



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

June 26, 2024 – 8:45 am

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Pat Bandzes *
Clinton: Michelle Benivegna *
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Duane Gates *
Durham: Brendan Rea
East Haddam: Irene Haines *
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Carey Duques *
Haddam: Bob McGarry *
Killingworth: Eric Couture *
Lyme: David Lahm *
Middlefield: Jim Irish *
Middletown: Ben Florsheim *
Old Lyme: Martha Shoemaker *
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna *
Portland: Ryan Curley *
Westbrook: John Hall *

MPO Members:

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

*present

Others Present:

Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
Kathryn Russell, Deep River
Laurie McElwee, The Kennedy Collective
Nicole Velardi, DEMHS
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Brigitte Arcoite & Rebecca Stanton, Sustainable CT Fellows
Erik Shortell, FHWA
Jeremy Crossland & Michael Greer, US Army Corps of Engineers
TJ Magnoli, Eversource
Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office

Staff Present: Sam Gold, Robert Haramut, Kevin Armstrong, Susie Beckman, Margot Burns, Megan Jouflas, Janice Ehle/Meyer, Marcos Gonzalez, Brendan Geraghty, Eliza LoPresti

RiverCOG

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 8:50 A.M. The meeting was conducted in person at the Gillette Castle State Park visitor’s center and via Zoom.

2. Public Speaking

Julia McGrath of Congressman Courtney’s office stated that WRDA text has been authorized for 2024, which makes the CT River basin an area eligible to partner with the Army Corps and others to combat invasive species; it also expands the watershed to include affected lakes. She mentioned the compost and food waste pilot program, applications for which are due September 4, along with the lead hazard grant program that is open for another round until August 19.

Representative Haines noted that the CGA will be in special session as of tomorrow and will have an update on bills after that day.

Erin McBride of Sen. Murphy’s office discussed legislation that he has introduced such as on mental health in schools, the job corps act, public housing, emergency response, and more. The Senator finished his annual walk through the state.

Mr. Gold noted that Ms. Conklin, the Regional Election Advisor, was unable to attend the meeting but that many towns have had changes in registrars, the most recent being the Republican registrar in Westbrook. She is available to assist towns with registrars training.

Chairman Salvatore reminded everyone that new legislation requires ballot boxes to have cameras on them. Ms. Haines noted that the town of East Haddam will be opening ballots at a location away from Town Hall in case there is something in them. Mr. Lahm stated that early voting is killing towns. Mr. Fortuna stated that the primary and other small elections cost Old Saybrook \$9,500 with early voting and the presidential election will cost about \$18,000. He will be budgeting \$25,000/year for early voting expenses.

3. Presentation – Army Corps Aquatic Plant Control Program – Michael Greer & Jeremy Crossland

Mr. Crossland and Mr. Greer gave a presentation on cost-sharing program for aquatic invasive species. Timelines for treatments were discussed. The presentation can be viewed [here](#), starting at 21:24.

4. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of May 29, 2024 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Special Meeting

Ms. Haines moved to approve the minutes of the May 29, 2024 regular meeting; second by Ms. Shoemaker. Vote was unanimous in favor.

b. Central Connecticut Loop Trail Study Update

The study is at about the halfway point. There was a public workshop and presentation on June 10 in Middletown that was well-attended. The next steps are to define the future alignment and concepts, in the fall hold another public meeting, and to wrap the study up next spring.

c. Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Action Plan Update

The plan has just started to get underway, there will be bi-weekly check-in meetings. The consultants, FHI Studio are drafting logos and creating base mapping. An advisory committee meeting will soon be set up to meet within the next 4-6 weeks and pop-up events will occur this summer. Once the study gets rolling it should be about 18 months to completion.

d. Other Transportation – (Active Transportation Micro Grants)

The CT DOT is running the active transportation micro grant program again; these are for \$5,000 or less. There were 3 applicants in the first quarter and 3 more in the second. Funds were allocated within 4 weeks of the submittal. Mr. Haramut thinks there will be about 5 quarters worth of granting before the funds are spent and the CT DOT may keep or expand the program after that.

e. Thriving Communities Grant Update

The federal grant is for technical assistance to study transportation-oriented development (TOD) near the region's three train stations and one bus terminal in Clinton, Westbrook, Old Saybrook, and Middletown. WSP and Accelerator for America are the consultants assigned to the project. Miranda Creative and Jacobsen Engineering have been brought on as sub-consultants to do community engagement and wastewater studies, respectively. The project will run through summer 2025. There will be larger public engagement meetings held this summer. The website for the project is now live at www.rivercog.org/tod

f. Update from Estuary Transit District

On May 28 they launched many new services which are running well and receiving good feedback. Ridership is growing in the two new Xtra Mile areas, East Hampton and Madison/Guilford. The park connect service to Hammonasset has also started for the summer.

5. LCRVCOG Business

a. Authorization for Executive Director to Sign Agreement between RiverCOG & Estuary Transit District (motion)

Mr. Cox moved to authorize the Executive Director to sign the agreement between RiverCOG and ETD for the shared Planner; seconded by Mr. Couture. Vote was unanimously approved.

b. Authorization for Executive Director to Negotiate and Sign Contract with Gateway (motion)

Ms. Haines moved to authorize the Executive Director to negotiate and sign the contract with the Gateway Commission; second by Mr. McGarry. Vote was unanimously approved.

c. Approval of RiverCOG SOW for FY25 Regional Services Grant from OPM (motion)

Ms. Haines moved to approve the RiverCOG scope of work for the FY25 Regional Services Grant from OPM of \$550,145.71; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimously approved.

d. RiverCOG Personnel Policies Update (motion)

Ms. Haines moved to approve the update to the RiverCOG personnel policies; second by Mr. Cox. Vote was unanimous in favor.

e. Regional Waste Authority Grant Update

Ms. Ehle/Meyer and Mr. Gold are still working with CT DEEP and Mr. Needleman. The executive committee asked Mr. Gold to push a little harder to get the scope finalized and the budget started. He will follow up with Mr. Needleman.

f. Household Hazardous Waste Update

The interlocal agreement has been signed by all and sent to all the participating towns. Three HHW collections have occurred so far this year and we are up about 9% in participation. Two paper shredding events have occurred, these are up about 40% over last year.

Staff is in process of getting a letter to Mr. Needleman about closing of the permanent facility in Essex. Ms. Ehle/Meyer and Mr. Gonzalez have begun the application for a federal grant on a study regarding food waste and if it can be turned into propane to be used by River Valley Transit. The Sustainable CT Fellows will be collecting data on food waste from all towns.

g. Shoreline Soup Kitchen and Pantry Update

SSKP is concentrating on summer meals for kids right now, please help support the lunch or backpack program(s) in your towns. Clinton residents have been raising funds to pay off the school lunch debts of students so that they can receive lunch when they return in the fall.

h. Regional Agriculture Council Update

The farmers are busy farming in the summer. RAC representatives are needed from Chester, Cromwell, Essex, Middlefield, Old Lyme, and Portland.

i. Regional Housing Committee Update

The committee is working on the methodology for a regional housing needs assessment (RHNA). The state will be working on this too, but a draft is not expected until January 2025. Our region and committee would like to be well-informed about the RHNA by the time that happens so they can actively participate in that process. The RHC will

participate in quarterly workshops for the RHNA, two of which have already occurred. The committee is hoping to have a report in January on the process.

j. Invasive Species Update

There will be a public information meeting at the East Haddam town hall on June 27th about the Army Corps hydrilla project. Hydrilla treatments in the river now have tentative dates that will be forwarded to everyone. So far Ms. Burns and her crew have been out nine days pulling water chestnut from Deep River to Haddam and with the Jonah Center crew on the Mattabessett. They are applying for a permit for treatment there as well. She is hopeful to contain or eradicate it in the lower river. Seasonal staff and an intern are working with her this year.

k. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

The annual meeting will be held in person on the evening of August 15 with dinner at 5:30 and a presentation at 6:00 by Hank Gruner, a herpetologist. He will discuss vernal pools and the new frog species recently found. It looks like the LCRLT will be receiving a technical services grant from the National Park Services to work on the regional conservation plan.

l. DEMHS Update

Ms. Velardi thanked those that participated in the recent intense field exercise. She asked that all remind their schools that their drill logs are due July 1. Each town will have a logon through the emergency management system; there will be an overview and training on July 9. Please remember to log into web DOC to add where cooling centers are and when they are activated as that information is used by 211. Applications for the state and local cybersecurity grants are due July 19. The REPT bylaws are in their final draft and will be presented at the August 24 meeting.

6. Chairman's & Executive Director's Reports

Mr. Gold reminded all that the July COG and MPO meeting will be held virtually.

Chairman Salvatore commended RiverCOG staff and Mr. Gold on a good job this year.

a. Executive Director's Annual Evaluation

Chairman Salvatore stated the executive committee reviewed Mr. Gold's evaluation and voted to give him a 3.5% raise, the same as the other employees. There is no action needed on the board's part.

7. Other Business

Mr. Wright of CT DOT reminded towns to utilize the district offices for questions or maintenance. He will provide contact information on these to Mr. Haramut. Ms. Haines stated

that the state roads in East Haddam need to have sight lines mowed. There was general discussion on the states' responsibility of sight line maintenance.

Mr. Gold noted that CT DEEP would have to be the recipient for a grant to revive the Osaki House, he and Ms. Haines are working on that for the next grant round. Ms. Haines offered to bring those interested down to the Osaki House right after this meeting.

The state park staff were thanked for helping with this meeting.

8. **Adjournment**

Mr. McGarry moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:16 am. Seconded by Mr. Curley; vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti