



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 SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE MEETING

Tuesday, December 15, 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 (9:55) *
Middletown: Ben Florsheim
Old Lyme: Tim Griswold *
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna *
Portland: Susan Bransfield *
Westbrook: Noel Bishop *

*present

MPO Members:

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

Others Present:

Brianna DeVivo, Senator Murphy's Office
Irene Haines, Representative House District 34
Christine Goupil, Representative House District 35
Greg Bugbee, CT Agriculture Station
Amy Jackson-Grove, Federal Highway Administration
Lou Mangini, Rosa DeLauro's Office
Christine Palm, Representative House District 36
Julia McGrath, Representative Courtney's Office
Tim Myjak, BL Companies & Middlesex Chamber
Kathryn Faraci, CT DOT
Martin Henry, Henry, Raymond & Thompson
Brandon Chafee, Representative House District 33
John-Michael Parker, Representative House District 101

RiverCOG

Nick Giardina, BL Companies
Paul Cicarella, Senate District 34
Laurie McAlwee, South Central Mobility Manager
Kelsey Wentling, CT River Conservancy
Norm Needleman, Senate District 33

Staff Present:

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

1. Call to Order, Roll Call/Introductions

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M. This meeting took place via Zoom. Roll was called by Sam Gold.

2. Auditor's Report – Henry, Raymond & Thompson

Martin Henry stated that the remote audit is complete and there are no issues and therefore no management letter. The audit had clean opinions with no findings.

a. Approval of Auditor's Report

Mr. Bishop moved to accept the auditor's report; second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Ms. Bransfield re-stated for the record that there were no findings and no changes from submitted documents. The year ended in the positive by over \$138,000 due to extra funding from RSG and lower than expected expenditures. However, the majority of it is because our dues were not used as much for matching grants and work for individual towns; this year we used less than the dues received. The ending fund balance at June 30 is 1.2 million. Our annual budget is around that much. Mr. Gold explained that he prefers to have at least a year of operating expense in the bank as the COG's revenues are not guaranteed. This year there was no increase to dues and no increase will be proposed for the next year. Ms. Bransfield thanked Mr. Gold and Ms. Fernald for their work to get us into a good financial position. Mr. Bishop stated that as treasurer he is impressed by the information he has seen in the office presented by Ms. LoPresti and Ms. Fernald and that since Ms. Fernald has come on board there have been clean audits each year. Mr. Cox noted that there is about a 2.2 million dollar budget and an expenditure of a little over 2.1 million. Ms. Fernald explained that out of 1.2 million, \$960,000 is unrestricted, \$105,000 is assigned for work on the RPOCD and \$146,000 is HHW fund restricted. Mr. Gold noted that the larger budget over 2 million included a lot of pass through funds for the DEMHS region. He also expressed a long-term goal of owning an office rather than leasing. Mr. Griswold asked about financial impact due to the ransomware incident; the impact was \$10,000 as insurance paid for the bulk of it which would have been well over \$200,000 if we didn't have the CIRMA insurance.

3. Legislative Agenda/Discussion with Region's Legislators

Conversation began with Senator Needleman discussing the way the session may be run this year and noting that he and Rep. Goupil are both Vice-Chairs on the planning & development committee. He discussed 8-30g and the complications of that proposal and the need for the affordable housing that exists that is not deed restricted to be recognized. He mentioned he is focusing on energy costs and enhanced carbon reduction goals such as battery storage. The committee would like to push anaerobic digestion through as the current approval process is taking 18-24 months. MIRA and its fate were touched upon. Transportation funding was discussed. Now that tolls are off the table a revenue source needs to be found, though he believes there won't be an answer this year. Another topic that he is working on is access to internet and broadband services, though that is federally regulated so it may be tough. Comcast is probably going to be raising prices.

Julia McGrath of Congressman Courtney's office mentioned a couple of federal programs with USDA but noted that there is no money coming into Connecticut even as criteria for the program are met; she is following up on this. There is a current resolution to fund the federal government through March and a follow up to the CARES Act coming. She asked that those who haven't received Covid grants that they expected reach out to her for follow up (julia.mcgrath@mail.house.gov). Mr. Gold noted that the statewide EDA Grant was denied for CT, Ms. McGrath will look into this.

Mr. Gold mentioned for the federal legislators that county equivalency for the COGs is up on the federal register now and that he is working with CT DOT on a replacement for the Special Transportation Fund. He asked about the chances of a transportation infrastructure bill coming, Ms. McGrath indicated that this would be a focus this year.

Lou Mangini of Congresswoman DeLauro's office stated that the Covid bill would re-open the PPP loan program which would benefit the restaurant and entertainment businesses. Rep. DeLauro has been elected the Chair of the appropriations committee, which means that money for programs will increase for the state. He noted that they may be bringing back earmarks which would aid state infrastructure programs. He asked that the COG have some shovel ready projects ready to go once that money becomes available. Rep. Haines asked about water infrastructure being part of the bill in reference to East Hampton. Mr. Cox noted that they are not shovel ready due to lack of funds to even create a design.

Rep. Paul Cicarella noted that he is representing the 34th district which includes part of Durham and sits on the veteran's affairs, housing, public safety and appropriations committees.

Rep. Irene Haines stated that she sits on the transportation, education and higher education committees. She noted the interdependency of issues previously discussed and highlighted invasive species for lakes in the towns she represents. She agreed with Senator Needleman on the issue of anaerobic digestion permitting.

Rep. Christine Palm noted that she sits on the GAE, environment, judiciary and internship committees. She has also been made an assistant majority leader. She is concerned that there may be a lot of dipping into the state's rainy day fund as other funds dwindle and is concerned about Covid denialism among citizens. She also has concerns about the CT DOL being set up able to handle the state's needs. She would like to look further into introducing a bill regarding hydrilla and other invasive species. There will be a separate call for Rep. Palm to dive deeper into this topic. Ms. Lino

mentioned a regional grant for shared equipment to remove some of the dead trees. Rep. Palm also noted that bills are supposed to be limited for this session and those that do not deal with Covid may be looked at last.

Rep. Brandon Chafee of the 33rd district will be on the environmental, transportation and finance committees. He stated that the legislative agenda the COG presented overlaps with his own and is looking forward to helping craft legislation that Rep. Palm discussed.

a. **Approval of 2021 Legislative Agenda**

Ms. Gister moved to approve the 2021 legislative agenda with the title change mentioned (“trash” to be changed to “waste management”); second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

4. **Discussion with Region’s Legislators**

See item #3.

5. **Regional Plan of Conservation & Development Workshops**

There is a workshop this evening concerning regional branding and visioning. Last week’s workshop on demographics was very successful. All will be posted on the RPOCD page on rivercog.org. Next week’s workshop will be on the future land use map.

6. **Chairman & Executive Director’s Reports**

Mr. Gold reported that the HHW budget and new interlocal agreement is being worked on; this will be discussed at the January COG meeting. The COG county equivalency proposal is on the federal registry until Feb. 12, 2021. Mr. Gold will create a template support letter and send out the updated FAQ sheet.

Mr. Gold reported on the long-term recovery planning committee, which is realizing that since the pandemic is still going on that the focus needs to be on response rather than recovery. Without EDA support the resiliency report that GRI is working on will not move on to the next phase. He also noted that the vaccine should be reaching the general population by August or September of 2021.

7. **Other Business**

Ms. Gister noted that the funds for vaccine distribution is federal money to get vaccines to the states but runs out on Feb. 1. She noted that we will need to push our state and federal legislators to help get funding. Ms. Bransfield suggested health district leaders meet with Mr. Gold to set further how the vaccines will be distributed and emphasized that it needs to be very well-planned and that municipal CEOs have a plan in hand perhaps organized by COGs.

8. **Adjournment**

Mr. Bailey moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:28 AM, second by Ms. Bransfield. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti