



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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Regional Planning Committee

LOWER CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Monday April 27, 2020 – 6:00 pm

Virtual Zoom Meeting

Members:

Chester	Mike Sanders *
Clinton	Alan Kravitz *
	Martin Jaffe *
Cromwell	Chris Cambri * (until 6:45)
	Anthony LaCava *
Deep River	Bruce Edgerton *
	Tony Bolduc *
Durham	Frank DeFelice *
	Joe Pasquale
East Haddam	Crary Brownell
	Lou Salicrup
East Hampton	Michael Kowalczyk *
Essex	Sandra Childress *
Haddam	Raul deBrigard *
	Stasia DeMichele
Killingworth	Alec Martin *
	Stephanie Warren *
Lyme	Mary Stone * (6:30)
Middlefield	Vacancy
Middletown	Beth Emery *
	Kellin Atherton *
Old Lyme	Harold Thompson
Old Saybrook	Thomas Cox *
	Karen Jo Marcolini
Portland	Vacancy
Westbrook	Bill Neale *
	Marie Farrell

*Members Present

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Torrance Downes
Eliza LoPresti
Megan Jouflas
Margot Burns
Janice Ehle/Myer

RiverRPC

Guests: None

1. Call to Order

Chairman DeFelice called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. The meeting was conducted via video and conference call due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Roll Call

3. Seating of Alternates

Sandra Childress (Essex) and Tony Bolduc (Deep River) were seated.

4. Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Kravitz moved to adopt the agenda, Mr. Martin seconded. Vote was unanimous in favor.

5. Public Comments – None

6. Approval of Minutes of Past Meetings

Ms. Stone moved to approve the March 23, 2020 meeting minutes; second by Ms. Childress. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Mr. Neale moved to approve the April 14, 2020 special meeting minutes; second by Ms. Emery. Vote was unanimous in favor.

7. Referrals – None

Mr. Downes received some administrative referrals from Portland that have been handled internally. He updated the committee that the public hearing for the Durham farm brewery regulations has been extended in part based on content that was received from the RPC and the Regional Agriculture Commission.

8. Update on Regional Plan of Conservation & Development

a. Introductory Municipal Presentation Comments

Ms. Joufflas compiled all comments received from RPC members on the presentation that was given during the last meeting. The presentation was then discussed in detail; comments are captured below.

Chairman DeFelice asked if the presentation accomplished its purpose or missed the mark and if it was appropriate for the intended audience.

Mr. Sanders felt that the presentation tries to do too much and needs to be more focused. In different contexts all the information is valuable, though all at once the amount of information may overwhelm.

Mr. deBrigard asked who the presentation is being aimed toward, which has been a common question among members. The intended audience is local land use agencies, the public at large and the businesses and development community. Mr. deBrigard stated that with that broad of an audience this is the best we can do because the presentation tries to reach multiple audiences at once.

RiverRPC

Mr. Kravitz stated that a lot of the background on institutional structure could be presented on a one-page handout. The presentation does not engage the audience into thinking regionally and creatively. He mentioned that at this time we need to look at unique regional solutions and have the audience stretch their vision beyond their town. The extent that money flows into the region through the COG and that it could be quantified.

Ms. Warren stated that the presentation tries to address two different audiences within the same context, which is problematic. She asked about the focus of the survey questions: is it on the town or on regional development? She would like to see something that does a better job of integrating the information so that it is specific and clear for someone that might not know what is being talked about.

Mr. Martin stated that the presentation is heavy on explaining what the COG is. He feels a good portion should address the town's relationship to the COG, the region and the plan.

Mr. LaCava agreed with Mr. Martin and suggested one or two slides specific to each town and how it relates to the plan.

Ms. Warren discussed public transportation and conservation of open land as intermunicipal projects that are interdependent, regional services. They illustrate the connectivity between towns and regional importance.

Mr. Atherton agreed with Ms. Warren that highlighting the towns' interconnectivity is important, and also the towns' differences.

Mr. Neale noted that the matrix of each town's POCD findings could be valuable to support the above comments. It could be summarized on a slide.

Mr. Kowalczyk stated that a few bulleted points on each town's regional services could be created. For examples he cited MAT and regional health districts.

Mr. Gold suggested a slide to discuss what the region actually is and what exactly is being discussed as the region for the plan since there are so many different regional geographies in the state.

Ms. Emery raised the importance of the Connecticut River – it's recreational and conservation points.

Mr. deBrigard suggested that instead of asking the audience what services are shared in the region we could fill in the answers for each town and let them know what they already share.

Mr. Sanders had a sense that the consultants didn't read the town POCDs. He suggested that during the presentations cognizance needs to be shown regarding the local neighborhood and maybe include a slide of key points that might have come up in that town's POCD.

Mr. Cambrieri suggested using the word “guide” instead of the phrase “marketing tool”.

Ms. Warren asked how the consultants will be analyzing survey data. Mr. Gold stated they will include the data in a summary report with common themes.

Mr. DeFelice asked if members felt the words used in the presentation were accurate, defensible, and communicate clearly, or if they felt it was inaccurate.

Ms. Stone stated that the presenter appeared to not have done his homework. He had no local knowledge, it felt unpracticed and he was unsure of himself.

Mr. Sanders felt the same and that the presentation was too wordy; bullets should be used so it is more distilled. Some reordering of slides will help.

Ms. Childress felt that the presenter did not have enthusiasm for what he was presenting.

Mr. DeFelice asked about the clarity of the vision, brand and goals of the plan. He then discussed the idea of a brand for the region.

Mr. Kravitz stated that branding is an image and a marketing tool, which is not our function. Our function is to think about the future and how to get there.

Ms. Warren stated that vision allows for progress, adaptation and resilience. A brand locks you into something specific, which if not met, can lead to failure.

Mr. Neale stated that the region having a brand is not within the scope of the RPOCD. Perhaps the COG can take this on.

Ms. Stone echoed Ms. Warren’s comments. If a brand is devised it will set up for a lot of blowback. General terms on which we can agree will not suit any particular community with the specificity of what is wanted. Brand marketing should be left out and instead we should work on a vision for the region.

Mr. Sanders feels we are hung up on semantics. Does the region have a vision for itself, does the region fit together as a region, how do we develop it and do we even need a vision? He feels we don’t need to dwell on this.

Mr. Downes stated that the idea of the brand came from a meeting a few years ago. The idea seemed to resonate in identifying where the RiverCOG region fits in with the state as a priority at the time.

Mr. DeFelice asked if having a brand is desirable and if so should it be a recommendation or goal in the plan. Mr. Gold asked what the region’s goal in the larger world is and what do the different components in the region see as their roles as within the region. He mentioned having a discussion in the existing conditions report on the different

components/brands that exist. What is important is the role of this place and what we want to emphasize about it.

Mr. deBrigard stated that this is a poor medium to come up with a vision or brand as it does not lend itself to really creative exchanges. Instead of asking people to come up with visions could we give them some to choose from and ask them to react to them and/or comment rather than create them.

Mr. Kravitz stated there should be a discussion on vision. He also noted that this is a plan for a very different time (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) and it should be addressed early on in the planning process. We shouldn't be assuming business as usual.

Mr. Kowalczyk stated that vision and goals are more internally directed at the COG, RPC, and individual towns. A brand is more externally focused and could be a recommendation or goal of the plan.

Mr. DeFelice asked thoughts about the survey.

Mr. Atherton thought the questions were appropriate for the audience, if he is understanding who the audience is supposed to be.

Mr. Gold stated that the survey questions were not reviewed in advance; he thought they were all over the place. The idea of asking about regional services is not good for the audience. Instead of asking people to describe their town it might be better to have them choose adjectives for this part of the state.

Ms. Warren felt the slides were poorly constructed and was not sure who the questions were aimed at.

Mr. Gold stated the survey questions were supposed to be asked during a live meeting in which our response clickers would have been used. This would have been an interactive tool in that presentation. Mr. DeFelice wondered if the old survey data could be used.

Ms. Emery stated there should be no survey question about road infrastructure and it should be made clear that the RPOCD is not a transportation document.

Mr. DeFelice suggested that the office staff could propose more appropriate questions. Mr. Gold stated that questions should be higher level concerns and interests. The data would be more generalized, summarizing things that were head over and over again.

Ms. Stone stated the questions felt like they were trying to get to information that the questioner should already know. It seemed to her that the presenter should know the answers to the questions so that better questions could be asked.

Mr. Martin stated the survey could be done online later and time should not be spent on it in the presentation. Perhaps there could be five or six general participation questions drawn up by RiverCOG staff.

Ms. Sanders stated that all the towns have probably done surveys and maybe they could be used to guide the discussion.

Mr. Gold stated perhaps open-ended questions could be asked. As examples he noted: what would be useful in this plan for you; how do you want the regional document to intersect your town plan and how can it help you do your job.

Ms. Emery stated that the questions on this survey should be different than the first survey if we do this second survey.

Ms. Warren stated that the questions could be worded differently than the first survey though you may want to address the same issues to get a comparison of answers over time.

Mr. DeFelice asked about the structure of the remote presentations. Do members want to see a remote meeting for each individual town, a given number of remote presentations that anyone can participate in, interactive presentations that are either live or pre-recorded, or a live presentation that is recorded and can be accessed later?

Mr. Sanders thought best that there would be a couple of master presentations with the generics then plant the seeds for a later discussion with each town.

Mr. Gold stated there could be some generic webinar-style meetings then a series of ten or so local meetings with a third presentation on existing conditions, which could be one big webinar for everyone.

Ms. Stone thinks we should go to each town individually.

Ms. Warren feels that three presentations are too many. She noted we should be sure that the meetings are open public meetings that are recorded and available to all.

Mr. DeFelice feels that all presentations should be uniform.

Mr. deBrigard suggested making the presentations available to all. There are three thematic meetings in the scope. Mr. Gold suggested doing the introduction presentation as a webinar done by RiverCOG staff. Before meeting with each town individually we could assign homework on areas of focus in the plan.

Mr. Kowalczyk would prefer a brief introduction meeting before the commissions that are still active to show some momentum on the plan.

Mr. Martin stated that all meetings should be live.

Mr. Kravitz stated that the first presentation could be a larger vide-feed meeting to which everyone is invited, then do meetings at the local level.

At this time Ms. Jouflas went through the presentation that included the comments previously made by the RPC members.

9. Miscellaneous: State, Regional or Local Planning Issues

The general assembly ends next week. No new bills have been introduced. There could possibly be a special session in June regarding only major budgetary issues. At this time it is not known how the regional funds will be affected.

10. Adjournment

At 8:11 P.M. Mr. Neale moved to adjourn the meeting; second by Mr. Martin.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza Lopresti