



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

February 24, 2021

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 * (9:15 – 10:00)
Haddam: Bob McGarry *
Killingworth: Cathy Iino *
Lyme: Steve Mattson *
Middlefield: Ed Bailey * (until 9:30)
Middletown: Joe Samolis *
Old Lyme: Tim Griswold *
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna * (until 9:30)
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
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor
Christine Goupil, Representative House District 35
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Laurie McAlwee, South Central Mobility Manager
Attorney Steve Mednick
Senator Christine Cohen
Kurt Salmoraghi, FHWA
Cathy Lezon, Eversource
Jennifer Carrier, FTA
Jonathan Ferrigno, Eversource
Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
Leah Sirmin, FTA

RiverCOG

TJ Magnoti, Eversource
Erik Shortell, FHWA
Laurie Giannotti, Gateway Commission

Staff Present:

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

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

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:02 A.M. This meeting took place via Zoom. Roll was called by Eliza LoPresti.

Attorney Steve Mednick spoke about efforts to get executive orders (EOs) regarding municipal referenda and absentee ballot eligibility. Atty. Mednick encourage all to join the Governor's call this same afternoon to explain the need for certainty in knowing the EOs will be extended beyond April 19th so there is time to prepare for referenda as necessary. Ms. Iino asked if there is possibility of extending absentee balloting; Atty. Mednick stated yes, the rules that were in place for the presidential cycle extend to the municipal cycle for primaries and special elections. There is an attempt to get this extended to referenda. He also stated that he is getting mixed signals as to whether the installed ballot boxes can be used and is trying to gain clarity on this issue. Ms. Bransfield suggested that EOs should be extended through the fiscal year since that is how municipalities and the state operate. Mr. McGarry stressed that the EOs shouldn't be closed out until the threat of emergency is gone, especially since there are new variants of Covid. Chairman Salvatore noted that if a town's budget is not passed then they need to hold a second referendum and there isn't time in between to do the absentee ballot process.

Ms. Francis asked if anything prevents allowing remote participation in meetings if all other standards are met (the board itself meeting in person, FOIA standards are met, etc.). Atty. Mednick referenced the speaker phone decision from the early 1980s which allows for remote meetings for the boards; this is the jumping off point for further exploration of this with today's technology so long as the elements of decision 41 can be complied with. He recommended speaking with town attorneys or asking the FOI commission for clarity. Ms. Gister asked about voting via remote access; this also still needs interpretation.

Cathy Lezon of Eversource stated that the company has bill aid for those residential and business customers that are unable to pay due to Covid-related financial issues. This program protects them from disconnection but they are still responsible for balances, and can possibly join a payment program. There are upcoming webinars that highlight these programs along with the free energy efficiency programs.

Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor, reported that ten COG towns have had FOI requests pertaining to the presidential election. The requests are for great amounts of data and lists. The FOI emails are tied to several people's personal emails that are affiliated with the Fight Voter Fraud organization. This is occupying a lot of the registrars' time. She noted that someone is drawing conclusions from the data which will most likely be released to the press. Ms. Conklin also discussed HBs 58 & 59 regarding early and absentee voting in which testimony concluded yesterday. She believes that no-excuse absentee voting will pass.

2. **Legislation Reports – Area Legislators**

Senator Needleman stated that he doesn't believe that Sen. Looney's bill to have a statewide mill rate will be approved and that he will fight that proposal. There is an effort for possible incoming data centers to have a tax break. Most of our towns would not be impacted by this because we don't have a municipal electric company, though this is a new industry with potential for the state. Mr. Griswold and Ms. Bransfield asked about costs related to purchasing police bodycams and storing the footage from resident state troopers. The state is mandating it to be stored but is not providing funds, which are excessive. Sen. Needleman is proposing a per officer cost. This issue is currently being debated. Ms. Bransfield noted that this needs to be acted upon as the police accountability law was passed but there are no plans to roll it out though it affects every town's budget.

Senator Cohen stated that there will be a hearing on many of the items coming out of CCSM; there already was a hearing on cylinders, tires, etc. and language on that bill is being tweaked. She also stated that she will be voting no on the data center bill based on environmental concerns. Chairman Salvatore mentioned hydrilla and asked her to work with Ms. Burns on that project since it's a growing problem that effects the majority of our towns.

Brianna DeVivo of Senator Murphy's office stated that he is soliciting projects due to the reauthorization of FAST Act projects. She will send out more information to the group.

Ben Lovejoy previously distributed the updated bill tracker to the CEOs and reported on a few of the bills that are making their way through the legislative system. He noted that there seems to be a broad theme around equity in many of the bills. Mr. Bishop requested weekly updates on bills that affect municipalities.

3. **Vaccination Report – Scott Martinson of Connecticut River Area Health District**

Mr. Martinson was not available to attend the meeting but he passed along a written update that Mr. Downes read into the record. There was a vaccination clinic held on Feb. 22 in Old Saybrook in which 6,053 vaccinations were given. 1,414 of these were second doses. No adverse reactions occurred. Mr. Bishop initiated a discussion on vaccination issues that towns are facing. Ms. Gister explained that you can schedule both doses if you call the state number but if you go through VAMS you cannot schedule the second dose, so there are some issues with people running up right against their deadline without the second dose appointment. Ms. Francis noted that the biggest problem is limited supply.

a. **Vaccination Transportation – Joe Comerford**

MAT and ETD are both offering free transportation to vaccination sites or testing sites regardless of age.

4. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of January 27, 2021 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meetings

Ms. Gister moved to approve the minutes of the January 27, 2021 meeting; second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. MPO Certification Review – FHWA Presentation/Board Input

Next week is the certification review that occurs every four years. Kurt Salmoiraghi of the CT Division of Federal Highway and Leah Sirmin of Federal Transit gave a short presentation outlining what will happen during the certification review. Mr. Haramut will follow up with the CEOs for written comment (due March 26).

c. Draft 22-23 UPWP Update

Mr. Haramut has begun updating this document which includes things such as a prospectus, description of staff, FAST Act goals, financial tables etc., then broken down into the five transportation planning tasks (admin/management, data collection, planning activities, other technical assistance and public outreach). Funding is similar to the past two years. The draft should be out in April for public comment and hopefully the board will endorse it in May.

d. CMAQ Update

The CMAQ (congestion mitigation air quality) report was distributed and discussed at the January meeting. Mr. Haramut sent brief rating criteria which will be discussed at the March meeting when the projects will be prioritized. So far Mr. Haramut has only heard from Mr. Comerford about projects that were bus study items: the trolley for Main St., Middletown and the XtraMile on-demand service around downtown Middletown.

5. LCRVCOG Business

a. Appointment of Laurie Giannotti as Gateway Commission Second Regional Representative

Ms. Iino made a motion to appoint Ms. Giannotti as the Gateway Commission Second Regional Representative; seconded by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor. Discussion: Mr. Downes gave a brief description of the Gateway Commission as the governing body of viewshed for eight river towns. Currently, Raul deBrigard of Haddam is the first regional rep. He was appointed by Midstate, before the merger into RiverCOG. Ms. Giannotti of Deep River will be the Southern town representative.

b. Letter of Support – Haddam Remediation Project

Haddam is requesting a brownfield remediation grant for the Scovill Hoe property that is currently CT DOT owned. The Phase 1 study is already complete and not much remediation is required. A letter of support from the COG is needed to support their grant application.

Mr. Cox moved to submit a letter of support from the COG; second by Mr. Griswold. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. MIRA/Trash Update

A written update will be sent as MIRA board members Mr. Bailey and Mr. Fortuna were currently at that meeting and unavailable to give an update.

d. Household Hazardous Waste Update

Ms. Ehle-Meyer reported that the schedule for 2021 has been set, flyers will be going out to transfer stations shortly. The SLAM calculation is complete. Six towns will be receiving money in total of \$2,174. The roof at the HHW facility is rusty and we are now looking at spot repairs instead of replacing the whole thing which will be very costly.

RiverCOG is holding another composter sale. April 11 is the pickup day. RiverCOG is working with the Rockfall Foundation on sessions regarding waste.

e. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

The plan went to the state with no comments from them. It has now been forwarded to FEMA.

f. Hydrilla Update

Ms. Burns offered regional testimony toward HB 6384 about adding language to fund the development of a plan of eradication. She is working with Sen. Murphy and Blumenthal's offices on the appropriations bill which may result in funding a program with the Army corps of engineers.

g. Lower Connecticut River Land Trust Update

This agenda item was skipped

h. DEMHS Update

Mr. Downes will prepare and distribute a written update.

6. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

a. PSAP/Tax Assessment Report to OPM

Chairman Salvatore stated that the CT COG group sent a report to OPM regarding regionalization of PSAPs and tax assessment servicers. He believes both of these to be bad ideas for various reasons.

7. Other Business

None

8. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:37 AM, second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti