



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

October 23, 2024 – 9:00 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 - Rep. Courtney, CT-02
Noah Carver - Rep. Joe Courtney CT-02
Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor
Bridget O'Brien, CLYNK
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Nicole Velardi, DEMHS Region 2
Joel Severance
Kim O'Rourke, Middletown

Staff Present:

Sam Gold, Robert Haramut, Kevin Armstrong, Brendan Geraghty, Margot Burns, Eliza LoPresti,
Elizabeth Rolison

RiverCOG

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, Introductions

Chairman Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:02 A.M. The meeting was conducted in person in the RiverCOG office and via Zoom.

2. Public Speaking

a. Julia McGrath, Representative Courtney's Office

As of October 1, the federal code of regulations uniform guidance has been updated for federal financial assistance. The purpose is to lessen the burden on both grant seekers and grant recipients by streamlining notices of funding and consolidating the reporting burden. Ms. McGrath asked that members let her know if they run into any issues when trying to procure federal money. She has sent along resources to help everyone get more familiar with the new rules.

December 30th, 2024 is the deadline for obligating American Rescue plan local fiscal recovery funds. This does not mean funds need to be spent, but funds do have to be designated for a service and there are further stipulations depending on the category of the expenditure. Ms. McGrath noted that she is available to assist with guidance on this.

The EPA has released a final rule to identify and replace lead pipes within 10 years. While this is good as a public health measure it is also an expensive and time-consuming undertaking. Ms. McGrath is brainstorming federal resources to support towns as they go through this process.

The BEAD program that is being implemented by DEEP is in its prequalification program for sub applicants. She encouraged members to go to website to see if this is something their town would like to participate in.

b. Erin McBride, Senator Murphy's Office

Congress is in recess until after the election. Things are a bit slow regarding updates in policy and legislation. Senator Murphy sent a letter to US Secretary of Transportation weeks ago asking for details on DOT efforts to improve roadway safety. Senator Murphy expressed serious concern over rising traffic fatalities in CT and asked about specific measures that would be implemented to increase roadway safety.

c. Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor

Ms. Conklin reported that early voting has started, and it has shown big numbers for small towns. The pattern is that the start is heavy, but it is expected to taper down and then have a strong finish. Several towns had issues with scanner barcoding with heavy use. Some had to go to Staples to get new scanners and the state has been contacted about some of the issues which they are working through. If there are any issues between now and November 5th, Ms. Conklin advised the group to please shoot her an email and that she is happy to help.

Mr. Gold stated that he will be working with Ms. Conklin regarding her 2-year contract renewal. He is working with her on her draft contract which they will be presenting to the COG next month.

3. **DIRECT PAY PROGRAM - Noah Carver, Congressman Joe Courtney's Office**

Mr. Carver briefed the group on Elective Pay and explained that it is a provision in the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) that allows tax exempt eligible entities to receive clean energy tax credits by filing with the IRS. He suggested that should you be interested in elective pay that you seek the advice of your attorney or tax preparer.

He clarified that Direct Pay and Elective Pay are the same thing, however a search on Direct Pay on the IRS website will yield the wrong result. It is not a tax credit, but an umbrella that covers a range of credits and a tool for you to access what is out there. It is uncapped, available for 10 years, and there are many projects that it can be applied to. Mr. Carver highlighted some examples of eligible credits that could be used by municipalities on his presentation to the group.

Mr. Carver went on to give an overview of considerations, qualifiers, detractors, the process of filing and receiving payment.

Mr. Carver shared resources with the COG. He also offered his assistance to members.

[View Presentation Here](#)

4. **Bridget O'Brien, CEO, CLYNK**

Ms. O'Brien met with Ms. Ehle Meyer of RiverCOG regarding the CLYNK bag drop program and shared a presentation about the program. **CLYNK** is an 18-year-old company that pioneered a consumer-friendly modality to support citizens in states that have bottle bills associated with them.

They realized that consumers wanted to do the "right thing" provided that the process was convenient. Bag drop recycling is a more convenient, contactless, reliable way of redeeming beverage containers and is growing when other forms of recycling struggle. This is a system and technology that supports citizens, beverage manufacturers who pay for the bottle bill and food retailers that are obligated to take back at retail and creates a solution that encourages more people to recycle.

Ms. O'Brien noted that Connecticut has made great progress in modernizing its bottle bill noting the increase of the deposit from 5 cents to 10 cents.

CLYNK is hoping to begin a 5-store pilot at Stop and Shops across Connecticut and is currently working on zoning approval. They hope to have them operating within 1-2 months.

Ms. O'Brien went on to explain the ease of the account-based program where consumers will sign up to purchase bags (the bags are the only thing they must pay for), scan and drop and then have the

money deposited into their accounts. Plastic, glass, and aluminum do not need to be sort separated. Each bag has a personalized tag that links bag to the consumer's account.

She continued to explain the process, as well as the collection points which are autonomous, made of recycled nonfood grade plastic and are easily transported and set up. They are self-contained, solar and wind powered with a low carbon footprint. She also gave statistics that indicated consumer preference for this modality.

She is available for questions regarding the program.

She clarified that the bags are available in the store for purchase.

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5. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of September 25, 2024, LCRVCOG & LCRVMPO Regular Meeting (motion)

Mr. Salvatore moved to approve the minutes of the September 25, 2024, regular meeting; second by Mr. Couture. All in favor. Motion carried.

b. 25 TIP Amendment 02

- i. Meriden/Middletown, I-91/I-691/RT15, 0079-0240. NHPP, CC, Interchange improvements sb and eb to sb, AC Conv, CON, 2025, \$6,250,000, 80/20/0, Decrease estimate from Fed \$37M
- ii. Meriden/Middletown, I-91/I-691/RT15, 0079-0240, NHPP, CC, Interchange improvements sb and eb to sb, AC Conv, CON, 2026, \$2,500,000, 80/20/0, Decrease estimate from Fed \$43M
- iii. Meriden/Middletown, I-91/I-691/RT15, 0079-0240, NHPP, CC, Interchange improvements sb and eb to sb, AC Conv, CON, 2027, \$2,500,000, 80/20/0, Decrease estimate from Fed \$25.2M
- iv. Meriden/Middletown, I-91/I-691/RT15, 0079-0240, NHPP, CC, Interchange improvements sb and eb to sb, AC Conv, CON, 2028, \$47,500,000, 80/20/0, Increase estimate from Fed \$13M
- v. Meriden/Middletown, I-91/I-691/RT15, 0079-0240, NHPP, CC, Interchange improvements sb and eb to sb, AC Conv, CON, FYI, \$44,625,000, 80/20/0, add FYI NHPP AC Conv
- vi. Meriden/Middletown, I-91/I-691/RT15, 0079-0240, NFRP, CC, Interchange improvements sb and eb to sb, AC Conv, CON, FYI, \$0, 80/20/0, Add NFRP AC Entry
- vii. Meriden/Middletown, I-91/I-691/RT15, 0079-0240, NFRP, CC, Interchange improvements sb

Mr. Couture made a motion to approve items 5b, i-vii; second by Mr. Cox. No further discussion. All in favor. None opposed. Motion carried.

- viii. East Hampton, Airline Trail, 0041-0123, CPCDH, X6, Construct remaining trail gap, CON, 2026, \$1,750,000, 80/0/20, New project

Mr. Couture made a motion to approve 5b, viii; second by Mr. Cox and Ms. Haines. All in favor. None opposed. Motion carried.

c. Other Transportation

Mr. Haramut is setting up a public information meeting regarding the Loop Trail Project and an SS4A public meeting to take place around the holidays. He also stated that the consultant – FHI, will be attending the next MPO meeting to provide a brief update.

d. Update from Estuary Transit District

Mr. Geraghty reported that the Tap and Ride program was introduced on October 7, 2024. This statewide project would allow for a convenient, cashless experience for riders. Mr. Geraghty noted that they would like to study how the free transfer works between systems. He went on to explain daily and monthly fair capping. The program has been successful to date and the end goal is to implement this program statewide to provide a seamless transfer experience for riders across the state.

Mr. Geraghty briefed the group on the XtraMile and Service Span Expansion programs that were launched in late May. For the Service Span Expansion program, he reported that they are seeing good ridership for weeknight, Saturday night and Sunday services. XtraMile has also expanded to East Hampton, Madison, Guilford and Middletown.

Mr. Geraghty gave an update on the Bus Shelter DOT program. There are 5 bus shelters that they are looking to install in Middletown. They will be obtaining final drawings from the DOT contractors to present to the City for approval.

Mr. Comerford welcomed Portland and East Hampton to the transit district and noted that they now have 13 member towns.

6. LCRVCOG Business

a. RiverCOG Executive Director Employment Contract and Memo (motion)

Mr. Salvatore, Mr. Gold and Mr. Cox discussed moving item 6a to be covered under item 9.

*Mr. Couture made a motion for item 6a to be covered under item 9; second by Mr. Cox.
All in favor. Motioned carried.*

b. Resolution for GIO Parcel & CAMA Improvement Grant (motion)

Mr. Armstrong explained that the state GIO is looking to expand the match rate and shared a memo addressed to the Executive Board. He explained that that they are running into issues with differences between towns. The effort is to use state funds to bridge this gap and make those changes. Since it requires working with assessors to get these changes implemented, they are not quite sure if current vendors or outside vendors will be used.

Ultimately GIO is looking for simple resolution to say that we are accepting the role of distributing these funds. The offer is to send the COG \$205,700.00 for Parcel and CAMA improvements grants. It is the COG's discretion to distribute. The state is going to provide a list of focus for the purpose of reaching a specific match rate.

Questions arose that included: Who would be paying vendors? The COG would distribute funds and ultimately the towns would pay the assessing and GIS vendors; What is the timeline? The funds are intended to be spent by calendar year end 2026; Does it address issue of data not matching up? Yes, the intent is to fix CAMA and parcel mismatch. The priority is to get the match rate up; Will new Condos and Associations match up to the data? Hopefully going forward there will be a standard to avoid this issue. Ultimately, they are focused on the present issues which are dependent on the assessor's office and the vendors.

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Mr. Cox made a motion to approve the resolution and to authorize the Secretary to sign and submit; second by Ms. Shoemaker. All in favor. None opposed Motion carried.

c. DEMHS Fiduciary Services Update

Mr. Gold informed the group that he and Ms. Beckman had attended a meeting the previous Friday to discuss the future of RiverCOG hosting the DEMHS regions.

They learned that the response to the letter was that DEMHS was looking for a new fiduciary. They brought the COG attorney, Mr. Mednick, to discuss some concerns and how some of this work could be streamlined.

The amount of Homeland Security funding that Connecticut and the nation have been receiving has been declining over the years while costs have gone up to administer the money.

One commitment received from DEMHS is to work with the RiverCOG attorney on possibly replacing the current MOU process to make it more streamlined as collecting the MOUs from all CEOs is an expensive and inefficient process.

Mr. Gold and Ms. Beckman told the representative that if the price can come down for the work, RiverCOG will still host the DEMHS region which he believes would be the preference of DEMHS. Mr. Gold is not certain who else may be able to take on the task of hosting the region.

In summary, Mr. Gold stated he will continue to meet with the DEMHS and the representative. He believes that it is a worthwhile use of the RiverCOG attorney to work with DEMHS to streamline processes and forcing the state to look at how things can be done differently considering that funds have been declining. He mentioned that Ms. Beckman believes that two full time people can cover the fiduciary responsibilities for the entire state and that this will keep in proportion with declining funding. In addition, the subsidy for DEMHS would be less problematic if RiverCOG was subsidizing for its towns and not other regions.

He believes that both the letter and meeting were both productive. He will keep everyone informed as to how this develops.

Mr. Gold introduced Nicole Velardi from DEMHS Region 2. Ms. Velardi met with the REPT and steering committee on Friday. Ms. Velardi informed the group that the REPT and the steering committee are exploring options. No commitments have been made at this time, but they

are willing to work with RiverCOG on seeing if or what type of agreement can be made. The REPT is appreciative of the years of support from RiverCOG as a fiduciary and thanked Ms. Beckman and Mr. Downes for the work they have put in. She acknowledged that a request from RiverCOG for an additional increase of money for the fiduciary fee could not be supported by DEMHS as the regions are taking a 10% cut in funding this year. They are trying to navigate and figure out the best solution for all stakeholders that will allow them to support the REPT and the mission of regional preparedness.

d. REDC Update

Mr. Gold gave an update on REDC on behalf of Ms. Beckman who had provided him a written update. The Middlesex County Revitalization Commission has been in talks with Old Lyme and Lyme about joining which is an opportunity to broaden MCRC capabilities to serve the entire RiverCOG region. MCRC has received some additional funding and some of the things that can be worked on include land bank options, infrastructure development, and business support.

Further discussion included the possibility of Middlesex Chamber developing training for volunteer town commissions which include economic development commissions, zoning and planning commissions, and ZBAs who may not have any additional training on economic development. Developing this resource will be helpful and supportive of these commissioners.

Ms. Beckman had discussed investigating the possibility of sharing a grant writer between the Chamber and RiverCOG. CEOs have brought up a need for this several times. Mr. Gold believes this is good way to address sharing the cost of a grant writer.

There has not been on the REDC district application to US EDA. Ms. Beckman has been in touch with Representative Courtney's office on this and will keep on checking in with Representatives in Washington and the EDA.

e. Aquatic Invasive Species Update

As per Ms. Burns, the Cost Share program letter of intent was submitted to Army Corps. She reminded the group that part of that motion was that if the state decided to apply, that RiverCOG would be happy to join them. The state did apply, and she will see what Army Corps comes back with. She has not heard anything to date.

There is a Massachusetts meeting tomorrow with Department of Environmental Services regarding the extent of hydrilla infestation which she will be attending. She noted the effect of hydrilla up in MA and its impact in our region. She will let the group know what their outlook is.

The water chestnut grant is still available to work with next summer. There is money left in budget from this summer, so a request has been made to DEEP to extend for another season as well as switch some categories in budget to support the equipment category of the grant (which includes the marina slip rental) and possibly debris removal.

a. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Ms. Burns let the group know that they got word from DEMHS that the grant will be coming through. This is a bit behind schedule compared to the last time they got the update. Now that we

have word that the grant coming through, the GIS Committee is on. She believes that they will be starting with the consultant in February or March after official word from DEMHS. She reminded the group that there will be large meetings after the COG meetings and 2 municipal meetings in conjunction with this grant which are critical to the success in the planning process.

b. Lower CT River Land Trust Update

Ms. Burns had a meeting with National Park Service yesterday to plan for Conservation Plan Workshop which went very well. She stated that there is a need to have an annual meeting in December for Land Trust. They need one more board member and it would be great to have a First Selectman or designee on the board.

Joe Somalis from Middletown would like to see a presentation on hydrilla project from Army Corps for annual meeting and asked group if they would be interested in a presentation. Mr. Salvatore said possibly, and if Mr. Gold feels it is worthwhile.

c. Regional Housing Committee Update

Ms. Lopresti gave a RHC update on behalf of Ms. Jouflas. The RHC continues to work on the on the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) which is a methodology to determine the number of units needed to accommodate population over next 10 years. RHNA is a planning to only.

Ms. Lopresti noted that the Committee had a meeting yesterday which demonstrated how hard the Committee is working and how much they are thinking about formulating this equation.

They hope is to nail down the methodology by the end of the year and then have the Committee create a report for the COG.

7. Chairman and Executive Director's Report

Mr. Gold provided the RiverCOG financial report. As of September 30th, 2024, the Council has completed 3 months of Fiscal Year 2025. Overall spending is within the parameters of the adopted 3.2-million-dollar budget.

Dues, subscriptions, and professional development has already reached 47% of the budget but Mr. Gold is confident that this will be covered by other line items should it go over.

As of September 30th, 2024, the State Treasurer's investment fund account (STIF) totaled \$1,224,898 and the

Liberty Bank Account balance \$399,599.00. A Large electronic deposit had been received by Liberty Bank at end of month and transferred within days to the STIF account.

He and Ms. Fernald had investigated investing some of the reserves into a CD and if that would bring any additional interest. Ultimately, the STIF was found to be a better option with more flexibility.

8. Other Business

None

9. Executive Session to Discuss Executive Director Contract Renewal (motion)

Mr. Salvatore stated that the Executive Director Contract Renewal could be discussed openly since the

information was provided as a memo in the packet, or that the discussion could go into an executive session.

It was decided to be done in open session.

Mr. Salvatore stated that there was a previous executive session during which Mr. Gold's RiverCOG retirement match, currently at 6%, was discussed. All other items in the contract remained the same with the exception of salaries and it now being a 3-year contract.

The Executive Committee decided to recommend an increase from 6% to 9% on Mr. Gold's RiverCOG retirement plan match.

Mr. Fortuna made a motion to approve; second by Mr. Cox. All in favor. None opposed. Motion carried.

Mr. Salvatore expressed appreciation for Mr. Gold's work.

10. Adjournment

Mr. Cox moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:26 a.m.; second by Mr. Fortuna. The vote was unanimous in favor.

DRAFT