

CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY COUNCIL OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

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MINUTES

January 25, 2012

Attendees:

Chester: Edmund Meehan

Cromwell:

Clinton: Willi Fritz

Deep River: Richard Smith

Durham: Laura Francis

East Haddam: Mark Walter, Chairman

East Hampton:

Essex: Norm Needleman

Haddam: Paul DeStefano

Killingworth: Cathy Iino

Lyme: Ralph Eno

Middlefield: Jon Brayshaw

Middletown:

Old Lyme: Bonnie Reemsnyder

Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna

Portland: Susan Bransfield

Westbrook: Noel Bishop

Others:

Dave LeVasseur, OPM

Phil Miller, State Representative

Liz Glidden, Haddam, Town Planner

Cindy Varricchio, East Haddam, Financial Administrator

CRERPA: Linda Krause, Janice Ehle-Meyer, Dorothy Papp, Jay Northrup,

MRPA: Geoff Colegrove

Several members of the public

1. Call to Order:

Chairman Mark Walter called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. at Westbrook Town Hall, Westbrook, CT.

2. Luncheon:

Noel Bishop welcomed everyone and offered the lunch.

3. Legislative Report:

Phil Miller talked about the expected State budget surpluses that have now become a deficit due to reduced revenues. The Governor has announced some budget cuts in the executive, judicial and legislative branches. CCM and CABE have announced that they would like to keep municipalities whole and see more state spending on special education costs. In the previous union concessions, there wasn't a provision to remedy the issue of building up pension benefits by working over time hours in the last years before retirement.

Hunting bears is a new issue. CT is presently one of the few states with a bear population that does not allow bear hunts.

The Education Committee has been meeting concerning the disparities in regions. Laura Francis asked Phil to pay attention to which regions are under achieving and how towns can get relief in the mandated areas that are costing the towns money. Mark Walters said that the legislature will send money to under achieving districts with a result that the others will get less money because the total will not change.

Ralph Eno asked Phil to be aware that CRRA will be making a move to have the electricity generated from burning garbage classed as a justifiable renewable; there may be opposition. This classification would affect the rate at which energy from garbage burning could be sold.

4. Approval of December minutes:

Mark made a motion to approve the December minutes, Laura seconded. All were in favor.

5. Progress Report on Consolidation:

A summary of information on the proposed COG was distributed. Mark thanked the consolidation committee for all their work and the additional help that was given to develop a document (draft only) for the proposed consolidation.

Mark briefly explained what the document included. He explained what a Council of Governments is, what steps have been taken, and how to achieve the transition stage.

There was a discussion about the requirement for 11 of the 17 towns (60%) to approve the COG before it comes into being. When the COG is formed, a transition period will begin. If towns do not vote to approve the consolidation, they will not be members.

During the transition period the towns that have not approved the COG will continue to get services assuming they have paid their dues to their existing regional agencies.

It was asked if there is a legal obligation to join the COG. David LeVasseur responded that there is only a statutory obligation to be designated in a planning region. If after the transition period, a town does not want to be a member, they then will be unable to participate and their access to state transportation funding will be in question.

Geoff Colegrove said that he recalled a town in this situation, and if they did not pay their dues to the MPO, they were not eligible to have the services provided, one being the transportation funding.

There was another discussion about whether a town's services will continue if they have not yet had their town meeting, and approval of 11 of the other towns is completed. The town that has not had a meeting will continue with services through the transition period.

Three of the towns have ratified to form a COG. They are: Killingworth, East Haddam and Cromwell.

There was a discussion on why to form a COG and who has the authority and what are the guarantees, savings, and location.

The town's per capita contribution was discussed. During the transition period, it is proposed that the dues rates will not change; after that, the rates will be refigured based on work program and budget.

Establishing a Regional Planning Commission was discussed and it was explained that a single advisory commission could be formed with one town/one vote. There is a staffing cost for this and some other regions have decided to not have a commission. The problem of getting people to come to meetings was discussed. Members of the existing planning agencies have expressed interest in this new commission.

The interaction among town planners and a COG's planners was discussed.

Transportation planning was discussed, including the process for merging the two existing MPOs.

Location of a new office was discussed and what the needs are. Sharing leased space with another regional group was discussed.

Cindy explained how the finance section of the report was established. A five year examination of historical fund balances was looked at. Cindy suggested that the budget should include an increase for professional fees because an auditor would have to be paid for both agencies with two audits until the close out. There will not be savings until 2014. A discussion followed about audits.

Geoff noted that Middletown transit is now relocating. The money source to do this will be looked into to see if it could help with the consolidation of the RPA's.

A question was raised as to post consolidation liabilities from the agencies.

The use of the term "consultant" was brought up as to a problem. "Professional services" would be a better term. An auditor would be part of the professional services. When to do audits and which organization would be responsible was discussed. Human resource services and legal services were mentioned as possible needs.

Dave explained that the towns will need to have two resolutions for consolidation. The first to ratify the COG with a 60% majority, and the second is to combine MPO's, for which there must be a 75% approval.

A verbal review of when the towns will have a town meeting to address the COG ordinance was conducted., resulting in the following estimates:

Chester – May

Clinton – February

Cromwell – approved

Deep River –February

Durham – March
East Hampton – no indication
East Haddam – approved
Essex – end of February/ March
Haddam – February
Killingworth – approved
Lyme – May

Middlefield – February
Middletown – no indication
Old Lyme – March
Old Saybrook – March/April
Portland - February
Westbrook – May

It was suggested that representatives from other towns be available to support towns that will be voting.

Retirement information was requested from the executive directors for their retirement structure by Cindy to include in the information.

6. Other matters

Laura reminded Selectmen from Region 2 please attend the REPT meetings. The next meeting will be on February 6th at 9:30 at the Guilford Fire Headquarters.

The next CRVCEO meeting will be on February 29th at the Old Lyme Town Hall at 12:00 with the Commissioner of Education.

Laura asked other towns to send her their public works budgets to look at for formatting.

The next merger sub-committee meeting will be determined after the changes to the consolidation document can be added.

6. Report from Executive committee / Business Plan:

See above.

7. Regional Planning Incentive Program (RPIP):

Due to lack of time, there was no discussion.

8. Adjournment:

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Cathy Iino and seconded by Susan Bransfield at 1:55 p.m. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Janice Ehle/Meyer