



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

145 Dennison Road Essex, CT 06426 | +1 860 581 8554 | www.rivercog.org

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

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING Wednesday, August 26, 2020 – 1:00 PM

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Lauren Gister *
Clinton: Karl Kilduff *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Angus McDonald *
Durham: Laura Francis * (until 2:40)
East Haddam: Robert Smith *
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Norm Needleman
Haddam: Robert McGarry *
Killingworth: Cathy Iino *
Lyme: Steve Mattson *
Middlefield: Ed Bailey * (until 2:45)
Middletown: Ben Florsheim
Old Lyme: Tim Griswold
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna * (until 2:45)
Portland: Susan Bransfield
Westbrook: Noel Bishop *

MPO Members:

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

Others Present:

Brianna DeVivo, Senator Murphy's Office
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Cathy Lezon, Eversource
Jake Manke, DEMHS Region 2 Coordinator
Pat Bandzes, Eversource
Edgar Wynkoop, CT DOT

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Torrance Downes
Eliza LoPresti
Margot Burns
Robert Haramut
Megan Jouflas

RiverCOG

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

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 1:04 P.M. This meeting took place via Zoom.

Roll was called by Sam Gold.

Public Speaking

Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor, reported that the primary of August 11 was the most active primary she's seen. The Town Clerks and Registrars had every obstacle thrown up against them with the pandemic, power outages, recounts, etc. Many bugs will be worked out prior to the November election. The state is revamping the absentee ballot process in that the mailing house will be mailing out applications but Town Clerks will mail the actual ballots. Towns can seek reimbursement for extra help hired for this process.

Ms. Iino asked Ms. Conklin to recommend to the Secretary of State that the link to download absentee ballots be more visible on the state's site, right on the front page.

Jake Manke, Coordinator of DEMHS Region 2, is looking for a municipal designee from each town to enforce sector rules. A disaster designee declaration from FEMA has been requested, numbers will be needed from municipalities. A regional emergency planning team meeting is happening next week to approve the Federal grant program for FY20, it is beneficial for the CEOs to attend, if that is not possible please send a proxy to reach quorum. Municipalities are asked to start sourcing PPE. The CT Intelligence Center (CTIC), which is now part of DEMHS, is looking to establish a list of fire, police & EMS chiefs.

Ms. Francis stated that when REPT meetings are continually cancelled because of lack of quorum it takes up a lot of her time and that of other volunteers. She urged the CEOs to attend the meetings since they are responsible for the budgets and to be more attuned the responsibility or make sure a proxy is available if meetings cannot be attended.

Brianna DeVivo from Senator Murphy's office reported that the House passed the postal service funding bill though they are doubtful it will get called to a vote in the Senate. Mr. Gold asked the status of funding for the federal transportation bill; it is not known at this time.

2. LCRVMPO Business

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

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

b. 2018 TIP Amendment 41, Revised

This TIP amendment was approved at the last meeting, the revision is that the amendment now has the correct date which will move the funding to the correct pot.

Mr. Bailey moved to approve TIP Amendment 41 as revised; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. Draft 2021 TIP Update

Public comment period for the draft TIP update is Aug. 24 – Oct. 9, 2020. There will be a virtual public meeting on September 16 and conditional approval will be sought at the October 28 COG/MPO meeting.

Mr. Smith and Mr. McGarry stated that there is unfavorable feedback from citizens in Haddam and East Haddam on the planned traffic circles in Haddam. Edgar Wynkoop of CT DOT was present and stated he will find out the status of this project and will let the state know that the towns are unhappy about it.

3. LCRVCOG Business

a. Storm Recovery

Mr. Gold stated there was concern among the CEOs about Eversource's response time after storm Isaias. Cathy Lezon and Pat Bandzes from Eversource were present and addressed concerns where they could.

Ms. Francis stated that the usual protocol was not followed and that what took 3-4 days would have typically been completed in 24-36 hours. She stated the need for flexibility to work in tandem with shared resources, such as municipal public works departments.

Chairman Salvatore stated that in 46 years this was the worst storm response from the utility company that he has seen. Liaisons were changed mid-stream, there was no pre-positioning of crews, they didn't know where their crews were in town to assign DPW staff and roads couldn't be cleared because most trees were in wires.

Ms. Iino noted that the idea that all roads were not made accessible is unacceptable. There was a lack of solid communication and Killingworth never did get a make-safe crew.

Mr. Bishop stated that the largest employer in his town had their power shut down without being told and had to send hundreds of workers home. All they wanted was communication/notification about shutdowns.

Mr. Smith stated that they had an excellent liaison but the first crews that showed up were instructed to make safe and re-energize which became a problem because they had so many roads blocked that the DPW couldn't handle without Eversource. This was a change of policy as there is usually a make-safe crew deployed and pre-positioned first.

Mr. McGarry stated that make-safe should be a priority. The incident commander was in Massachusetts and stated that the priority was make-safe, but it was actually restoration over make-safe. Either the incident commander didn't know what was happening on the ground or was lying about what was happening. Communication was bad all around. Additionally, his liaison was handling towns that weren't contiguous, causing time spent on the road rather than time in the towns if they have to travel.

Mr. Gold stated that the COG should consider submitting testimony once more is known about the upcoming hearings. Ms. Francis noted that CCM and COST are working on this.

Ms. Francis suggested Eversource relax their company policy that liaisons should not physically come into EOCs (due to Covid). Ms. Bandzes noted that this policy evolved as the storm went on.

Mr. Gold asked if the Canadian border closure impacted extra crews. Ms. Bandzes and Ms. Iino stated that Canadian crews were present, noting that it takes two or more days for some of these crews to drive out here.

Ms. Iino noted that the communication between Eversource, Frontier and Comcast is not what one would hope and that this should be on the agenda as issues are addressed.

Mr. Fortuna noted that the COG submitting testimony is a good idea and suggested Mr. Gold draft a letter with a comment summary from this discussion.

Mr. McGarry was concerned with how quickly the communication infrastructure fell apart in general. There were people that were completely isolated and it hurt the Eversource response.

Chairman Salvatore asked the CEOs to send specific thoughts to Mr. Gold by email for the draft of his letter which will be sent to PURA and the energy and technology legislative committee, of which Senator Needleman is co-chair.

b. Covid Response/COG CARES Act Funding

Mr. Gold noted that staff time and direct costs were being spent under the idea that OPM would fund this for the COGs, but there is no money forthcoming. There has been about \$20,000 spent in staff time and about \$30,000 spent in direct costs, most of which was legal costs. Mr. Gold has told Attorney Mednick to stop working on behalf of the COGs. Mr. Gold adapted a resolution created by Atty. Mednick which discussed the whole situation, how it transpired and authorizes spending on Covid long-time recovery response and would approve the expenses up to this date. Mr. Manke confirmed that he has not heard anything further from OPM regarding this topic. This resolution will put it on record that the COG acted on good faith during the state of emergency, regardless of funding. This will be discussed in greater detail with the executive committee.

Mr. Bailey moved to approve the resolution; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. FY 2021 Regional Services Grant

Mr. Gold reported that he received the RSG paperwork last week which included the bonus again this year. He is budgeting for a consultant to work on a regional housing plan with separate municipal annexes to satisfy the new requirements of 8-30 j, similar to what has been done for the hazard mitigation plan.

i. Mandate for Regional PSAP (911) and Regional Tax Assessment Plans

There is a stipulation in the RSG funding that unless plans for regionalized PSAP and tax assessment are submitted by RiverCOG by March 1 the fourth quarter funding will be withheld.

d. Regional Plan of Conservation and Development Update

The individual town municipal meetings are almost completed. This was a task that FHI was originally going to do but instead has been done in-house.

e. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Municipal annexes were sent out. The deadline to return comments is the end of this week. Ms. Burns asks that even if there are no changes to please let her know. There will be a public meeting and a third planning meeting the third week of September.

f. Household Hazardous Waste Update

The collections are happening successfully and will continue for the course of the summer.

4. Chairman's & Executive Director's Reports

Chairman Salvatore had no report.

Mr. Gold is going to follow up with a memo regarding the regional approach for the affordable housing plan mandate once he hears from the department of housing.

RiverCOG's server has been broken while in the process of being fixed by our IT consultant, the owner of the company that is fixing it has stated they will take financial responsibility for damage they've done to the drives.

5. Other Business - None

6. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:51 PM, second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti