



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, April 22, 2020

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Lauren Gister *
Clinton: Karl Kilduff *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Angus McDonald *
Durham: Laura Francis *
East Haddam: Robert Smith *
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Norm Needleman
Haddam: Robert McGarry *
Killingworth: Cathy Iino *
Lyme: Steve Mattson *
Middlefield: Ed Bailey *
Middletown: Ben Florsheim
Old Lyme: Tim Griswold *
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna *
Portland: Susan Bransfield *
Westbrook: Noel Bishop *

MPO Members:

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce: Darlene Briggs *
Estuary & Middletown Are Transit Districts: Joe Comerford *

Others Present:

Cathy Lezon, Eversource
Pat Bandzes, Eversource
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Briana Devivo, Senator Murphy's Office
Kelsey Wentling, CT River Conservancy
Eric Shortell, Federal Highway Administration
Edgar Wynkoop, CT DOT
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor
Laurie McAlwee, South Central Regional Mobility
Christine Nelson, Old Saybrook Planner

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Torrance Downes
Eliza LoPresti

RiverCOG

Margot Burns
Megan Joufflas
Robert Haramut
Paula Fernald (10:00)

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

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M. This meeting took place virtually by phone and video conference.

Roll was called by Sam Gold.

a. Regional Election Monitor Report

Regional Election Monitor Carol Conklin reported that the presidential primary has been moved to August 11 to coincide with the state primary. The presidential primary cannot be cancelled because the candidates have not withdrawn by letter as required. The state is asking registrars for updated emergency polling plans and estimations for number of needed poll workers. The state received funding to aid with elections and they will help with sanitizing polling places before and after the primary and covering some costs of absentee ballots. The state will contract with a mail clearinghouse to send absentee ballot applications to everyone in the state that will then be forwarded to each town. Each town will receive a drop box for absentee ballots. The state will be able to cover additional help for the clerks as needed to process absentee ballots.

Mr. McGarry stated that 75% of Haddam's poll workers will not work if there is a pandemic (based on a survey). Ms. Conklin noted that the election monitors have discussed this and that August should be better, but November may be a problem because it will be closer to flu season. The state is looking at programs through unemployment or using college students to fill some of these positions. There was discussion of some statute changes so fewer people can work at a polling place. The state is researching other states that have done vote by mail for the November election.

Public Speaking

Ellen Graham of Senator Blumenthal's office reported that the Senate passed some more funding that is headed to the House. This includes \$310 billion more for the PPP program, \$60 billion of that is set aside for small lenders and financial institutions, \$25 billion for testing, \$11 of which goes to the states, and \$75 billion more for hospitals.

2. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of March 25, 2020 LCRVCOG & MPO Meeting

Mr. Bishop moved to approve the minutes of the March 25, 2020 regular meeting; second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. TIP Update

Mr. Haramut stated that the draft of the '21 TIP is nearly complete. The air quality determination is completed by CT DOT but they cannot yet do the public involvement portion. This should not affect the TIP schedule for federal review.

c. Regional Transportation Safety Plan Update

This a new regional strategic highway safety plan. The purpose is to provide data-driven counter measures, identify high-risk areas and ways to reduce accidents, serious injuries and fatalities. There will be stakeholder meetings in each town, with presentations most likely in the fall or winter with first selectmen, public works, PDs, etc. Ms. Francis asked that in advance of each town meeting they are provided with their accident data. Mr. Haramut stated there will be a local road focus.

d. Other Transportation Updates

- i. Route 66 Corridor Study** – The final draft report is about 90% complete but we are holding off on the public meetings in the towns. We have filed for a six-month extension to keep the funding for this project through December 31.
- ii. Lower Connecticut River Valley Transit Study** – This is moving forward but the public participation process is being stymied by the pandemic. The governance and facilities scenarios are done, service alternatives and improvement details are being worked on. Site screening for a southern satellite storage and light maintenance facility is occurring.
- iii. Transit District Update** – Mr. Gold stated that we are asking the board to hold off on creating a letter encouraging the CT DOT to expedite money for the CARES Act as previously requested by email. There will be funding available for our transit districts due to challenges of Covid-19. Mr. Comerford is working with CT DOT on how to split funds. This money cuts out the MPO as the transit districts will receive it directly, which speeds up the process. It does not have to be spent on costs directly related to Covid-19; it could be anything that is normally available for funding or operating assistance. There is no local match. Both districts have significant costs due to absenteeism, cleaning costs, hiring of security for the Middletown (exterior) bus shelter and loss of revenue among other costs.

Ridership is down by 85% on the 9-Town system. Middletown ridership is up a bit as FedEx has hired additional workers and there has been some bus hopping due to no fares being collected at this time.

3. LCRVCOG Business

a. Household Hazardous Waste Update

Mr. Gold reported that the collection that was to happen on May 9 in East Hampton has been postponed to August 1. Ms. Ehle/Meyer is creating a regional list of local farmers that customers can purchase goods from, this will be distributed when it is complete.

Ms. Francis asked for a solution to give residents that are asking about HHW. She asked about a local plan or a storage facility for waste until it can be taken by the vendor. There are safety and liability issues related to holding waste at the Essex facility. It was suggested that the subcommittee meet to discuss this further. Ms. Francis asked for a message to give the public about this. Mr. Gold reported that Ms. Ehle/Meyer will speak to the vendor to find out what is possible. There is also a backlog in the paintcare program as the paint is not being picked up from participating hardware stores.

b. Regional Plan of Conservation and Development update

A virtual presentation to each municipality is being worked on now. The core audience will be made up of land use committees, economic development, selectmen, etc. as well as the general public. Alternative ideas such as a regional meeting or meetings are being discussed. There will also be a later meeting on the existing conditions report. Each town will be reached out to in order to find out how they would like to proceed.

c. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

There is a meeting today. A survey was created and sent out to everyone with a pdf for posting on websites and social media. Our web page can be linked to as well.

d. Water Chestnut & Hydrilla Update

On the agenda there was a link to the web map application that the CT Agricultural Station has set up along with a site for the invasive species program. The Connecticut River survey for aquatic invasives (hydrilla & water chestnut) that was funded by Gateway is shown there. The COG put in an application to the CT environmental review team (ERT) to take advantage of that program that has a lot of volunteer scientific and technical experts. A presentation is being created for the public on what is being worked on with the ERT, this should be looked at with planning commission and lake associations. The Ag Experiment Station will produce a report with recommendations for abatement and is working with researchers from Univ. of N. Carolina and other experts.

Water chestnut infestations were pulled last year, but it will take a lot more work to get that under control. DEEP will help with the worst areas including Salmon Cove, Selden Cove and other areas.

4. Chairman's & Executive Director's Reports

Chairman Salvatore is concerned with the fact that often executive orders are being pused out, then clarifications don't happen until later. This is making it harder for small businesses to survive, especially in the case of restaurants and sale of alcohol.

Mr. Gold sent out the final report from the RiverCOG hacking last week. He thanked Ms. Fernald for all her hard work in handling the billing, claims, etc. with the vendors and insurance company.

The CT COG association has been working with CCM and COST on webinars and guidance documents on executive orders. RiverCOG's attorney has been helping with this. RiverCOG is being billed though the other COG directors are willing to chip in. Mr. Gold asked for approval to pay Attorney Mednick. The latest bill will be around \$11,000.

Mr. Bailey moved to approve payment to Attorney Steve Mednick; second by Ms. Bransfield. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Atty. Mednick thinks there may be more work to do this month with recovery efforts. Mr. Gold plans to draft an engagement letter for all the COGs to sign regarding splitting the cost. Ms. Francis is concerned that people serving on the working group will not be involved with the reopening committee. She is concerned that the reopening committee might not know the nuances of some of the EOs and is encouraging good interface between the two committees.

Mr. Gold attended a webinar regarding the committees. He mentioned Atty. Mednick's contact, Dr. Gallo, who has access to PPE for the state. He proposed to Johnathan Harris that the COGs be used for inventory or distribution. Mr. Gold is following up to see what role the COGs can provide in conjunction with the REPT.

Ms. Francis stated that the reopening committee may be DECD heavy but there are issues with the EOs that effect governmental function. Chairman Salvatore asked if a letter outlining concerns should be drafted; Ms. Francis did not feel that was necessary.

Mr. Gold discussed an example of issues in the EOs in regard to tax deferrals in towns and possible penalties. This led to a discussion of interpretations of that rule. Mr. Bailey referenced OPM's FAQ page to help clear up questions such as those that have been raised.

Mr. Bishop asked for an update on the GIS Coordinator position. Mr. Gold is keeping that position open for now due to budgetary uncertainty.

Ms. Iino asked about local recovery working groups. Ms. Francis stated that the regional emergency planning team is headed up with ESFs, of which long-term recovery is one. Each municipality should have a committee for that purpose. Now is the perfect time to solicit volunteers for that kind of a committee. She will share the wording she used with the group.

5. Other Business

Chairman Salvatore asked what others were doing for Memorial Day. Many municipalities have already cancelled or will cancel.

a. 2019 Emergency Management Performance Grant Authorization

Mr. Bailey moved to authorize Executive Director Gold to enter into the annual EMPG agreement; second by Ms. Iino. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Mr. Cox moved to authorize Secretary Bailey to sign the resolution related to that grant; second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.

6. Adjournment

Ms. Gister moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:34 a.m.; second by Ms. Francis. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti