



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

March 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
Haddam: Bob McGarry *
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
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Monitor
Christine Goupil, Representative House District 35
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Laurie McAlwee, South Central Mobility Manager
Jonathan Ferrigno, Eversource
Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
TJ Magnoli, Eversource
Marilyn Gleeson, Gateway Commission
David Maiden, Westbrook
Jim Tripp, Portland
Kelly Sterner, Essex

RiverCOG

Ellen Graham, Senator Blumenthal's Office
Louis Mangini, Congresswoman DeLauro's Office
Nick Giardina, BL Companies

Staff Present:

Torrance Downes
Eliza LoPresti
Margot Burns
Robert Haramut
Megan Jouflas
Kevin Armstrong
Ben Lovejoy
Paula Fernald

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.

Mr. Smith moved to add agenda item 3k – Consultant for Completion of Bike/Ped Plan; second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

a. Congressional & Senatorial Reps to discuss Federal Relief Act Funding

Julia McGrath of Congressman Courtney's office addressed questions regarding the funding from the newly signed Federal Relief Act. She had been provided some questions ahead of the meeting and in response distributed some written information about the funding to the CEOs. She asked for a list of further questions in writing. She is keeping a list as well in order to ask at the federal level. Lou Mangini of Congresswoman DeLauro's office, Brianna DeVivo of Senator Murphy's office and Ellen Graham of Senator Blumenthal's office helped answer questions where they were able (as their offices do not yet have all the information).

Since counties are receiving funding, and CT doesn't have county government and the COGs are not yet recognized as county equivalent, the funds will be sent to the state and distributed to towns. Federal Treasury is writing the implementation guidance so the state will not have say in how towns spend the money. Mr. Mangini suggested using guidance found on the Treasury website used for the CARES Act. He also mentioned another relief/recovery bill already being discussed for summer that will have funds for infrastructure spending and job training included. It was asked whether or not municipalities should put projects in their budgets that could be completed with the forthcoming funds, since they are supposed to be used for "unbudgeted" items. There was no immediate answer, but Mr. Mangini suggested getting sewer, water or infrastructure projects shovel-ready for when the funding hits.

It was asked if the funds would come from the state through OPM; Mr. Gold will ask Martin Heft. It was asked if the funding could be used for town matches pertinent to infrastructure projects that are already planned; it was Ms. McGrath and Mr. Mangini's understanding is that the funds could go to a cost-share in this situation but she would like to get a definite yes from Treasury.

i. Ideas for Regional Projects with Federal Funding: Some ideas discussed for supporting a new regional service with some portion of the funding were record digitization and online permitting to ease interactions in building departments and perhaps be able to share building officials and other staff more easily.

Carol Conklin brought up that none of the smaller towns can afford a tourism presence in larger publications. She suggested a regional pool of advertising and design money to promote tourism.

ii. Online Permitting and Record Digitization: David Maiden, Westbrook ZEO, spoke to how that town implemented online permitting and digitization of records. Mr. Gold will be in touch with all towns to see who might be interested in pursuing a project like this.

2. Presentation – Ethical Influence, Carter Johnson, Principal

Ms. Johnson’s firm has been hired by state DPH to conduct community outreach around the vaccination of residents. Ethical Influence is offering trusted messenger forums to equip community leaders with information related to vaccination. These are ninety-minute sessions that include a physician, Q&A and sharing best practices. They focus on equity and breaking down barriers and serve about 20-30 people at a time.

3. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of February 24, 2021 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Meetings

Mr. Cox moved to approve the minutes of the February 24, 2021 meeting; second by Mr. Fortuna. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. FY 21 TIP Amendment #1, Statewide, mast arm and span pole inspections, project #0170-3417, increase cost estimate

Mr. Cox moved to approve FY21 TIP Amendment #1; second by Mr. McDonald. Vote was unanimous in favor.

c. FY21 TIP Amendment #2, Old Saybrook, replace bridge 01386 on RT 154 over Back Rive, project #0105-0209, change of funding source/new project

Mr. Bishop moved to approve FY21 TIP Amendment #2; second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

d. FY21 TIP Amendment #3, District 2, replace traffic control signals at various locations, project #0172-0496, from FY18 TIP/new project

Mr. Cox moved to approve FY21 TIP Amendment #3; second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Cox asked for clarification of the amount as there appeared to be a typo in the amendment. The total is \$7,800,000 (for all, not just in our district) with it being 100% federal.

e. FY21 TIP Amendment #4, Cromwell/Middletown, CCTV installation on RT 9, project #0171-0416, increase cost estimate

This TIP amendment is actually a TIP action. Actions are minor revisions to the TIP that do not require board approval. This will be bundled with the next two agenda items as TIP Action #1 when sent to the state and the feds.

f. FY21 TIP Amendment #5, Haddam, replace two T-type intersections with roundabouts and bridge 00622 on RT 82/154, project #0060-0160, new ROW/FD, phases and move CON

This TIP amendment is actually a TIP action. Actions are minor revisions to the TIP that do not require board approval. This will be bundled with agenda items 3e & 3g as TIP Action #1 when sent to the state and the feds.

g. FY21 TIP Amendment #6, East Haddam, replace bridge 06887 on RT 151 over Shady Brook, project #0040-0144, increase cost estimate

This TIP amendment is actually a TIP action. Actions are minor revisions to the TIP that do not require board approval. This will be bundled with agenda items 3e & 3f as TIP Action #1 when sent to the state and the feds.

h. Adopt public transportation agency safety plan (PTASP) performance measures (ETD, MTD, Dattco)

Ms. Iino moved to adopt the public transportation agency safety plan performance measures; second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

DISCUSSION: this one motion covers all three transit agencies (ETD, MTD & Dattco)

i. CMAQ project review and prioritization – Middletown Area Transit & Middletown (XtraMile-Trolley)

Proposals are due to CT DOT by April 7. The only project that we have is for the XtraMile and Trolley Service for MTD. This would create a new on-demand transit zone tied together with the planned circulated trolley service for downtown Middletown.

Ms. Iino moved to support prioritization of the Middletown Area Transit & Middletown – XtraMile-Trolley project. Second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

j. Other Transportation Updates

Mr. Haramut reported that the draft UPWP was sent to the state and the feds on March 12. Comments are due back to us by April 29, with probable board endorsement at the May COG & MPO meeting. Applications for corridor studies are due to CT DOT by July 1. Currently we are looking at the Airline to Farmington Trail connector project; if any other projects come up please let Mr. Haramut know. The consultant is meeting with the final town of the regional transportation safety program next week. A draft is forthcoming. Ms. Iino asked Mr. Haramut to look into the state & local bridge project as Killingworth has an application in that should have had an answer by February.

Mr. Comerford updated that the MOA between the two transit districts is still ongoing between the transit districts and CT DOT. They have seen an increase in transportation for vaccinations.

k. Consultant for Completion of Bike/Ped Plan

Mr. Gold explained the RFP process for the completion of the bike/ped plan. There were four applicants who are all being interviewed this afternoon. The budget for this will not exceed \$50,000.

Ms. Francis asked if Durham's (and others) complete streets group would have access to meeting with the consultant about the plan; Mr. Gold stated that would be important.

Mr. Cox moved to authorize the Executive Committee to approve the recommendation for the plan consultant and to enter into negotiation with said firm. Second by Mr. Bailey. Vote was unanimous in favor

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. Legislation Update

Mr. Gold reported that he provided testimony on bills regarding affordable housing, statewide property tax and statewide GIS. He mentioned HB 6477, an act concerning volunteer fire and ambulance companies, which may affect the towns by adding volunteer emergency personnel to the state OSHA.

Mr. Lovejoy gave an update which was previously distributed to the group. Most of the committees have now passed their JF (favorable, joint) deadline, which means that they are done meeting and the bills have been sent for full consideration. There are still some large agenda items hanging out like the Governor's budget, online gambling, recreation marijuana, vaccine mandates, right to die, affordable housing, virtual net metering, etc.

Chairman Salvatore asked if municipalities are required to have ethics policies. Mr. Lovejoy will double check this but believes it was voted out.

b. Regional Housing Plan Update and Consultant Selection

Four firms responded to the call for RFPs to create a regional housing plan. Three were interviewed with the interview committee ultimately deciding to split the contract into two sections and award it to two different firms (SLR & Goman + York) that they felt would do the best work for that part of the plan.

Ms. Bransfield moved to engage the two firms as recommended by Executive Director Gold; second by Ms. Gister. Vote was unanimous in favor.

DISCUSSION: there will be no match asked of the towns, the budget is covered by RSG funds which will be about \$110,000 total. The plan will most likely begin in late spring/early summer. The four towns that are doing their own plans separately will be included as annexes so that the bigger picture of the whole region can be formed.

c. Appointment of Marilyn Gleeson as Gateway Commission Third Regional Representative

Ms. Bransfield moved to appoint Ms. Gleeson as the third Regional Representative of the COG to the Gateway Commission; second by Mr. Bishop. Vote was unanimous in favor.

d. Regional Election Monitor Contract

The contract is for \$14,000 for two years with \$7,000 split evenly over both. State funds will be used to pay for this contract, not local dues. The contract has been changed to reflect the calendar year, not the fiscal year, as this works better for election cycles.

Ms. Bransfield moved to approve the contract with the Regional Election Monitor; second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimous in favor.

e. Regional Plan Update

Ms. Joufflas reported that a draft of the plan has gone to the Regional Planning Committee for review. A special meeting will be held March 31 to review their comments. At the end of April the draft plan will go out for public review for 65 days with the COG hopefully approving the plan at the July meeting. There will be a public meeting to kick off that portion of the plan on April 26.

f. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

The plan is still in FEMA's hands. The timeline for comments from them is two weeks to six months.

g. Lower Connecticut River Land Trust Update

The second meeting of the Advanced Collaboration Assistance Program Committee was held during the last regular LCRLT meeting. The group is working on their vision and mission statements. The consultant for the project gave a presentation on different models of collaborations that already exist. There is the possibility of funding for taking the next steps in a collaboration scenario.

h. Hydrilla Update

A bill came out of the environment committee but did not include language regarding rivers. Representative Palm is trying to attach a friendly amendment to include that language and has been working with Ms. Burns and Kelsey Wentling of the Connecticut River Conservancy on this.

The grant application for the boat cleaning station has been submitted for \$42,000, with an \$11,000 match from the towns. There is some question on how to get rid of the waste water though other states have used these and have come up with solutions.

Ms. Burns sent some language in to the federal FAST Act program regarding implementation of a hydrilla task force. Sen. Blumenthal's office is working with us on initiating the Army Corps of Engineers to work on hydrilla.

The Northeast Aquatic Species panel would like to put in a grant for summer boat stewards and has asked if RiverCOG would subcontract to hire them through our agency, which was agreed to. This would be for summer 2022-2024 (possibly).

Ms. Burns will be giving a presentation to the Friends of Whalebone Cove focusing on success stories of hydrilla abatement.

5. Chairman & Executive Director's Reports

Chairman Salvatore had no report.

Mr. Gold reported that there is a grant application through DECD for economic development projects for six of the COGs without economic development regions. We would partner with the Middlesex

Chamber on a comprehensive economic development strategy and a number of other projects. This will hopefully be funded over two years with no local match.

He also reported that he has been in discussions with the building landlord over the current lease, which expires in June. We may be renewing the lease for three years with an out clause or, if that is not acceptable to the landlord, we may only renew the lease for one year.

6. Other Business

a. DEMHS Update

Mr. Downes sent a memo to the towns within Region 2. The 2018 grant is expiring on June 30. There are projects in the works to spend that money down. One will come to fruition at the end of the time period, which is a \$70,000 allocation for a PSAP to PSAP program, though quotes have not yet been submitted to RiverCOG. There was a reallocation of \$53,000 allocated for electronic signs.

Mr. Lovejoy is assisting Mr. Downes in tracking down MOUs for the FY 19 & FY20 grants.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Fortuna moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:55 AM, second by Mr. Smith. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti