**Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments**

**and Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization**

**DRAFT MINUTES OF SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

Tuesday, July 15, 2025, 9:00AM

**Members Present:** Anthony Salvatore (Chairman), David Cox (Vice Chairman), Robert McGarry (Secretary), Carl Fortuna (Treasurer), Irene Haines (At-Large), Eric Couture (At-Large)

**RiverCOG Staff Present:** Samuel Gold, Margot Burns, Elizabeth Rolison

## **1. Call to Order**

Chair Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:01AM

## **2. Approval of Minutes from June 17, 2025, Regular Meeting & June 23, 2025, Special Meeting**

Chairman Salvatore asked whether members preferred to approve the June 17, 2025, Regular and June 23, 2025, Special meeting minutes together or separately. Members agreed to vote on both as a single motion.

***MOTION****: Mr. Cox made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 17, 2025, Regular Meeting and June 23, 2025, Special Meeting.*

***SECOND*** *Mr. Fortuna seconded the motion.****VOTE****: The motion was unanimously approved.*

**3. Regional Election Advisor Funding**

Mr. Gold reported news that the Secretary of the State executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) signed a funding agreement with RiverCOG.

* RiverCOG will receive $25,000 in support of Carol Conklin’s position as Regional Election Advisor.
* The actual contract value with Ms. Conklin is less than the award, and Mr. Gold intends to meet with her later in July to develop a spending plan for the remaining funds.
* This plan may include regional training opportunities and support for municipal election officials, coordinated with existing local and state registrar organizations.
* The funding must be expended by June 30, 2026.
* A follow-up letter of thanks to the Secretary of the State is planned, recognizing the prompt action following RiverCOG’s advocacy.

It was clarified that while RiverCOG has not yet received the check, the funding is secured and pending OPM’s disbursement timeline.

**4. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) and Herbicide Use Update**

Mr. Gold and Ms. Burns provided a detailed update regarding the controversy surrounding the Army Corps of Engineers’ Hydrilla management project on the Connecticut River:

* The Army Corps issued a public notice of environmental assessment changes, adding 12 new treatment sites. The notice listed herbicides to be used, including Diquat, sparking public backlash.
* A social media campaign led by Norwalk-based rapper Chris Webby spread misinformation, leading to public confusion, a small protest, and a petition with 20,000 signatures.
* The Army Corps received numerous complaints, including a death threat to the project manager, which was investigated and since addressed by the FBI.
* Senator Blumenthal’s office has expressed interest in hosting a press event. RiverCOG has requested that it not take place at active treatment sites.
* Ms. Burns emphasized that all herbicides are EPA and CT DEEP approved, and their application follows strict safety protocols. The use of Diquat is targeted and context specific.
* Despite the controversy, prominent environmental groups such as Rivers Alliance of CT support the project as necessary and appropriately regulated.

**Discussion:**

* Ms. Haines shared that Rep. Devin Carney may organize a public information session contingent on participation from the Army Corps and DEEP. RiverCOG staff may attend if appropriate.
* Mr. Gold and Mr. Cox reminded the committee that while RiverCOG has supported the project through public information efforts, the initiative is federally led and not a RiverCOG operation.
* Mr. Cox emphasized that since some of the new herbicide treatment sites are in inland lakes under municipal oversight, local governments must be prepared to address resident concerns.

**Consensus:**  
The committee supported continuing to monitor the issue and briefing the full board at the next RiverCOG meeting but agreed to take a wait-and-see approach before making a formal policy statement.

**5. Other Business**

**A. Upcoming COG Agenda Items**

Mr. Gold and Ms. Rolison highlighted the following items for the July 23rd RiverCOG meeting:

* **MOU for Eversource Community Partnership Initiative (CPI):** Mr. Gonzalez has drafted an MOU where RiverCOG acts as a central contact for participating towns. The document will be distributed separately for review.
* **State Comptroller Visit:** The Comptroller will join the meeting via Zoom to address the board.
* **Transit District Update:** Joe Comerford (ETD) seeks to enter a five-year contract for Brendan Geraghty’s services to protect grant funding. The agreement includes a 90-day termination clause.
* **TIP Amendments:** Mr. Haramut is preparing standard TIP (Transportation Improvement Program) amendments for review.

### **6.** **RiverCOG Personnel Issue**

The consensus of the group is that an Executive Session was not required at today's meeting.

Mr. Gold reported on the pending departure of Finance Administrator Paula Fernald whose last day is July 25, 2025.

* Two highly qualified candidates have been interviewed: one via the Robert Half agency and another currently employed elsewhere.
* Both have significant financial experience; one is familiar with federal systems, and the other has strong nonprofit and for-profit credentials.
* The hiring decision is expected by the end of the week, and efforts are being made to ensure overlap with Paula.
* Ms. Fernald is finalizing fiscal year-end closeout, and Ms. Figueredo (Financial Assistant) is now independently managing payroll and check processing.
* The annual audit will take place in October instead of August, providing time for onboarding.

Mr. Gold noted that the Northwest Hills COG had recently hired Deep River’s finance person—only for Deep River to then hire Ms. Fernald—demonstrating the statewide staffing challenges.

### 7. **Adjournment**

***MOTION:*** *Ms. Haines made a motion to adjourn the meeting.****SECOND:*** *Mr. McGarry seconded the motion.****VOTE:*** *The motion was unanimously approved.*

The meeting adjourned at 9:46 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Rolison