



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

DRAFT MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

July 24, 2024 – 8:45 am

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Cindy Lignar *
Clinton: Michelle Benivegna
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Carol Jones *
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
Eoin McClure & Kevin Tedesco, CT DOT
Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor
Breanna Horton, Senator Marx's Office
Joe Severance, CERT

Staff Present:

Sam Gold, Robert Haramut,
Kevin Armstrong, Susie Beckman,
Margot Burns, Megan Joufflas,
Janice Ehle/Meyer, Marcos Gonzalez, Eliza LoPresti

RiverCOG

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:03 A.M. The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

Ms. Haines moved to move agenda item 3b) State Roadway Mowing – CTDOT Maintenance District Office 2 up before Public Speaking. Additionally, she moved to add agenda item Authorization for Executive Director to sign Regional Waste Authority Grant and make it 4a, thereby moving the other items below that down. Second by Mr. Couture; motion passed unanimously.

2. State Roadway Mowing – CTDOT Maintenance District Office 2

Eoin McClure, CT DOT Transportation Maintenance Director, gave a brief overview of what his department handles in regards to mowing responsibilities. If a private driveway or town road is intersecting with a state road, the private owner is responsible for sightline mowing. The state is responsible for state road on state road intersections. The areas are mowed two times per year, so if a call for aid due to unsafe conditions comes from a town at a certain time, they may wait a bit to get it done. If there is an immediate safety concern, supervisors at one of the offices should be talked to. If illegal encroachment signs are in an area where the state mows they will take the sign. If they get a complaint they will investigate. If signs are in someone's front yard they leave them alone. Letters are sent to each town around December of January of each year outlining the paving projects. Some questions about paving projects were asked, these can be answered by the traffic division. Mr. McClure can be reached at eoin.mcclure@ct.gov if needed. CT DOT also has a customer care center for constituents on their website.

Kevin Tedesco of CT DOT offered to re-send the district office letters with contact information. That information is also listed here:

CTDOT - District 1 Office (Cromwell, Durham, Middlefield, Middletown)

Maintenance

Barry Julian, Maintenance Director

Barry.Julian@ct.gov

(860) 258-4501

Construction

Don Ward, District Engineer

Donald.Ward@ct.gov

(860) 258-4603

Cathy Mitchell, Administrative Assistant

Catherine.Mitchell@ct.gov

(860) 258-4500

Doug Deveny, Administrative Assistant

Douglas.Deveny@ct.gov

(860) 258-4605

CTDOT - District 2 Office (Chester, Clinton, Deep River, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth, Lyme, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland, Westbrook)

171 Salem Turnpike, Norwich, CT 06360

Maintenance

Eoin McClure, Maintenance Director

Eoin.Mcclure@ct.gov

(860) 823-3222

Construction

Eileen Ego, District Engineer

Eileen.Ego@ct.gov

(860) 823-3204

Michele Santoro, Administrative Assistant

Michele.Santoro@ct.gov

(860) 823-3220

Sharon Oldham, Administrative Assistant

Sharon.Oldham@ct.gov

(860) 823-3202

3. **Public Speaking**

Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor, stated that the focus is now on the August 13th primary. Early voting is in trial, it will be 7 days from 8/5 to 8/11, the hours need to be posted. There is some concern in towns about getting enough poll workers. The state has partnered with realtors and veterans to create a list of about 700 people willing to be poll workers, which the registrars will receive. They do not need to be from your town. Unaffiliated people from your town can also be used as workers. Many offices are purchasing ballot scanners because they make for a quicker, more accurate process. Chairman Salvatore asked when the cameras need to be installed on ballot boxes; Ms. Conklin will find out and get back to everyone. (Note that she later found out that it is by July 1, 2025).

Erin McBride of Senator Murphy's office stated that those who put in applications for congressionally directed spending projects should be getting an email shortly about where those projects are in the process.

Ellen Graham of Senator Blumenthal's office reiterated the same as above and mentioned that the Senator will be around in August so to please reach out to him for events.

Julia McGrath of Congressman Courtney's office mentioned that at Eastern CT State University on August 8th there will be a federal funding resource fair, she will send information by email. Two grants were given to the state in the CPRG program. The Congressman also recently did two farm visits in our region with the department Secretary of the USDA.

4. **LCRVMPO Business**

a. Approval of Minutes of June 26, 2024 LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Special Meeting

Mr. Couture moved to approve the minutes of the June 26, 2024 regular meeting; second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimous in favor with Ms. Jones and Ms. Lignar abstaining.

b. 21 TIP Amendment 37 (motion)

- i. New Haven UA, 0170-3742, CRPNH, X6, Detection upgrades at various traffic signals, PD, 2024, \$421,000, 80/20/0, New project
- ii. New Haven UA, 0170-3742, CRPNH, X6, Detection upgrades at various traffic signals, FD, FYI, \$180,000, 80/20/0, New project

- iii. New Haven UA, 0170-3742, CRPNH, X6, Detection upgrades at various traffic signals, CON, FYI, \$5,310,000, 80/20/0, New project

Mr. Cox moved to approve TIP Amendment 37, sections i – iii. Second by Ms. Haines. Vote was unanimously approved.

c. Other Transportation – (Active Transportation Micro Grants, CCLT Study, SS4A, FY25 TIP)

Mr. Haramut stated that there were four applications for the active transportation micro grants, Ms. Fernald will be sending checks out to those applicants soon. The consultants for the Central CT Loop Trail Study have worked on a map and preferred alignment. The Safe Streets and Roads for All study now has a website, a draft map, and the first advisory committee meeting will be held next week. The FY25 TIP has been endorsed and is now awaiting federal approval.

d. Update from Estuary Transit District

Mr. Comerford reported that River Valley Transit launched Sunday and Saturday night service. The Sunday service is already close to Saturday ridership levels. The Xtra mile pilot in Guilford/Madison is growing fast. The one in East Hampton is more slow. They are receiving state funding to expand the Old Saybrook to Middletown route, that will start soon. East Hampton officially joined the district, there are now 13 towns. They will be participating in the tap & ride pilot with the state, who got a federal grant. This includes open tech so riders can now just tap their cards on the bus without purchasing a ticket ahead of time. This will work across different systems in CT and will be launched in early September.

5. LCRVCOG Business

a. Authorization for Executive Director to Sign Regional Waste Authority Grant (motion)

Mr. Cox moved to approve the resolution to authorize the Executive Director to sign the Regional Waste Authority grant; seconded by Ms. Lignar. Vote was unanimously approved.

Discussion: Mr. Couture asked what the time estimate is for the study as the towns are working under a deadline with the MIRA dissolution and waiting is scary. Mr. Gold noted that the executive committee had this same concern and the plan is to have the RFP out before we get the signed contract from CT DEEP. The study will hopefully start this fall. He doesn't think it will be complicated, but experts are needed to provide guidance and make recommendations. There are towns that don't use MIRA currently, so we need to understand what benefits creating a RWA would provide towns like Middletown for example, which already has a RWA, or Cromwell. So there are a couple of things – keeping the towns that currently use MIRA together, but also how could it serve other towns who don't currently go to that facility. This might include towns outside of our

region. Madison and Guilford may be sending waste to Essex, so we would be reaching out to those towns as well, if there was interest.

b. HHW Update

Ms. Ehle/Meyer stated that at the last collection in Cromwell, Chairman Salvatore stopped by and their public works department came to learn how the collection was run. This is a good recommendation for other towns to do as well. We are in the process of turning the old facility in Essex over to the town.

c. Regional Agriculture Council Update

The no-till equipment is now with RC&D and they continue to share it within the state. Mr. Gold stated that the state is looking for participants in the roaming swine and bovine task force, if anyone is interested. Ms. Ehle/Meyer noted that we do have DART in our region, this is the Durham Animal Rescue Team, in the case of needing to corral critters.

d. Shoreline Basic Needs Task Force Update

There was a recent event at Lenny & Joe's in Westbrook, the proceeds from the carousel went to SBNTF.

e. Aquatic Invasive Species Update

Army Corp pilot Hydrilla project treatments began yesterday with Keeney Cove. Portland Boat Works is to be treated today.

f. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

Ms. Burns and others met with the National Park Service yesterday for the first meeting for the update of the strategic conservation plan. Meetings are tentatively being scheduled through March of 2025. If your town does not have a board representative and would like to participate please let Ms. LoPresti know. Representatives must be able to commit to all four meetings.

The summer LCRLT meeting will feature speaker and herpetologist Hank Gruner. This will take place in our office on August 15th, please RSVP for dinner.

g. Regional Economic Development Committee & CEDS Update

The REDC is currently learning about economic development in the region and what drives it. Committee leadership will meet in August to plan for the next six months of committee work.

h. DEMHS Budget Request

Ms. Beckman gave a brief presentation on the fiduciary responsibilities and costs to RiverCOG as the fiduciary for DEMHS Region 2. She presented two letters that she

would like to send to DEMHS and REPT leadership requesting more funding for fiduciary responsibilities and regarding possible elimination of some deliverables.

Ms. Haines moved to request additional feeds from DEMHS and to authorize the Chair to sign and send letter A. Second by Mr. Cox; vote was unanimously approved.

Discussion: Mr. Cox asked how letter A (request for more funding) get impacted by letter B (request to eliminate some deliverables). Ms. Beckman stated that in reviewing deliverables over the past twenty years that the grant has been around, a lot of these responsibilities have been put on the fiduciary because there wasn't a management function or coordinator at the state level. The three identified in letter B are those that she would like the DEMHS office to remove from the fiduciary list. Mr. Cox clarified that he was asking whether those are deliverables for which we get paid, and if we eliminate them are we still asking for more funding in letter A. Ms. Beckman stated it would be more in line if we reduced those deliverables and still received the \$70,000 or \$75,000 funding, which will cover costs for the other deliverables we are doing. A few of the deliverables she identified have not been done over the past few years. In the future, if this could become more efficient she would love to be able to reduce our fees to the REPT, therefore allowing them to put more funds into purchases. There is no contract she has found, we are just paid annually with no additional fee requests since 2016. These numbers should be reviewed every year moving forward. Mr. Cox noted that's probably a budget discussion to have with DEMHS but since there is a motion on the floor he feels that we should move forward with sending the two letters. Chairman Salvatore asked what our chances are of them increasing the budget. Ms. Beckman feels that if the request comes from the board rather than staff it may have a pretty good chance. She proposed a \$2,500 increase last year that was rejected but at the end of the conversation at least one person wanted to give us the funding because it's hard to find a fiduciary agent and we haven't had an increase in eight years. In the event the request is rejected, where does the RiverCOG board stand on how to respond to that? Chairman Salvatore said it would be discussed at that time. Mr. Gold pointed out that we are the fiduciary for region 2 which includes 10 of our towns, all of the SCRCOG region and a portion of the NVCOG region. Other towns in our region are in DEMHS regions 3 and 4. So, when we do more work than DEMHS pays us, that money gets covered out of the dues pot, which is dues for all 17 of our towns, so it's really not fair to not have DEMHS pull its own weight. We've made this argument to the other COGs that host, but they are not tacking their time as closely as we are. We track every hour so we know that the subsidy is going on. He believes that point needs to be made to DEMHS and the REPT, that if we don't get paid for our costs, your are asking for a subsidy from towns who are not even in DEMHS region 2. The motion on the floor is for a \$5,000 increase request.

Mr. Cox moved to approve letter B and to authorize the Chair to sign it asking for removal of three deliverables as stated. Second by Ms. Jones. Vote was unanimously approved.

6. Chairman’s & Executive Director’s Reports

Mr. Gold gave the financial report: spending in FY24 was in the parameters of the budget for the year. Projections for the close of the fiscal year show us in the black with any extra going into the reserve fund. The STIF account holds \$1,283,506 and the Liberty checking account holds \$39,541 as of June 30, 2024.

He also mentioned that OPM will be conducting the fair share housing study; they created a steering committee which was then retracted after it was seen to be stacked with housing advocates. The public will have a chance to comment on this once it goes to hearing in the next legislative session.

7. Other Business

Reminder that there is no August meeting.

8. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:32 am. Seconded by Ms. Lignar; vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti