



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments and Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Wednesday, January 23, 2019

RiverCOG Members:

Chester: Lauren Gister *
Clinton: Christine Goupil *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore * (until 9:25)
Deep River: Angus McDonald, Jr. *
Durham: Laura Francis *
East Haddam: Emmett Lyman *
East Hampton: Michael Maniscalco *
Essex: Norm Needleman * (9:30)
Haddam: Lizz Milardo *
Killingworth: Cathy Iino
Lyme: Steve Mattson
Middlefield: Ed Bailey
Middletown: Daniel Drew
Old Lyme: Bonnie Reemsnyder *
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna *
Portland: Susan Bransfield
Westbrook: Noel Bishop *

MPO Members:

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce: Darlene Briggs * (until 10:15)
Estuary Transit District: Joe Comerford
Middletown Area Transit: Lisa Seymour

Others Present:

Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz
Marc Bradley, Director of External Affairs
Christine Palm, Representative, 36th District
Irene Haines, Representative, 34th District
Jesse MacLachlan, Representative, 35th District
Devin Carney, Representative, 23rd District
Paul Formica, Senate District 20
Edgar Wynkoop, CT DOT
Eric Lindquist, Office of Policy & Management
Martin Heft, Office of Policy & Management
Pat Bandzes, Eversource
Eric Shortell, Federal Highway Administration

RiverCOG

Amy Jackson-Grove, Federal Highway Administration
Amy Patterson, CT Land Conservation Council

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Robert Haramut
Janice Ehle-Meyer
Margot Burns
Eliza LoPresti
Jon Curtis

1. Call to Order, Roll Call/Introductions, Public Speaking

Chairman Michael Maniscalco called the meeting to order at 8:47 a.m. at the Legislative Office Building, 300 Capital Ave., Hartford, CT.

Roll call was taken by Sam Gold, Executive Director.

Public Speaking:

a. Amy Patterson, Executive Director of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, explained their work with the 137 Land Trusts in CT and municipalities. She discussed HB 5254, which is a bill that would enable communities that wish to do so to adopt a buyer's conveyance fee program, the funding from which could be put into a local fund for the town to use to purchase land for open space. Eleven towns have already asked to be included in the bill. If any of the RiverCOG towns are interested in participating or learning more, Ms. Patterson will give more information. If there is interest in being part of the bill, she suggested that municipal leaders speak with their legislators.

2. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of the Dec. 5, 2018 LCRVCOG & MPO Meeting

Upon motion of Ms. Reemsnyder, seconded by Mr. Bishop, it was unanimously voted to approve the Dec. 5, 2018 Minutes of the LCRVCOG & MPO Meeting.

b. TIP Amendment #20 Replace highway sign supports in Cromwell/Berlin, project 0007-0189

For Routes 9, 5 & 15; includes a reduction of federal funds and an overall increase to the project using some state funds.

c. TIP Amendment #21 Replace bridge 01139 East Haddam, project 0040-0145

Bridge is over Eight Mile River; the project is being deleted from the TIP and will be done by CT DOT Maintenance with no federal funding attached.

d. TIP Amendment #22 Replace bridge 02929 Deep River, project 0122-0103

This is currently in STP funding, and is changing to STP New Haven. Though it will be a new item in the TIP, it is still an existing project.

e. TIP Amendment #23 Replace bridge 02713 and 06896 in Old Lyme, project 0104-0175

This bridge is on Rt. 156. This project has had an increase of about four million dollars as it went from a rehab project to a full reconstruction.

f. TIP Amendment #24 Replace bridge 00524 approach spans in Middletown, project 0082-0312

This is for the Arrigoni bridge and indicates an increase of 20 – 37.4 million dollars, plus a change in FY funding.

g. TIP Amendment #25 Replace traffic control signals in District 1 and 2 project 0082-0471

These are projects being added in Groton and Stonington, which do not affect us, but still need district-wide approval.

Mr. Salvatore moved to approve all TIP amendments (items 2b through 2g); second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

h. FY 18 List of obligated/granted projects

This is a list of obligated projects from the previous fiscal year for review.

i. Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update

A rough draft went to CT DOT, Federal Highway & Federal Transit on January 4, 2019. The next step is the air quality conformity determination; Mr. Haramut is unsure when that will be available. Next week a draft of the plan should be available on the RiverCOG website, with a survey sent to all interested parties. Final date for approval is April 12. Thirty days of public comment period will need to precede approval. A draft will be distributed to the RPC next week, and they will host a public meeting within the coming months.

At this time, Ms. Francis asked about an issue in Durham, which CT DOT is considering to be a congestion problem, and therefore not in their work plan. It was suggested to her that she try to get the project on the TIP. Mr. Haramut advised that the project would have to go in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan first, and wouldn't go on the TIP until there is federal funding.

j. LOTCIP Update

Chester and Haddam have both received their project authorization letters. These are the last two jobs from that round of funding; Mr. Haramut solicited for funding for the next round in early November. He received eight projects which will be reviewed for prioritization at the next COG/MPO meeting.

Ms. Francis reported that the Durham project is out to bid and getting a lot of initial activity and that because of receiving the community connectivity grant, she can reduce the scope of her proposed project.

k. Transportation Alternatives Program Update

This is what used to be called the Enhancement Program. The Fast Act expires in 2020 so they are looking for solicitations for that program for 2021-2025, with the expectation that funding will be in the new federal legislation at similar levels as in the past. A few of the projects received for LOTCIP were former TAP submissions. If towns need to resubmit under the TAP program they can with a new application, otherwise LOTCIP can be utilized. Mr. Haramut will send out applications and selection criteria soon; there will be about a two month window to get projects into the COG for prioritization. The other MPOs within our TMA will need to be coordinated with on this, as one list is submitted per TMA. Final applications are due to DOT at the end of June.

l. Other Transportation Updates

i. Route 66 and Route 81 Corridor Studies

A public meeting for the Route 81 study was held January 10; the final report may be available in February or March. Information on the advisory committee meeting for the Route 66 project will be distributed soon. Once the existing conditions are out there will be public meetings (probably Feb. or March) and recommendations by summer.

ii. Connecticut Active Transportation Plan

Mr. Gold served on the steering committee for the Bike/Pedestrian Plan update, which held its last meeting in June of 2017. There was no communication with the steering committee between then and December 2018, when a new plan was released to them the week before Christmas; the comment period spanned the two weeks during the holidays. Mr. Curtis and Mr. Gold made comments on the report, and Mr. Curtis attended a meeting during which he objected to the CT DOT's implementation of its own public process. The state adopted the plan on January 8, and is now asking for updates over the next six months.

Mr. Gold stated that CT DOT gave the go-ahead to execute a contract with Nelson Nygaard, the consultant for the upcoming Regional Bus Integration Study.

3. LCRVCOG Business

a & b. RiverCOG Legislative Agenda & Discussion of RiverCOG Legislative Agenda with the Region's Legislators

Upon motion of Mr. Fortuna and second of Mr. Salvatore, the RiverCOG Legislative Agenda was unanimously approved.

Mr. Gold gave an overview of the Legislative Agenda at this time (attached to these minutes). Chairman Maniscalco noted that this year there will be follow up on what our Legislators have done, with a report after the session. A report on what was accomplished from the last session can also be created.

Representative Carney noted that it was too late to propose individual legislation; the deadline had been the week before. He suggested holding this meeting prior to that deadline next year.

Ms. Francis suggested the ability to recall on all appointments, not just for the transit boards.

Discussion was then held on ways to incentivize young people just out of college to stay in the state, such as student loan debt relief. Rep. Palm has put in a bill to create a commission to study retaining millennials. Rep. Carney discussed the need for programs to train young people to work for employers such as UTC, EB, The Lee Co., etc. that are actively looking for skilled workers. Rep. MachLachlan discussed student debt in relation to expected returns from degree programs (i.e. some degrees will earn you less money and would therefore cost less). Rep. Palm discussed the money from the First Five employer program, and how she would prefer to see some of that fund companies' ability to underwrite student debt of employees, or to alleviate taxes in some way. Chairman Maniscalco discussed the difficulty of hiring young people in the public sector, as the salaries do not align with the amount of their debt. He also noted that the federal legislation for the public service loan forgiveness program does not work. Ms. Francis is reviewing her job descriptions for what they warrant (i.e. does every job description that necessitates a degree actually require one in practical application?) Rep. MachLachlan highlighted the opportunity to think about targeted skills education (one-off courses) vs. a general education degree.

Mr. Fortuna discussed that he would like to see the prevailing wage lifted on renovations, a resolution/action from the state for MIRA and the garbage crisis, a discussion on elimination of car tax which eliminates 5-7% of a municipality's revenue, and a solution for teacher's retirement. He mentioned an approach from Rep. Ritter at the COST conference, which was to pay the equivalent of a social security tax shifted onto towns. Mr. Fortuna added that if anything is going to be done for shifting costs to towns, he hopes that the towns are warned 3-4 years in advance, as the towns can't handle all these increases in one year. Ms. Milardo discussed the formula for the TRB. Rep. Haines stated that she submitted a bill regarding prevailing wage.

At this time, Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz entered the meeting and introduced herself and Marc Bradley, Director of External Affairs. Lt. Gov. Bysiewicz specifically asked about the agenda item for COG reorganization. Mr. Gold explained that there are concerns on cost, time, timing, and expectations set by the previous administration. Also, that COGs are looking to be recognized as a county equivalent, which would net CT more federal money, but in order to do so the COGs need to be stabilized and not reorganizing every few years.

Some of the previous discussion topics were reiterated for the Lt. Governor, such as prevailing wage, formula for the TRB, retaining young people in the state, and giving sufficient warning to towns of upcoming increases in contributions. There was further discussion on the COG system, and how and why it works and what benefits would be provided to the state if COGs were recognized as county equivalents. Cooperation of the towns within RiverCOG and the amount of shared services, regionalization, etc. was expressed, with CEOs asking for legislation that can make more regionalization easier. The spreadsheet that was created that shows the sharing done within the COG will be sent to the administration.

Lt. Gov. Bysiewicz discussed the policy recommendations that were created by the fifteen policy committees, and the fact that the Governor is looking at them all, but that these are only suggestions and not all will be supported by him or implemented. The recommendations have been compiled in a document which will be shared with the CEOs.

Within a further discussion on shared services, the issue of hiring was raised. The Lt. Gov. inquired which positions were hard to hire for, with the majority of CEOs stating Building Officials, Planners, ZEOs, etc. The importance of the private sector in regionalizing was highlighted – examples of a private contract with a kennel for animal control and many towns using the same engineering firm were raised. RPIP grant reinstatement and other statute changes could be helpful for funding some of the startup costs of further service sharing.

Senator Needleman noted the importance of vetting regionalization by two factors: is it saving money, and will it improve services. The Lt. Gov. noted that sharing services is all about incentivizing efficiencies and taking away barriers to such. Ms. Francis noted that using a word like “inefficiencies” when talking about local government causes issues for towns, as residents will believe that there is fat to be cut from budgets, when really there is not. She suggested using “opportunities” instead. Ms. Milardo stated that with regional BOEs, there doesn’t seem to be checks and balances as there is with towns, due to the way statutes are written regarding regional BOEs as a separate entity. Ms. Goupil discussed some of the road blocks that exist toward regionalization of dispatch services. Mr. Fortuna discussed collective bargaining as a roadblock to sharing services/staffing.

In response to discussion on talent shortage (dispatchers, town planners, other previously discussed positions), Rep. Carney suggested letting the Eastern Workforce Investment know about opportunities to fill gaps for preparation/outreach.

c. RiverCOG FY2020 Dues

RiverCOG dues are used to match the federal planning grant, and we have not yet been informed by the state what that or the state's match will be for the next fiscal year. The Executive Committee recommends a \$10,185.00 (total) increase in dues.

Upon motion of Ms. Reemsnyder and second of Mr. Bishop, an increase in revenue from dues of \$10,185 was approved unanimously.

d. Household Hazardous Waste 2019 Budget

There was discussion on adding another collection in Cromwell. Mr. Salvatore was not present during this discussion, nor were a few of the other northern towns. It was decided that the budget would be approved without this addition, and adding another northern collection would be explored further at the next meeting, when hopefully more of those towns would be present. Mr. Gold will poll the other northern towns and encourage them to be present at the next meeting. There was a brief discussion on the capital fund and the possibility of subsidizing through it.

Upon motion of Ms. Francis and second of Ms. Milardo it was unanimously voted to approve proposal one, which is the same amount of collections as in previous years. Discussion of adding another collection will occur at another time.

4. Chairman's and Executive Director's Reports

Due to time constraints these items will be emailed. A letter will of thanks will be sent to the Lt. Governor and Legislators present.

5. Other Business

a. DEMHS Update – Ms. Francis reported that acceptance of additional funds was approved at the last REPT meeting.

6. Adjournment

Upon motion of Ms. Goupil and second of Ms. Reemsnyder, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 10:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eliza LoPresti
Recording Secretary