



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 REGULAR MEETING

January 27, 2021

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Lauren Gister (until 11:00) *
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: Bill Warner *
Killingworth: Cathy Iino *
Lyme: Steve Mattson *
Middlefield: Ed Bailey *
Middletown: Joe Samolis *
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
Christine Palm, Representative House District 36
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
John-Michael Parker, Representative House District 101
Laurie McAlwee, South Central Mobility Manager
Kelsey Wentling, CT River Conservancy
Matt Lesser, State Senator, District 9
Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Jake Manke, DEHMS Coordinator, Region 2
Michael Quinn, Representative House District 82

RiverCOG

Staff Present:

Sam Gold
Torrance Downes
Eliza LoPresti
Margot Burns
Robert Haramut
Megan Jouflas
Kevin Armstrong
Ben Lovejoy
Janice Ehle-Meyer

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.

- a. **New RiverCOG Staff – Kevin Armstrong & Ben Lovejoy** – Mr. Gold introduced RiverCOG’s new GIS Planner and Planning Intern

Public Speaking

Representatives Goupil and Haines both discussed proposed legislation and encouraged anyone to be in touch with them.

Representatives Quinn (Middlefield) and Parker (Durham) introduced themselves to the group.

Representative Palm has introduced a bill to eradicate hydrilla.

Senator Lesser (Middletown, Cromwell) stated that he supports RiverCOG’s efforts on the Transit Integration Study, the Central CT Loop Trail, and a regional fire school.

Ellen Graham of Senator Blumenthal’s office stated that the Senator is busy approving nominations for the new administration, going over Executive Orders and looking at another possible Covid relief package.

2. LCRVMPO Business

- a. **Approval of Minutes of 12/2/20 & 12/15/20 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meetings**

Mr. McDonald moved to approve the minutes of the December 2, 2020 meeting; second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the December 15, 2020 meeting; second by Mr. Bishop. Vote was unanimous in favor.

- b. **FY 20 Obligated Project List**

This is a list of projects that were funded last year which are now up for public review. This program follows the pattern of the TIP

c. **CMAQ Project Solicitation**

The congestion mitigation and air quality program is Federal money sub-allocated to regions. Applications are due to DOT in early April. If we get any in, they need to be prioritized at the March meeting. This is a reimbursement program at 80%, not a grant. The projects need to demonstrate they can reduce congestion and improve air quality; trails are eligible. There was discussion on applying for the Middletown Trolley or expansion of the Last Mile program or other transit services.

d. **Haddam Swing Bridge Walkway**

CT DOT has decided to incorporate a walkway on the southern side of the swing bridge as part of the upcoming overhaul project. This will provide a safe pedestrian connection that will benefit both the towns of Haddam and East Haddam. The CT DOT is asking for the non-federal match of between \$300-500 thousand dollars. LOTCIP cannot be used for this project and DEEP does not have funds to put toward it. Mr. Salvatore asked Mr. Gold to look into options with our state legislators.

e. **Other Transportation Updates**

- i. **Rt. 66 Corridor Study** – The final public meeting was held and the final project is up on the website.

Ms. Bransfield thanked CT DOT, Mr. Gold and Mr. Haramut on their leadership on the study and noted that Portland received a community connectivity grant over \$525,000 because of areas of improvement identified in the study. She also congratulated Old Saybrook on getting their community connectivity grant. Mr. Fortuna noted that between the two towns they received 1.2 million of the 5.5 million available, which demonstrates that smaller towns can be competitive in the grant process.

- ii. **Transit Integration Study** – Has wrapped up and now the two transit districts are working together on the MOU between them and the CT DOT to discuss next steps. Ms. Francis reported that the MOU committee finalized their language to be brought before the districts and then to CT DOT. Both Ms. Francis and Mr. Samolis noted that there has been a great working relationship between MAT & ETD. The result of the cooperative expansion will be a more resilient transit district.
- iii. **MPO Certification** – The four-year review is coming up in March. There is not yet an agenda. There will be a brief presentation on the process at the February meeting. There will be virtual sessions this year rather than a full day in-person review. There will probably be a meeting at some point with the MPO board.

At this time Mr. Gold asked Mr. Wright of CT DOT when the next solicitation for corridor studies will come up as he is interested in a study of the Central CT loop trail which includes expansion and connection of the Airline Trail in our region. Mr. Wright stated that there was a recent meeting of the corridor study committee and that a solicitation letter should be sent out before the end of March.

3. **Covid-19**

The reports on baseline resiliency by region that were created by GRI are coming out. Mr. Gold has not yet received the reports for DEMHS Regions 2 or 3. The reports are to be used to apply for future funding. There had previously been a statewide grant to the EDA which was not approved. The COGs are leading the effort of reapplying based on EDA feedback.

Ms. Francis, Region 2 REPT Chair, wants to make sure that all CEOs have attended a training session on how to use the unmet needs form developed by the state. It is to be used if there is an unmet need that cannot be handled locally. It will be kicked up to the regional then the state level as necessary. It will also be used as a tool to aggregate the needs in the regions and share best practices.

Mr. Manke, DEHMS Region 2 Coordinator, asked each municipality to identify a single person as the local point of contact for the unmet needs form. He also discussed the dynamic guidance on vaccination locations. Municipal partners need to work with their health departments and the state. Ms. Bransfield asked if there are going to be changes to the VAMs system and explained what Portland is doing to help the senior citizens in that town with vaccination appointments. The processes in other towns were discussed as well. Mr. Manke asked that towns with best practices summarize that in an email to him. He asked that CEOs keep accurate, detailed records to include staff time for possible reimbursement from FEMA and to let him know of any concerns in the process as a whole.

4. **LCRVCOG Business**

a. **Approval of 2021 Dues Rate**

There will be no increase in dues this year. It will remain at the base amount of \$6,215.35 plus \$0.62 per capita based on population numbers from the DPH.

Mr. Fortuna made a motion to approve the dues rate; seconded by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. **Legislative Update**

Mr. Gold reported that he has to give a report on possible regional tax assessment and PSAPP services to OPM by March 1 in order to receive the fourth quarter RSG payment. He will have a report ready for the February meeting.

Mr. Lovejoy gave an update on current bills/concepts going through the legislative process.

c. **New IT Firm Recommendation**

Mr. Gold reported that we are not ready to name a firm but he is looking from authorization from the board to pursue the firm we do ultimately select or report to the Executive committee.

Mr. Fortuna moved to authorize the executive committee to approve Mr. Gold's recommendation for IT firms. Second by Mr. Griswold. Vote was unanimous in favor. Discussion: Mr. Fortuna asked who was on the interview panel with Chairman Salvatore suggesting that a few CEOs be on the board. Mr. Fortuna offered the services of his IT professional. If anyone else wants to volunteer they should contact Mr. Gold, who mentioned

that he will brief the executive committee and interested board members with the recommendation from the RFP.

d. Hydrilla Update & Hydrilla ERT Video Endorsement

Mr. Cox moved to endorse the Hydrilla ERT Video; second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Ms. Burns discussed an invasive species grant from DEEP due Feb. 12, the funding of which comes from the boat registration fee program. She would like to have a pilot project for hydrilla mitigation in the river. In lieu of that she would like to apply for \$50,000 funding to procure a portable CD3 boat cleaning system, owned by the COG, which could be rotated through towns, marinas, boat launches and lakes in the region. An educational kiosk is included. There is a grant match needed and the system would need to be stored in the winter somewhere. There was a general consensus that the towns are interested in this.

Mr. Smith moved to approve applying to the grant program; second by Mr. Bailey. Vote was unanimous in favor.

e. Renewal of Regional Election Monitor Contract

The election monitor's two-year contract ended at the end of December. Mr. Gold proposes that the funding come out of RSG as in the past contract. The consensus was that Mr. Gold should reach out to Ms. Conklin to begin contract negotiation.

Ms. Iino asked if the ballot boxes provided by the state in November can be used for referendums. Mr. Gold will reach out to the secretary of state's office to discuss.

f. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

The plan has gone to CT DEEP and they will be sending it to FEMA soon. Once we hear back the plan will need to be passed through the COG and each town.

g. HHW Budget Proposal

This year it is being proposed to hold four collections only at the Essex location along with the four satellite collections. Traffic police will need to be hired for the Essex events. There is a proposal from Anchor Engineering to address the bay roof which is very expensive. The interlocal agreement with the CRERPA towns is set to expire in 2021 and options are being explored.

Ms. Bransfield moved to approve the household hazardous waste budget; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Discussion: Ms. Iino asked for an explanation of the SLAM fund; turns out this is based on a complicated formula, up 10% from last year. Mr. Gold noted that the current language and formula is confusing and the HHW committee should revise and clarify the language. Under the existing format there is not much money given out and the balance in the fund has grown. There is time to figure this out before the SLAM fund will be distributed as that happens at the end of the collection year.

Ms. Ehle-Meyer discussed CCSM meetings/waste at this time. CCSM has been meeting to attempt to address MIRA issues, a final report should be issued soon. Ms. Francis noted that the focus is on proposed legislative items such as extended producer responsibility, an updated bottle bill and state mandated unit pricing on waste. The legislators need to know that those efforts are supported. Ms. Ehle-Meyer reported a possible pilot program in the region for recycling plastic boat-wrap film.

h. Agriculture Grant

No till equipment for the region is being looked at while keeping an eye out for possible grants.

i. Parcel Data Permission

A request was received from Eversource for parcel data for the town of Deep River, Portland, and East Haddam. Those town indicated that is permissible for RiverCOG to give them their data.

j. Hybrid Meeting Best Practices

Mr. Gold will create a memo for ideas for best practices to make sure that people that call or video into a hybrid meeting are afforded the same amount of time and recognition as those that attend in person.

Mr. Bailey moved to add to the agenda a report from the nomination committee and elections; second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

k. Report from the Nominating Committee and Election of Officers

The nominating committee agreed to re-nominate all existing officers, those officers have agreed to serve again on the executive committee.

Ms. Bransfield moved to endorse the slate of officers as recommended by the nominating committee; second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

The COG officers for the upcoming year remain Anthony Salvatore (Chairman), Lauren Gister (Vice Chair), Edward Bailey (Secretary), Noel Bishop (Treasurer), Cathy Iino (At-large) and Tim Griswold (At-large).

5. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold reported that he has to notify the landlord of our intentions on renewing the lease by the end of January. He will tell Mr. Dresty that we are staying for now but we are not amendable to an extension of the lease.

Mr. Gold gave a financial report – we are within the parameters of our 1.8 million dollar operating budget, though we will go over on IT expenses for the year.

Mr. Gold explained that his nomination to remain the Chairman of the CT Association of COGs was pulled at the last minute over concerns on the RPIP bill language. He is still the acting chair and feels the situation will be smoothed over and he will remain chair.

6. Other Business

a. DEMHS Update

Mr. Downes will create a one-page memo to include a DEMHS and Gateway Commission update and email it out in the interest of time.

7. Adjournment

Ms. Gister moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:14 AM, second by Ms. Iino. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti