municipal housing planning.

Mr. Gold concluded by affirming that COG staff across the state are aligned on common principles—such as statewide housing needs targets around 35,000–40,000 units—and are working together to propose a framework that respects local control, while also aligning with state goals.

ii. Public Act 25-33 (SB-9)

Ms. Beckman has reviewed **Public Act 25-33 (SB-9)** and presented a summary:

- The law allows one or more towns to enter into interlocal agreements to designate:
 - Sending sites – areas identified for open space preservation.
 - Receiving sites – areas eligible for increased housing density.
- Eligibility criteria for receiving sites include:
 - Connection to a public water system.
 - Location within ½ mile of public transportation.
 - Not located in core forests, flood zones, or areas impacted by sea level rise.

Beckman noted that due to these constraints—especially access to public water and transit—many areas in the region may not qualify as receiving sites. Additionally, no funding is currently attached to incentivize towns to become receiving sites.

Questions & Comments:

- Chair DeFelice asked if any benefits, such as funding, were available to receiving towns. Beckman confirmed that no direct incentives were outlined in the law.
- Ms. Langdon described the approach as an “offset” system, likening it to trading development rights. She raised concerns about the broadening definition of public transportation and its implications, particularly in rural towns like East Haddam where transit is intermittent. Langdon cautioned that being classified as transit-accessible—even with infrequent bus service—could trigger unintended zoning and funding eligibility pressures.
- Beckman acknowledged the concern and referenced state statute Section 13b-79kk as the source of the formal definition of a public transportation facility but had not yet reviewed it in depth.
- Members appreciated the concept of intermunicipal cooperation but raised concerns about the restrictive eligibility criteria, lack of funding, and vague definitions. Staff will continue to monitor implementation and its potential impact on local planning and zoning efforts.

iii. Planning-Related Bills

[Discussion on this was integrated within the HB 5002 conversation.]

9. Other RiverCOG Project Updates

Mr. Gold provided brief updates on several ongoing regional projects:

- **Airline Trail & Farmington Canal Trail Study:** The study has been completed and printed reports are ready to be distributed to participating municipalities and stakeholders. RiverCOG is also coordinating with the City of Middletown, which has secured funding for the next project phase.
- **Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A):** The regional highway and transportation action plan continues to progress, with upcoming public engagement opportunities. Members will be notified of those events.
- **Regional Waste Authority Study:** The study has entered the data collection phase. Consultants are conducting interviews with municipal officials to gather detailed information on local solid waste and recycling systems.
- **Department of Housing Technical Assistance Grant**
Megan Jouffas of RiverCOG shared that the agency received a Department of Housing Technical Assistance grant to develop educational programming for local officials. This will include:
 - **A training program for land use commissioners**, which will count toward required training hours. The program will cover fundamentals of housing planning, housing needs assessments, and strategies for engaging the public in challenging conversations.
 - **Development of digital content**, including educational videos and myth-busting materials related to housing density. These will be made available on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram for public and municipal use.

10. Miscellaneous: State, Regional, and Local Planning Issues

Ms. Langdon reported that Eversource is conducting transmission line upgrades in East Haddam and Haddam. The Connecticut River Gateway Commission used this as an opportunity to request reconsideration of underground cable options, citing modern, safer technology. Eversource has declined to share cost estimates ahead of their Siting Council submission, prompting the Gateway to seek municipal support for requiring a full application and public review. While Lyme responded with questions, Senator Needleman expressed concerns over potential surcharges. Langdon's cost analysis suggested minimal consumer impact, but she has received no response from the Rules Committee, which is now handling the issue.

Mr. Neale shared positive public feedback on affordable housing during an outreach event in Old Saybrook. He also noted that the DEP asked Westbrook to resubmit its application for outlet apartments and expects progress this summer. Westbrook is beginning a new 10-year POCD, along with updates to its affordable housing, coastal resiliency, and hazard mitigation plans.

Langdon added that East Haddam is working with a consultant on a revised Moodus master plan, with draft proposals expected later this year.

Chair DeFelice highlighted shared flooding concerns in Durham and Middlefield due to the clogged Coginchaug River, suggesting DEEP action is needed and encouraging collaboration as towns update mitigation plans.

11. Adjournment

MOTION: With no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Neale; seconded by Mr. Demetriades. There was no discussion.

VOTE: The motion was unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:28pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Rolison