Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth, Lyme, Middlefield, Middletown, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland, Westbrook

Catherine Iino, Chairman
Richard Smith, Vice Chairman
Susan Bransfield, Secretary
Edmund Meehan, Treasurer

LOWER CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

DRAFT MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

March 27, 2014

Members:

Chester: Edmund Meehan *
Clinton: Willie Fritz
Cromwell: Jonathan Sistare
Deep River: Richard Smith *
Durham: Laura Francis *
East Haddam: Mark Walter
East Hampton: Michael Maniscalco *
Essex: Norm Needleman *
Haddam: Melissa Schlag *
Killingworth: Cathy Iino *
Lyme: Ralph Eno
Middlefield: Jon Brayshaw *
Middletown: Daniel Drew
Old Lyme: Bonnie Reemsnyder *
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna *
Portland: Susan Bransfield
Westbrook: Noel Bishop *
CT Dept. of Transportation: Edgar Wynkoop *
Estuary Transit District: Joe Comerford *
Middletown Area Transit: Andrew Chiaravallo *

Others Present:

Bob Bell, President Essex Steam Train and River Boat
Pat Bandz, CL&P Community Relations
Stuart Popper, Cromwell Town Planner
Bill Warner, Middletown Town Planner
Cathy Lezon, CL&P Community Relations
Deanna Rhodes, Portland Town Planner

* Members Present

Staff Present:

Linda Krause
Jean Davies
Judy Snyder
Rob Haramut
Torrance Downes
Dan Bourret
Janice Ehle/Meyer
Jeremy DeCarli
Erin Bodan

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Cathy Iino called the meeting to order at 9:51 a.m. at the offices of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments in Essex.

2. APPROVAL OF THE FEBRUARY 26TH MEETING MINUTES

Upon motion of Bonnie Reemsnyder, seconded by Ed Meehan, it was unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the February 26, 2014 meeting.

3. PROBATE COURT LEASE

Carl Fortuna stated that the Old Saybrook Town Hall does not have enough space to accommodate the probate court adequately. He asked if other towns have the same problem. Richard Smith said that a committee should be set up to look into this further and possibly combine some of the town probate courts into one building. Norm Needleman felt that the probate courts could look into leasing a commercial building, centrally located for the towns involved and that would be large enough to accommodate meeting rooms and private offices where cases could be reviewed. Ms. Fortuna stated that a July 2015 target date has been set to relocate the probate court in Old Saybrook.

Richard Smith suggested a committee be established to look into this for interested towns. Carl Fortuna and Cathy Iino volunteered to be on the committee.

4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Cathy Iino said that she had received a notice for America's PrepareAthon on April 30th. This is an emergency management program. Jeremy DeCarli said that he has watched the webinars and the website should go live on 31st. This is a FEMA storm preparedness program.

Ms. Iino asked if each person would give a brief update on their town's budget and what is proposed.

Richard Smith stated that Deep River is in the middle of the process.

Laura Francis stated that Durham's public hearing on the budget is April 7th with a .53% mil increase. She told the members that in Durham there are several horse boarding facilities. These facilities get taxed on the horses not the owners of the horses. The Regional Agricultural Commission is looking into this. She stated that the employees will receive a 2.5% increase in salary. Employees pay 13% of the medical insurance.

Jon Brayshaw stated that the mil rate in Middlefield increased slightly. The employees will receive a 1 ½% retroactive increase from last July and a 2% increase going forward. Employees pay 13% of the medical insurance.

Bonnie Reemsnyder stated that Old Lyme's public hearing on the budget is April 21st and a 2% increase in salaries is proposed for town employees. The town is looking at a higher deductible health insurance plan. A .4% mil rate increase is proposed this year and reval will be conducted this year. Employees pay 18% for medical insurance.

Norm Needleman stated that the proposed budget is under a 2% increase and that is adjusted from reval. Health insurance go up 1% a year and now is close to 18%.

Carl Fortuna stated that the school budget is under 3%. Declining enrollment in school students does not mean a decrease in the school budget. Old Saybrook had reval this year and that will go into effect in July. Residential reval was down 14% and commercial held its own or went up. The town is also in need of a new police station and school building updates. The town employees have three unions and all HAS health insurance. This year the raises will be 2% with a pension increase from 5% to 6% over the next three years.

Bill Warner stated that the reval for Middletown was completed last year and the grand list is down 7%, commercial and industrial is up 22%. The unions are asking for a 2% increase for labor workers and 2.75% for management positions.

Stuart Popper said that the Cromwell budget is before the Board of Finance and the meeting is Monday night.

Ed Meehan stated that the reval for Chester is down 12%. He is trying to get a zero increase in the budget this year. He proposes a 2.75% increase in salaries. Chester's public hearing is scheduled for April 29th.

Laura Francis asked if any of the towns have discussed closing schools. Some towns expressed a lower student enrollment, consolidation and eliminating modular classrooms.

Michael Maniscalco stated that East Hampton proposed a $1.2 million capital budget which is up from about $800,000 last year with a 1.55% mil rate increase. The public hearing on the budget is May 5th. The employees are receiving a 2% increase in salaries. The police union is receiving a 2% retroactive increase for two years and then a 2.5% increase for two years going forward. The supervisor's union, which has nine members, is going to arbitration. Reval will be conducted in 2015.

Melissa Schlag stated that Haddam is going through reval in 2015. The Board of Finance has added money to the budget. They have one union and the cost of health insurance is $5/month for employees. The Board of Education's budget for Haddam is up 4.7%. Haddam's portion of the Haddam/Killingworth regional school district budget is almost 60%.

Noel Bishop stated that in Westbrook the union raises this year are 2.5% and will be 2.75% for the following two years. The public works department is not unionized. Employees pay 12% of the medical insurance.

Deanna Rhodes did not comment on the Portland town budget.

Laura Francis asked if there was any new information regarding the Cadillac tax which is slated to start in 2018.

Cathy Iino stated that Killingworth is looking into the cost of health insurance. The union employees salary increase is 2.5%. The Board of Selectmen's budget is up 3%.

5. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Linda Krause distributed copies of the "CT Nutmeg Network Status" (attachment #1). March 31st is the last day to submit an application for this service, however at this time River COG will not be joining. She said it is expensive to connect and a commitment of a 20 year contract needs to be signed. Members wanting additional information may contact Margot Burns.

Linda Krause mentioned that the Bill addressed in Section 3-90 of Public Act 13-247 repealing the option of the COGs to establish and utilize a regional planning commission to carry out the planning duties and responsibilities. Ms. Krause stated that she has spoken to Representative Jason Rejas and he was agreeable that this change would not be good for the COGs. Ms. Davies will be in Hartford on April 3rd to speak on this issue.

Linda Krause stated that the River COG has received 42 resumes for the Financial Administrator position. She and Dorothy Papp expect to start interviewing for the position by the end of April and have that person in place by June 1st.

Cathy Iino read a memo from Linda Krause to the members. Ms. Krause stated that she is having surgery and is expecting to be out of the office for four weeks. In Linda Krause's absence Jean Davies will assume the position of Acting Director. Members wished Ms. Krause a speedy recovery.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

Laura Francis thanked Linda Krause and Dan Bourret for attending the Durham Planning and Zoning Commission visioning workshop on the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development. This workshop not only will help the RPC develop the regional plan, but also the town Plan of Conservation and Development. Ms. Francis stated that the issues that the public is concerned with have changed in the last 10 years. Today public transportation, renewable energy, and developing bicycle lanes are important topics to the residents. She stated it will be interesting to see the similarities in these issues between the other towns.

Noel Bishop distributed an invitation for an open house at the new Middlesex Hospital Shoreline Medical Center, Saturday, April 19th, 10-2, 250 Flat Rock Place, Westbrook.

Jean Davies discussed the outline (attachment #2) for the second half of the RPIP project which will be a strategic economic growth plan. Part of the requirement of the grant is to develop a committee of volunteers who are interested in economic growth in the region. The subcommittee members of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Economic Organizational COG are: Susan Bransfield, Laura Francis, Bonnie Reemsnyder, Kip Bergstrom, Cathy Lezon and Pat Bandzes. They have met and would like recommendations from the COG members. Ms. Davies asked members to e-mail or call with names of persons interested in serving on this committee. The subcommittee will review the names and the COG will vote on the nominations presented. Ms. Davies is looking for approximately 20 people on this committee however the stakeholder committee will be much larger.

Laura Francis stated there were two Bills being discussed that she finds worrisome.

#1 Legal notices would no longer be posted on the town website. Instead the notices would be placed on a state website, controlled by the state and the towns would pay a fee for this service.

#2 Resident State Troopers Bill has put in alternative language that says rather than go back to the 70% fringe they want to freeze the fringe at the 2014 levels. This would mean in the future the fringe would never go below 70%.

Noel Bishop stated that several years ago the State instituted a ban on the use of pesticides on all public elementary school grounds. There is a Bill, possibly passed, that would ban pesticides on all public schools properties in the state. He explained that this has a major impact on the contracts the town has with the vendors that do this work. Mr. Bishop felt that the legislators should be consulting the members of the COG before voting on these issues that directly affect the towns.

Richard Smith stated that being present in Hartford is very important. He felt that the appearance of chief elected officials does have an effect.

Carl Fortuna mentioned the Mental Stress bill that is being discussed in Hartford. This would include town personnel such as the police, fire department personnel, including volunteer fire departments, EMTs, 1st responders, etc.

Carl mentioned that he and Jeremy DeCarli had attended a meeting on the updates to the northeast corridor long range plan sponsored by the Amtrak Federal Rail Administration. Cathy Iino said that the aging population wants and needs public transportation. Laura Francis said that Durham is not going to be a walkable community, but elements such as sidewalks on both side of Main Street would help. Bonnie Reemsnyder stated that she sees many people walking by her office window every day.

Bonnie Reemsnyder has had a request from a resident for the town to purchase a portion of their property. The resident's house was destroyed in the hurricane and is now working with the NCRS. The NCRS may purchase the property, but not the land that is below a certain flood level. The town is not obligated to purchase the remaining land but may want to preserve it as open space with a conservation easement.

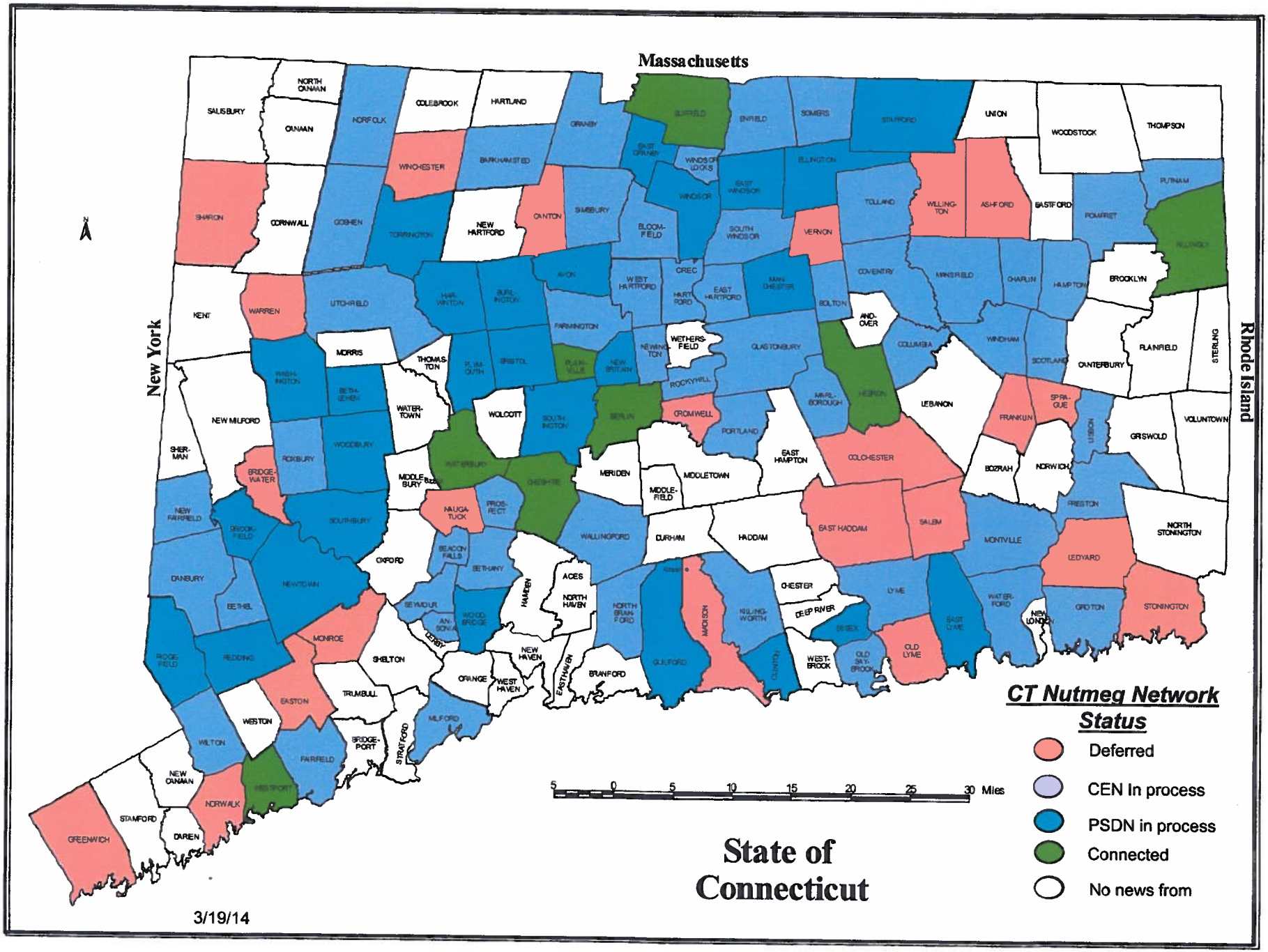
7. ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion of Bonnie Reemsnyder, seconded by Melissa Schlag, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 11:13 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Snyder
Recording Secretary

DRAFT



Attachment #1

Sustainable Economic Growth Strategy – OUTLINE FOR DISCUSSION

Layer cake *(no one business sector dominates the economy)* and/or Placemaking Growth Concept

Small Business

Home Based Business

Home Values

Retail Sector

Arts and Entertainment

For Profit - Tourist Amenities

Amenity Assets *(Forest and Parks, Waterfront Access, River, Streams, Lakes, Forest Cover, Fishing, etc)*

Service Sector *(Personal service, Property Maintenance, Professional Services, etc)*

Technology Sector

Industrial Sector

Food Service (Suppliers, Restaurants, Production)

Transportation sector *(Auto Service, Transit, Taxi, Rail, Sales)*

Medical Services (Service, Suppliers,)

Agriculture

Defense

Education

Government

Communications

Transportation

Demographics and Labor Market

Political Leadership and Land Use Coordination

Education and Technology Network

Attachment #2

RiverCOG Strategic Economic Committee (Subcommittee of the COG)

Mission:

- **Advisory to COG**
- **Hire Consultant per RPIP Grant**
- **Stakeholder group to provide guidance to consultant**
- **Promote implementation of the final plan**
- **Grants for special projects**

Types of Members (Workable Group Size)

Government Chambers (5 in region) Tourism Natural Resources Transportation/Communications Businesses Marketing DECD Arts -Entertainment

Regional Economic Stakeholder Group (appointed or open to interest)

- **workshop participants**
- **marketing**
- **team-members in development of plan**
- **data and information sources**

Government Chambers (5) Tourism Natural Resources Medical Non Chamber Businesses Marketing

Transportation Defense Food Industry Arts/Theater Technology Education Agriculture Retail

Home-based Small Business Industrial Freight Marine Recreational

RIVERCOG'S

REGIONAL PERFORMANCE INCENTIVE PROJECT: Phase II

Lower Connecticut Valley Strategic Economic Planning Project (LCVSEPP)

The Lower Connecticut Valley Project will provides start up costs via the CT OPM RPIP grant, for a Region Strategic Economic Growth Plan and geospatial center for inventory of small, home-based, and agriculture businesses to support the efforts of the UConn Small Business Center, regional chambers of commerce and other business groups. The RiverCOG will establish a Lower CT River Valley Economic Committee. This Committee will provide for consultant selection and policy guidance for the region's Strategic Economic Growth Plan.

LCRV Economic Organizational

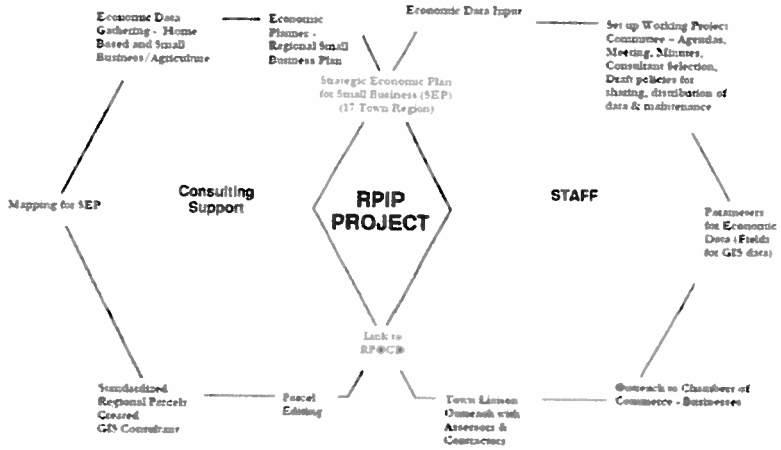
COG Subcommittee

Susan Bransfield, Laura Francis, Bonnie Reemsnyder, Kip Bergstrom (DECD), Cathy Lezon and Pat Bendzas (NU Economic Development)

LCRV ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

To be selected based on recommendations from RiverCOG board members and subcommittee

LCRV STAKEHOLDER GROUP

To be determined after the LCRV Economic Committee is formed

LCRVCOG RPIP (January 2013 – June 2015)