

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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DRAFT Minutes of the November 20, 2024 Meeting of the Southeastern CT Council of Governments

PRESENT:

Bozrah	Glenn Pianka	New London	Michael Passero
Colchester	-	North Stonington	Bob Carlson
East Lyme	-	Norwich	John Salomone
Franklin	-	Preston	Sandra Gauthier
Griswold	Tina Falck	Salem	-
Jewett City	Laurie Sorder	Sprague	Cheryl Allen Blanchard
City of Groton	-	Town of Stonington	Danielle Chesebrough
Town of Groton	John Burt	Stonington Borough	Michael Schefers
Lebanon	Kevin Cwikla	Waterford	Rob Brule
Ledyard	Fred Allyn	Windham	Thomas DeVivo Jim Bellano
Lisbon	Thomas Sparkman	SEAT Rep (MPO)	Thomas Sparkman
Montville	Lenny Bunnell		
Military Liaisons:	US Coast Guard Academy: - New London SUBASE: Captain Kenneth Curtin, Steve Sadlowski		
Tribal Affiliates:	Mohegan Tribe: - Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation: -		
CT DOT	-		

SCCOG staff: Amanda Kennedy, Kate Rattan, Daniel Robinson, Lana Melonakos-Harrison. seCTer: Captain Paul Whitescarver, Mark Oefinger. SEAT: Mike Carroll. Office of Sen. Murphy: Erin McBride. Office of Rep. Courtney: Noah Carver. SEAT: Mike Carroll. SECT Cultural Coalition – Deb Mathiasen. Uncas Health District – Patrick McCormack. BL Companies: Dominick Celtruda.

1) Call to Order:

Chairman Brule called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. Mr. Brule led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2) Roll Call:

A quorum was present.

Member Municipalities: Bozrah * Colchester * East Lyme * Franklin * Griswold * Borough of Jewett City * City of Groton * Town of Groton * Lebanon * Ledyard * Lisbon * Montville * New London * North Stonington * Norwich * Preston * Salem * Sprague * Stonington * Stonington Borough * Waterford * Windham

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3) Act on Minutes of the October 16th meeting:

MOTION: To approve the minutes (Allyn, Cwikla). Motion passed unanimously.

4) Treasurer's Report:

MOTION: To approve the Treasurer's Report (Sparkman, Blanchard). Motion passed unanimously.

5) Communications

Ms. Kennedy noted that the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe has changed the location for their Holiday Event. The Winter Moon Market will take place at the Gathering Space on December 21st, from 10am to 4pm.

6) Public Comment:

None.

7) Guest Speaker – David Kooris: Executive Director of the Connecticut Municipal Redevelopment Authority

Mr. Kooris began with a brief history of the CT Municipal Redevelopment Authority (MRDA), dating back to former Governor Dannel Malloy's administration. Mr. Kooris covered the journey from the redevelopment authorities of the past that were reserved for larger Connecticut cities to the new office, MRDA, that was formed to assist communities of all sizes. He stated that MRDA helps municipalities with zoning review/reform and planning, while also connecting them to resources to develop the appropriate kind of housing in downtown or transit-adjacent areas. MRDA is an opt-in program, needing initial municipal support to trigger MRDA's zoning review and subsequent suggestions. If those conditions are met and supported by the municipality, a Memorandum of Understanding and a redevelopment area will be established. He concluded with an outlook on MRDA's future, sharing that in January/February 2025 the first resolutions will go through at the local level – around 15 to 20 municipalities will be signing up. Ms. Kennedy added that the CT Project is offering technical assistance for communities to set themselves up better for MRDA funds and projects. Mr. Salomone inquired about the definition of Transit Oriented Development. Mr. Kooris replied that a TOD district is a half-mile radius from a substantial transit center (rail/CTfastrak). However, he added that MRDA will work with a town without a major transit center if they have a strong downtown and their regulatory environment prioritizes walkability, mixed use, housing, etc.

8) Committee and Liaison Reports:

a) Executive Committee

- i) Ms. Kennedy stated that the minutes of the last Executive Committee Meeting on November 4th are available. She shared that the Executive Committee recommended two resolutions for adoption.

MOTION: To adopt the Accepting OPM Funds for the Purpose of Improving CAMA and Parcel Data resolution (Gauthier, Salomone). Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: To adopt the Application for DEEP Materials Management Infrastructure Grant resolution (Sparkman, Cwikla). Motion passed unanimously.

- b) Legislative Committee – Mr. Allyn began with the topic of early voting. Mr. Allyn stated that the two-week early voting period and long hours led to high costs that negatively impacted municipal budgets. Mr. Allyn shared that, in the wake of no-excuse absentee ballots being passed, the two-week period should and voting hours should be decreased as well. Ms. Chesebrough suggested that early voting should be limited to four days -- the Thursday to Sunday immediately before Election Day – and that voting hours should not exceed eight hours on those respective days. Ms. Blanchard proposed removing early voting entirely in respect to primary elections, citing that those who vote in primaries make a strong effort to vote regardless of the timeframe. Ms. Kennedy noted that a motion was required to add this action item to the legislative agenda.

MOTION: To amend the legislative agenda to include Early Voting. The language shall include limiting early voting days to four days, limiting voting hours to at most eight hours, and eliminating early voting for primary elections (Chesebrough, DeVivo). Motion passed unanimously.

Next, Mr. Salomone provided an update on the veterans tax exemption issue. He spoke with State Senator Cathy Osten on the matter. Senator Osten was wary of the discrepancy between the high number of veterans eligible for exemption that the legislative committee provided and the much lower number she had on her end – though, she will continue to investigate it. Mr. Allyn reminded the board of the issues regarding permanent and total disability status and its subjectivity. Mr. Brule inquired about the state tax assessors' involvement in the matter, to which Mr. Allyn replied (that at a recent event) the assessors are involved in the issue.

Mr. Allyn listed and summarized the rest of the items on the legislative agenda, including: greater funding assistance for Special Education programs, coastal flooding protections, unfreezing of SEAT funds, and local sales tax reform (a sharing program with the state).

MOTION: To accept the Legislative Committee Agenda (Scheffers, DeVivo). Motion passed unanimously.

- c) Military Command Representatives – Captain Curtin spoke about the ribbon cutting on the Sub Base's microgrid that has been in production since 2015. He stated that the microgrid will greatly enhance the capability of the base, especially in times of crisis. Additionally, he shared that the newly christened, nuclear-powered submarine USS Iowa is currently in testing trials in Groton. He concluded that around eight or nine more submarines will be coming into port over the holidays.

- d) Congressional Office Report – Mr. Carver, of Representative Courtney’s Office, spoke briefly about holding off on the IRS Direct Pay program. Also, he shared that those involved with applying for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) should do it sooner than later in the wake of the incoming presidential administration and possible disruptions. Ms. McBride, of Senator Murphy’s Office, spoke about the firefighters grant deadline coming up on December 24th, as well as the ending of continuing resolutions on December 20th. Additionally, she shared that Connecticut will be receiving \$8 million from LIHEAP to help low-income families with their energy bills. She concluded with an update that \$5 million has been secured to make various upgrades at New London’s port.
- e) seCTer – Mr. Whitescarver spoke in support of Mr. Kooris and the MRDA, stating that seCTer will be greatly involved with the state’s new office to bring about development in the region. He also reminded the board that seCTer’s annual meeting is today, November 20th, and that it is still open to last-minute attendees.
- f) SEAT – Mr. Carroll said ridership rates increased in the last month and that public Wi-Fi was now available for passengers on the buses. Additionally, he shared that fare validators have been updated on the buses, hopefully leading to less road calls. Mr. Carroll said that soon they will be trying to integrate credit cards as an additional form of payment. He concluded with a reminder that SEAT services will be closed on Thanksgiving Day, and that SEAT always needs more operators.
- g) Cultural Coalition – Ms. Mathiasen shared that Culture Connects will be on November 22nd at the Packing House in Willington, CT and on December 6th at Foundry 66. She invited the board to look at the Coalition’s calendar, especially those in military families who can take advantage of certain free events.
- h) Health Districts – Mr. McCormack that Uncas Health District is working on their Community Health Needs Assessment, noting that nearby hospitals are partnering with health collaboratives. Additionally, he spoke highly of a focus group that took place on November 14th in which participants arrived at two key issues in the region – housing and mental health services (especially pediatric). He concluded with an update on their Health Improvement Plan, and a reminder to give the Health District a heads up on signoffs relating to eviction notices around the holidays. He invited the municipalities to call the health districts in anticipation of the high volume of signoffs to maximize efficiency.
- i) Solid Waste Committee – Mr. Allyn stated the committee met on October 27th and that their next meeting will be on January 28th, 2025.

9) Executive Director’s Report:

Ms. Kennedy shared that the Connecticut Department of Transportation has opened the application portal for LOTCIP and TRIP funds, and that a webinar will be held today, November 20th, about both programs the application process. Additionally, Ms. Kennedy shared that for entities that had previously applied for bike and pedestrian microgrants should be aware that the state has run out of funding for the program – though, she added that hopefully they will re-up the program next year. Ms. Kennedy announced that SCCOG staff

had recently submitted a BRIC Grant application and that an EPA Community Change grant will soon be submitted as well, marked by a notable partnership with United Way of Southeastern Connecticut. She concluded with a call out to the Achievable Housing Lookbook that Ms. Nicole Haggerty had prepared alongside SECHA. She invited the board to review it.

10) Old Business

There was no old business to report on.

11) New Business

MOTION: For SCCOG MPO Board to approve the TIP amendments as of November 2024 (DeVivo, Sparkman). Motion passed unanimously.

12) Next Meeting

Chairman Brule stated that the next board meeting will be on December 18th, 202 at Flanders Fish Market, in East Lyme. Breakfast service will begin at 8:00 AM and the meeting will begin at 8:30 AM.

13) Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting (DeVivo, Schefers). Motion passed unanimously.