



# Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

145 Dennison Road Essex, CT 06426 | +1 860 581 8554 | [www.rivercog.org](http://www.rivercog.org)

## Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments And Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

### MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING

Friday, May 15, 2020

#### RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Lauren Gister \* (until 10:00)  
Clinton: Karl Kilduff \*  
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore \* (until 10:15)  
Deep River: Angus McDonald \* (until 10:30)  
Durham: Laura Francis \*  
East Haddam: Robert Smith  
East Hampton: Jeremy DeCarli \*  
Essex: Norm Needleman \* (until 9:30)  
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  
Representative Irene Haines  
Representative Christine Palm  
Kathryn Faraci, CT DOT  
Suzanne Helchowski, Westbrook  
Kitty Strausberg, High Hopes  
Frank DeFelice, Durham

#### Staff Present:

Sam Gold  
Torrance Downes

# RiverCOG

Eliza LoPresti  
Margot Burns  
Megan Jouflas  
Robert Haramut  
Paula Fernald  
Janice Ehle/Meyer

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

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:02 A.M. This meeting took place virtually.

Roll was called by Sam Gold.

### Public Speaking

Rep. Irene Haines stated there is no word yet on a special session and that there is need to certify businesses for re-opening next week. There are links for this on the DECD site. She asked everyone to share this information so businesses are aware of this requirement.

Senator Needleman stated that the state needs to approve a budget because the issued executive orders have limited effect without funding. He discussed safe business opening and unemployment. Some recent guidelines for reopening stated that the local health directors are expected to enforce rules. Sen. Needleman has been advocating for enforcement to fall to the towns, though the business owners themselves need to police things. He discussed that the Town Hall in Essex has been open, though not to the public.

Chairman Salvatore noted that he feels cautious as people in his town are already calling Town Hall to turn people in that may not be following guidelines. He agrees that he doesn't want his health or police department stuck in the middle of disputes.

Sen. Needleman is hoping for voluntary compliance, especially as he has noticed compliance in most cases already. He feels that the directive to health departments should be slightly amended so that businesses are the front line as police don't have a lot of options.

Ms. Iino asked if the state police have been given guidance on their role in enforcement. Sen. Needleman stated that they seem to have some guidance though there is a reluctance to make arrests for violating the executive orders as that is a felony. Enforcement at the local level and guidance on such was discussed.

Ms. Iino expressed concern that there is not a local health official included on the reopening committee. Representation on the committee was discussed.

Ms. DeVivo of Sen. Murphy's office stated that the House introduced a proposal for the next stimulus package, called the HEROES Act, for 3 trillion dollars. This includes flexible funding for state and local governments, essential workers, testing, tracking, employee retention tax credit, extended COBRA subsidies, more funding for the PPP and EIDL programs and more.

Rep. Christine Palm emailed her comments to Ms. Gister to report as she was experiencing technical difficulties. She is concerned that things are opening up too early. She feels uniform enforcement is fair

to all businesses and thinks there may be a special session during the last week of June. Most of her time now is spent handling dept. of labor constituent issues.

## 2. LCRVMPO Business

### a. Letter of Support for the Haddam/East Haddam Swing Bridge Walkway Project

There are already plans for the bridge to be overhauled; the walkway would be an addition made during that construction. A letter of support would be used in the BUILD grant submission. The price has gone down from the last time the grant application was submitted as some elements have been moved over to CT DOT.

*Upon motion of Mr. McGarry and second of Ms. Gister it was unanimously approved that the RiverCOG Executive Director submit a letter in support of the project.*

## 3. LCRVCOG Business

### a. Household Hazardous Waste Update

Ms. Ehle/Meyer reported that we will hold the May 30 collection in Essex. RiverCOG staff will work the collection and plan ways to do the collection so it is safe for all. She will contact Essex PD about traffic as this may be a busy collection. Staff will have PPE that was provided by the Health Director in Essex. She received an email from DEEP about a state suspension on collections, though truly the collections are at the discretion of each entity.

Mr. Gold stated we received guidance from the health director and we have had many internal conversations on safety and social distancing and feel we can proceed comfortably. There is a risk of improper disposal if we do not hold collections. Residents will be asked to put waste in their trunk or truck bed so there is no interaction with the inside of their vehicle.

### b. Long Term Recovery Committee

Mr. Gold has been asked to join the state steering committee. There is some confusion on how to proceed because the DEMHS regions don't match up to the COG regions and the committee is overseen by the DEMHS region. RiverCOG towns are in three DEMHS regions, though Mr. Gold represents region 2. A task force has been created that is populated with major decision makers and funders and also with representatives from traditionally underrepresented groups. There is some question on how to bill staff time as we are not to use RSG funds for this work. The role of the REPT in recovery was briefly discussed.

Ms. Francis stated that using the DEMHS regions is appropriate because it's an emergency support function. The way everyone interfaces with it is going to be determined by our cooperation. She stated each town has to have their own recovery committee that will interface with the regional committee then up to the state. She suggested a standing agenda item to talk about long term recovery each COG meeting. Ms. Francis emphasized that the long-term recovery efforts should not be politicized in any way that does not further the goal of economic, social and health recovery of the state.

Ms. Iino is looking for clarity on the charge to local long-term recovery committees. She mentioned the crisis could be an opportunity to increase understanding of the interconnectivity in towns and entities in our state.

Ms. Francis stated that the local committees should document immediate local needs and used unemployment numbers as an example. Also, public outreach should be conducted to learn what the specific unmet needs in the community are that might still arise. Identifying local resources such as funders, organizations, social services, etc. will also be key. Mr. Gold brought up other issues such as healthcare, school/child care, etc.

**c. Reopening of Business**

**i. Zoning, Permitting, etc.**

Ms. Iino had questions about some of the guidelines for applications such as pertaining to microbreweries and seating arrangements for restaurants. Chairman Salvatore stated that he has been advising that where things aren't clear for his staff to use their best judgment and he will support them.

Mr. Downes discussed some guidance documents that he distributed to the group. He agreed that local officials should be using their best judgment on these issues and that things can be fine-tuned as we move forward. He noted there is a 10-day limit on the applications, meaning that after 10 days if there is no decision made the application is automatically approved. There is no commission review on the applications (with the exception of Inlands Wetlands if applicable), they are now all administrative review. He is available if any staff have specific questions.

Chairman Salvatore clarified that any changes made during this time are not permanent, only last for the length of the executive order and any decision made by staff with the best of intentions is covered by leeway given by the Governor. He suggested making it very clear to those putting in applications that these changes are not permanent.

Ms. Francis discussed that pushing limits for businesses might result in some good, creative changes that may be beneficial to be made permanent. She suggested being as accommodating as possible within the guidelines. Mr. Downes stated the goal should be to say yes within the safety guidelines.

Secretary Bailey took over as Chairman for the meeting at this point as Chair Salvatore had to step away. Mr. Bailey stated that some of the businesses in his town are having a hard time hiring staff because of the generosity of the unemployment benefits.

**d. PPE Purchasing**

Mr. Gold has heard from the state that towns should be budgeting to purchase PPE because FEMA reimbursements only last as long as the state of emergency is declared. OPM does have CARES Act money that they would like to use to fund COG Covid work and towns with. There may be some regional purchasing power through the Capitol Region purchasing council. There could be problems with delivery at this point.

Ms. Iino received a long list of vendors with the instruction that towns should look for PPE, which is a daunting task for a small town. Mr. Bailey reinforced that that the state is planning to reimburse Covid-related expenses to the towns under the CARES Act, but that they will be on their own after the state of emergency is lifted. There are problems with actually obtaining PPE items at this time as well.

Mr. McGarry asked if everyone would be providing disposable masks to town employees. He is planning to give employees cloth masks. Ms. Iino stated that she would like to have disposable masks for public that enter without their own. Haddam will provide gloves for public.

Rep. Haines is affiliated with a group that has been donating masks and she is happy to help if any towns need them in emergency situation for first responders, nursing home workers, and others in and working with vulnerable populations until the supply chain becomes more intact.

#### **4. Chairman's & Executive Director's Reports**

Mr. Gold received an email from the Secretary of State on safe elections that he will forward to all. He has a call with the Regional Election Monitor today.

The natural hazard mitigation plan update is moving along. There is a public virtual meeting on May 28 at 6:00 and an online survey currently happening.

The Regional Plan of Conservation and Development is moving forward with an updated public outreach strategy.

The Transit Integration Study is now in the draft plan stage for the two districts with recommendations for future use. The plan does not contain service changes because of impediments to the public involvement process.

Mr. Gold and Ms. Fernald are currently working on a budget for next year.

#### **5. Other Business**

Ms. Iino asked if Election Monitor Conklin is working with registrars currently as she has not been in touch with Killingworth's registrars. Mr. Gold confirmed that she is. Mr. Bailey asked about her term of engagement which is two years, until the end of 2020. Ms. Conklin will give a full report at the May regular meeting.

Ms. Francis does not like the idea of the drop boxes for absentee ballots and prefers mail-in. Ms. Bransfield asked for clarification on the entire mail-in ballot process, especially pertaining to where the ballots go.

#### **Adjournment**

*Mr. McGarry moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:37 a.m.; second by Ms. Iino. Vote was unanimous in favor.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Eliza LoPresti