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Chester, Clinton, Cromwell,
Deep River, Durham, East Haddam,
East Hampton, Essex, Haddam,
Killingworth, Lyme, Middlefield,
Middletown, Old Lyme,
Old Saybrook, Portland, Westbrook

LOWER CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

APPROVED MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Monday, July 25, 2016

7:00 p.m.

Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments Conference Room
145 Dennison Road

Members:

Chester: Vacancy
Clinton: Alan Kravitz
Jack Scherban *
Cromwell: Alice Kelly
Enzo Faienza
Deep River: Bruce Edgerton *
Durham: Frank DeFelice *
Joe Pasquale
East Haddam: Crary Brownell
Lou Salicrup
East Hampton: Meg Wright *
Michael Kowalczyk *
Essex: Alan Kerr *
Haddam: Stasia DeMichele
Raul deBrigard
Killingworth: Stephanie Warren *
Alec Martin *
Lyme: Vacancy
Middlefield: Robert Johnson
Middletown: Beth Emery *
Vacancy
Old Lyme: Harold Thompson
Old Saybrook: Kenneth Soudan *
Karen Jo Marcolini
Portland: Vacancy
Westbrook: Bill Neale *
Marie Farrell

* Members Present

Staff Present:

Sam Gold, AICP
Judy Snyder
Torrance Downes
Nate Hougrand
Jon Curtis

1. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL / SEATING OF ALTERNATES

Chairman DeFelice called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. The members introduced themselves and attendance was taken. Clinton alternate Jack Scherban was seated for Alan Kravitz. Sam Gold introduced Jon Curtis, RiverCOG's new planner, to the RPC.

2. AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA / APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Upon motion of Bill Neale, seconded by Alan Kerr, it was unanimously voted to approve the agenda.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Frank DeFelice asked if anyone from the public wished to speak. There was no one at this time.

4. APPROVAL OF MAY 23, 2016 MINUTES

Upon motion of Beth Emery, seconded by Stephanie Warren, it was voted to approve the minutes of the May 23rd, 2016 meeting.

Bruce Edgerton abstained from voting.

5. REFERRAL

There were no referrals at this time.

6. DISCUSSION OF REGIONAL POCD, HOUSING

Sam Gold stated that the housing chapter of the plan will be one of the most important sections. Housing links every other section together. People need housing to stay in the region, then jobs, transportation and businesses can develop.

Nate Hougrand discussed the housing section and that data from the American Census Survey (ACS) was used throughout this section. He spoke about the decreasing and aging population of Connecticut. Younger people are not staying in the state. They are moving to areas of the country where housing and the cost of living is less expensive. The state requires that 10% of a town's housing should have affordable housing units. In our region Middletown is the only town

that is above that threshold. He discussed the difference between affordable housing and obtainable housing.

The State of Connecticut Title 8-30g regulations for affordable housing in the towns is, sets the maximum housing cost to what is affordable to someone making 70% of the local median income. In the Lower Connecticut River Valley Region, “affordable housing” may unobtainable to most, particularly young people.

Bill Neale said that this State is in a crisis situation in the housing market with many houses in foreclosure.

Sam Gold said accessory apartments are sometimes a good alternative. Frank DeFelice asked how many towns have regulations that prohibit accessory apartments in separate buildings on one lot. Torrance Downes stated that towns are concerned with two dwellings on the same lot. Mr. Gold explained that granny pods could be used in some areas. These pods can be purchased or leased and are set up for the handicapped and medical needs person, however the pods need to be approved by the town’s building code and regulations. Bruce Edgerton stated that in some towns the permit needs to be renewed every five years. Beth Emery was interested how the Americans with Disability Act responds to the affordable housing restrictions. Middletown has struggled with the sober group housing issue and there is no easy answer.

Frank DeFelice suggested two corrections for this section, to keep all the decimal placements the same and the word percent be changed to % for this section. Bruce Edgerton suggested that the “\$” (dollar sign) be incorporated into the text instead of the word “dollar”.

Ken Soudan stated that today’s young people look at housing totally different than was the case 30 years ago. Most do not want to begin in a starter house and work up. They want to begin at the top leading to more foreclosures. Beth Emery wondered if a workshop with young people would help to understand what they are looking for in the area towns and the state. Meg Wright stated that in today’s job market there is no job security like years ago.

Nate Hougrand stated that he would like the members to e-mail their recommendations to him.

7. DISCUSSION OF LEGISLATION OF NOTE

Sam Gold told the members that the USDOT has released proposed rulemaking on June 27th that would significantly change the geography of the MPO’s in Connecticut. He went over in greater detail the two maps the members had received. He said that the USDOT put out a rule which only allowed for a 60 day comment period and has so far denied requests for an extension. The RiverCOG is responsible for transportation investments on a regional level and the CEOs have to approve these federal funds before the state can spend them. Mr. Gold said that the RiverCOG creates long range transportation plans that are usually projected out for 30 years. In 1991 the ISTEA transportation bill was passed and included in this bill was a paragraph that states that

MPO must include the entirety of U.S. Census defined urbanized areas and projected 20 year growth. Up to this point, an MPO's Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) was determined by the CEOs that comprise the MPO policy board. The legislation allows for more than one MPO in a single urbanized area, if the governor agrees.

The purpose of this rule change is to improve the efficiency of the transportation planning process. If implemented this rule change would impact 142 of the 409 MPOs in the country, and all 8 MPOs in Connecticut. Currently we receive 60% of our funding from being a MPO. Mr. Gold went on to explain what an urbanized area is and the options available when the UZAs and MPAs don't align.

An urbanized area is defined uniformly across the country by its density. Once the US Census Bureau defines an urbanized area it cannot be appealed. The Census Bureau knows this is geography that has serious limitations and states: "If a federal tribal state or a local government agency voluntarily uses the urban rural classification in a non-statistic program it is that agency's responsibility to ensure that that classification is appropriate for such use and the Census Bureau urges each government agency to conserve permitting appropriate modifications of the results of implementing the urban rural classification specifically for the purposes of this program."

Sam Gold said that our region has portions of three urbanized areas as shown on the map, Hartford UZA to the north, New Haven UZA to the southwest and Norwich-New London UZA to the southeast. He stated that the RiverCOG was officially declared an MPO by the state and feds in 2014.

Mr. Gold said he has participated in webinars with the USDOT and these are the three options that were discussed:

1. MPOs can merge or be dissolved;
2. MPA boundaries can be adjusted; and,
3. In areas that the MPOs and Governor determine to be complex enough, two MPOs can have the same UZA, but have to create one, joint Transportation Improvement Plan.

Another question is what happens when a town is divided into two MPOs. Their response was to create an imaginary boundary through that municipal with portions of the town being in part of a different MPO. The rule would also force the creation of multi-state MPOs when a UZA crosses state lines. Mr. Gold said another option would be to keep what we have if the Governor allows this, however the language is unclear in that situation. If the Governor does not agree and finds that the town is not in compliance of the rule then that ruling of noncompliance could mean your MPO could be found not in compliance with the rule and lose its funding. Whichever option is chosen approval of the MPOs and the Governor is required.

Sam Gold shows a map under the new scenario. Middletown and Haddam would be in two different MPOs based in Hartford and New Haven, Lyme and Old Lyme would be in the New

London MPO, and the other towns would be in the New Haven MPO except for East Hampton and East Haddam who do not have any qualifying urbanized areas yet, but probably in the next census will and it is possible those towns could also be a member of an adjacent MPO.

The boundaries of the MPOs could change every 10 years when the census is updated. Sam Gold stated that the intent is to have this rule finalized and approved by October before the November election and then have compliance in two years, by 2018. Another question is what happens in 2020 when the new census information becomes available and then every 10 years after that.

Mr. Gold stated that there are eight urbanized areas in Connecticut and currently eight MPOs. If the USDOT creates eight new MPOs we will still have the same number of MPOs for the same urbanized areas. In the future these MPO's are in question because the census data changes every 10 years and their methodology changes therefore, this change can be significant from census report to census report in 10 years.

Mr. Gold also added that this week all the COGs and congressional delegations will be submitting letters of request for an extension from 60 days to 180 days. He also asked all the towns to submit comments as well. CTDOT will also be submitting comments. Sam Gold said that he has asked Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro for a letter of support. She is the only member of our delegation that was in office in 1991 and she voted for the ISTEA Act.

8. MISCELLANEOUS

Beth Emery stated that on Tuesday, July 26th at 7:00 p.m. in the Middletown Elks Club the State Department of Transportation will be presenting their plans for the elimination of the traffic lights on Route 9 in Middletown and the creation of a roundabout between Route 9 and Washington Street.

Sam Gold said that there will be a GC3 (greenhouse gases) workshop on Tuesday, July 26th at 5:30 p.m. at the Rockfall Foundation, DeKoven Drive, Middletown.

Frank DeFelice said that the Durham Plan of Conservation and Development was passed.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion of Stephanie Warren, seconded by Bruce Edgerton, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Judith Snyder
Recording Secretary

