



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, May 27, 2020

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Lauren Gister *
Clinton: Karl Kilduff *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Angus McDonald *
Durham: Laura Francis * (absent from 9:30 – 10:05)
East Haddam: Robert Smith *
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Norm Needleman
Haddam: Robert McGarry *
Killingworth: Cathy Iino * (until 10:55)
Lyme: Steve Mattson *
Middlefield: Ed Bailey * (until 10:50)
Middletown: Ben Florsheim
Old Lyme: Tim Griswold *
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna *
Portland: Susan Bransfield *
Westbrook: Noel Bishop * (until 10:20)

MPO Members:

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

Others Present:

Pat Bandzes, Eversource
Lillian McKenzie, Senator Murphy's Office
Edgar Wynkoop, CT DOT
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor
Laurie McAlwee, South Central Regional Mobility
Lila Tuxbury, NWCOG Regional Election Monitor
Douglas Lary, Regional Election Monitor
Tim Myjak, East Haddam
Dave Roberge, Old Lyme
Chris Granatini, Tighe & Bond
Eric Lindquist, OPM

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 9:01 A.M. This meeting took place via Zoom.

Roll was called by Sam Gold.

Ms. Francis noted that there is language in front of the state executive order (EO) committee that will either write advisory documents or a new EO for towns that have elections next month about the ability to use absentee ballots.

Mr. Bishop moved to add agenda item 4f) UCONN Stormwater Corps Proposal Letter of Support. This was seconded by Ms. Gister and the vote was unanimous in favor.

Public Speaking

Ms. McKenzie from Senator Murphy's office stated that FEMA recently approved the Lamont administration's extension of the non-congregant housing programs to July 2 and that the HEROES act passed the house though there is no indication it will be taken up in the Senate. This includes over 900 billion dollars for state and local aid. There is an IRS hotline for people that haven't yet received stimulus checks; 800-919-9835. Sen. Murphy has also been working on the Rebuild Main Street act.

a. Regional Election Monitor Report

Regional Election Monitor Carol Conklin reported that critical emails have been sent to registrars. She identified the emails for the CEOs in case they are interested in reading them but also because some of the towns are having issues receiving the emails. The emails were sent on 5/1 (Covid-19 survey for resources), 5/4 (press release on utilizing federal funding), 5/5 (certificate of reimbursement for supplies, personnel, etc.), & 5/6 (absentee ballot ruling). Ms. Conklin is available to help any registrars with their emergency plans for polling places. If anyone needs more information relative to caucuses and primary petitions Ms. Conklin is able to help.

Mr. Gold discussed the secretary of state's press release announcing a radical change in the REM program. They will now be called "election support officers" and there will be one per congressional district instead of one per COG. The problem is that there is a state statute on the books showing one REM per COG and we are not sure what happens with the current contract with the REM. The funding for the position would then come from the SOS rather than the COG. Another issue is that some of the congressional districts, which are denoted by population, have many towns, which would be too many for one person to handle. Mr. Gold suggested he create a letter to the SOS outlining his concerns.

*Ms. Iino moved for Mr. Gold to create a letter to the Secretary of State outlining the concerns discussed above; second by Ms. Bransfield. Vote was unanimous in favor.
Discussion: The number of towns in Courtney's district alone is between 50-70. It is unclear how this person would be hired as a part-time monitor and be able to handle the volume.*

2. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of the April 22, 2020 LCRVCOG & MPO Meeting

Mr. Bailey moved to approve the minutes of the April 22, 2020 regular meeting; second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Approval of Minutes of the May 15, 2020 Special LCRVCOG & MPO Meeting

Mr. Griswold moved to approve the minutes of the May 15, 2020 special meeting; second by Mr. Bailey. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. Route 66 Study Presentation

Chris Granatini of Tighe & Bond presented a brief overview of the study. The presentation is included after these minutes.

d. Transportation Updates

i. **Lower Connecticut River Valley Transit Study** – Mr. Gold reported that there is a draft report on the facilities and governance structure. Mr. Comerford is setting up a meeting between the two transit boards to discuss. There is some struggle with the public outreach portion of the service plan because of the pandemic. Mr. Bishop and Mr. Comerford are pursuing an opportunity for a maintenance facility location for the shoreline.

ii. **Transit District Update** – No update

3. COVID Response and Long-Term Recovery

Mr. Gold has attended a number of state-wide meetings being led by Lisa Tepper Bates who is heading the steering committee and is pursuing a contract for a disaster-recovery framework. The disaster preparedness and response structures that we would use for a hurricane are being used for the pandemic, which can be confusing at times particularly because there is no structural damage and we are still in the middle of the crisis. There is still some question how the framework comes down to a regional level as the DEMHS regions are being used and those do not line up with COG regions. There is question on what to do with towns in our region that are in different DEMHS regions, but that have resources, like Middletown.

DEEP has decided to reduce capacity in state parks on a park by park basis. They will not be opening bathroom facilities but will be using porta-potties as they have a maintenance contract on those for cleaning. The state has committed to a real-time database on park openings which will be useful for town parks as well.

All the COGs are trying to figure out how to cover costs related to Covid. The Association of COGs will prepare one document for reimbursement.

Mr. Griswold asked for clarity on what the towns should expect in the form of reimbursement. Eric Lindquist from OPM was present and he stated he would get clarity from Undersecretary Heft and get back to everyone. A discussion on FEMA and CARES Act funding and submission of information ensued.

Ms. Iino asked who people are using as their town designee to monitor business compliance with EO 7PP. Discussion ensued with varied answers, some towns are using the ZEO, their Building Official, their PD, land use departments or themselves as CEO.

Mr. Gold discussed the state's steering committee and that it has not been made clear what the difference is between recovery and response. They are envisioning some sort of structure in which needs can be communicated up a chain. This is still in the very initial stages. He discussed COG roles, staffing of recovery teams, and tracking and testing response. Mr. McGarry stated that the response deals with the actual health care emergency – containing and eliminating the virus - while recovery deals with fixing that which is broken to get us back to a sense of normalcy.

The CEOs discussed what they are doing as far as opening town halls. There is no state decision, that is up to each town. Park and rec programs and summer camps were also discussed.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. FY 2021 Budget

A draft budget for July 1 was presented. This will be voted on during the June meeting. RSG funding was discussed. Guidance on STEAP grants from OPM was discussed. Projected revenue for RPIP has been obliterated so if the round comes out it will be greatly reduced.

b. Household Hazardous Waste Update

Collections are starting up this weekend in Essex. Ms. Ehle/Meyer went over the new protocols due to Covid. RiverCOG staff will be working the event in lieu of volunteers.

c. Regional Plan of Conservation and Development Update

The Regional Planning Committee approved a new approach to public outreach. There will be one introductory webinar for everyone in the region then there will be meetings in each town or in small groupings of towns. These meetings will take place via Zoom. Questions will be sent to commissions in advance.

d. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

On May 28 at 6:00 there will be a virtual public meeting.

e. Open Space Grant Letter of Support

A proposed letter of support was previously distributed to members for an open-space grant in Old Saybrook for a 55-acre property.

Upon motion of Mr. Fortuna and second of Mr. Smith, it was unanimously voted to send the letter of support for this acquisition.

f. UCONN Stormwater Corps Proposal Letter of Support

This request came from CLEAR at UCONN for a National Fish & Wildlife Foundation Futures Fund Grant for their stormwater assessment project. They would like to work in some of the towns in our region.

Upon motion of Mr. Cox and second of Ms. Gister it was unanimously voted to send the letter of support for the UCONN stormwater corps.

5. Chairman's & Executive Director's Reports

Chairman Salvatore stated that Cromwell passed a declaration to send a letter to the Governor to explore opening businesses sooner rather than later.

Mr. Gold stated that the COG is closed to the public except by appointment. Two Sustainable CT fellows will be working remotely with the COG for the summer.

6. Other Business

Mr. Lindquist of OPM stated that the STEAP program is currently in review by the Governor's office and a decision will be made shortly. The RPIP program is awaiting review by the Secretary/Deputy as well as looking at funding. The first priority is to preserve the RSG funding for the COGs, hopefully at the same level as last year.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:00 a.m.; second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti