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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
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING**

Monday, November 5, 2018 - 7:00 pm

Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments conference room
145 Dennison Road, Essex

Members:

Chester: Vacancy
Clinton: Alan Kravitz
Eric Bergman *
Cromwell: Alice Kelly
Chris Cambareri
Deep River: Bruce Edgerton *
Tony Bolduc
Durham: Frank DeFelice*
Joe Pasquale
East Haddam: Crary Brownell
Lou Salicrup
East Hampton: Michael Kowalczyk*
Essex: Alan Kerr *
Sandra Childress*
Haddam: Raul deBrigard
Stasia DeMichele
Killingworth: Stephanie Warren
Alec Martin
Lyme: Mary Stone
Middlefield: Vacancy
Middletown: Beth Emery *
Stephen Devoto
Old Lyme: Harold Thompson
Old Saybrook: Kenneth Soudan *
Karen Jo Marcolini
Portland: Elwin Guild
Westbrook: Bill Neale *
Marie Farrell

*Members Present

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Eliza LoPresti
Janice Ehle-Meyer
John McDonald

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman DeFelice at 7:02 pm.

2. Roll Call

Roll call was taken by Eliza LoPresti

3. Seating of Alternates

The following Alternate Members were seated: Sandra Childress, Essex and Eric Bergman, Clinton.

4. Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Soudan moved to reorder the agenda as follows: item 6) Approval of Minutes and item 7) 2019 RPC Meeting Dates will become items 9 and 10. Second by Mr. Edgerton; voted unanimously in favor.

5. Public Comments

None

6. Referrals – Town of Durham

Chairman DeFelice updated the RPC on the status of the referral; a public hearing is set for Dec. 5, 2018 and hopefully the regulations concerning agricultural events will be voted on that evening. He discussed some changes that were made to the original proposed regulations based on input from the public, P&Z, the regional Agriculture Commission and the RPC. It was clarified that in order to prove that your institution is primarily an agricultural entity, the tax certificate showing such will be required. If the entity is new, a site plan with an itemized list of what activities will occur would be required. It was highlighted that it is the applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary reviews by other agencies. Torrance Downes provided a letter to the Durham P&Z regarding the draft proposal, which was in turn provided to RPC members for comment.

There was discussion on whether or not the special permit ceases if and when a farm ceases to be a farm and how the town will become aware of that situation. The permit will cease if a farm is no longer used for that purpose. The permit will potentially have value for the next land owner, but if the Commission finds that the land is no longer being used primarily as agriculture they can remove the permit. The permits are not renewed annually.

In the letter, Mr. Downes noted that the inter-municipal impacts are not significant. If RPC members have concerns or suggestions regarding the letter, RiverCOG staff should be contacted.

7. Regional Plan of Conservation & Development – Agriculture Chapter

Ms. Ehle/Meyer gave an in-depth summary of this chapter. Comments and suggestions include: In the intro section, the table shows 518 farms in our region, but in the text it states that there are 100. This is most likely due to differing definitions of "farm" used by different agencies. This will be clarified and one definition will be focused upon. It should also be noted when Lyme & Old Lyme are included, as they are not included in data for Middlesex County (which is provided by the USDA). Or those two towns could be included (and noted as such) with a rough estimate of data. It should be clarified in all instances. The average acreage of farms was questioned, this will be researched further. Textual changes were discussed and noted directly on the draft for future editing.

It was suggested that the accompanying map include a road layer. Since there are a few different things being shown in the map, it could potentially be broken out into two maps.

It was suggested that under the “strengths” section the State’s definition of agriculture be included and noted as being intentionally broad.

There was discussion on the statistic that the farmland in Middlesex County increased by 44.8% though there are only 6 farms in our region that are larger than 500 acres.

Ms. Ehle/Meyer described the agricultural survey that was sent out to 173 farmers in our region in 2017. The survey responses (21% responded) contributed a portion of the chapter being discussed, which Ms. Ehle/Meyer went into detail on. Chairman DeFelice suggested this section be edited for readability, highlighting the insights that further the plan, rather than spelling out every statistic. There were suggestions about reflecting the number of respondents versus the percentages associated with such, or putting both in the text.

There was discussion on some type of regional signage for farms, as this was indicated as a need in the survey. Because town signage rules vary widely, a sticker on existing signs was suggested, or state-wide farm signs, similar to the wine trail signs.

There was a question on whether information can be obtained on the farmland that has been sold – where did that land go/to what use? Mr. Gold explained that there may be an issue with obtaining uniform data town by town, though an example from a town that has good data might be able to be made into a table. A map of how much of the region is in PA 490 was suggested, as it will show tax implications. There was discussion on changing text regarding climate change and GMO foods.

After the chapter was reviewed, suggestions were made to condense and reduce the amount of pages/text and focus on what is most important for the plan. A summary of clickable links were suggested for the places in which websites can be highlighted throughout. There was discussion on the length of this document vs. the length of the industry document, as there is more industrial/manufacturing in the region than agriculture. Perhaps this could be incorporated under the “weaknesses” category as farming is less lucrative than other industries. However, the reason agriculture is emphasized because of the historic connection to our community and it has to do with land use and planning, which is what the plan is about.

It was suggested that something be included about organic farming. There was a recommendation to focus on who the audience is for this plan, and what they are going to do with it, what answers are we providing them with? This is plan-wide, not germane to only this chapter. There was a suggestion to include information on energy; specifically allowing zoning to encourage biomass generation, etc. An idea was raised to list the obstacles/issues within the document, along with proposed solutions.

8. Miscellaneous

Mr. McDonald distributed an update on some of the information in the demographic section of the RPOCD. This shows trends on natural increase, which shows a population decline. There was a suggestion to change the scale as it looks dramatic, though it’s not really (chart 1.3); it should reflect a plateau.

Mr. Gold stated that the COG is receiving funding from CT DOT to do a bus company integration study. The study may indicate the need for a new maintenance facility and/or for the companies to work together. Nelson Nygaard has been selected as the consultant team for the study. This will possibly be a 15 month project.

Funding for FY19 was received. Jon Curtis is recovering from surgery and will hopefully be back to work in the next month or so.

A question was asked about the proposed table for the Long Range Transportation Plan (regarding an attachment that was emailed by request from discussion during September's meeting). Ms. Emery suggested working on encouraging towns to work on connections related to bike/ped regionally rather than by town line, and also to work with towns to come up with their own complete streets plans. Chairman DeFelice stated that any suggestions for the Transportation Plan should be sent to Mr. Gold or Mr. Downes.

9. Approval of Minutes – September 24, 2018

Due to no quorum the minutes were not voted upon.

10. 2019 RPC Meeting Dates

Due to no quorum the meeting dates were not voted upon.

11. Adjournment

At 9:35 p.m., Mr. Neale moved to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Childress seconded. The vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti