

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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DRAFT Minutes of the December 18, 2024 Meeting of the Southeastern CT Council of Governments

PRESENT:

Bozrah	Glenn Pianka	New London	Michael Passero
Colchester	-	North Stonington	Bob Carlson
East Lyme	Daniel Cunningham	Norwich	John Salomone
Franklin	Alden Miner	Preston	Sandra Gauthier
Griswold	-	Salem	Ed Chmielewski
Jewett City	-	Sprague	Cheryl 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
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: Charles Bunnell Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation: Rodney Butler, Robert Hayward		
CT DOT	-		

SECOG staff: Amanda Kennedy, Kate Rattan, Daniel Robinson, David Cook, Helen Zincavage, Jessica Cobb, Lana Melonakos-Harrison, Nicole Haggerty, Emily Bigl, Wendy Leclair, Jennifer Lindo. seCTer: Captain Paul Whitescarver, Mark Oefinger. SEAT: Mike Carroll. Office of Sen. Blumenthal: Ellen Graham. Office of Sen. Murphy: Erin McBride. Office of Rep. Courtney: Noah Carver. SEAT: Mike Carroll. Ledge Light Health District: Jennifer Muggeo. Town of Windham: Jim Bellano. SECT Cultural Coalition – Deb Mathiasen. TVCCA – Josh Kelly. MPTN: Michael Purcaro.

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 November 20th meeting:

MOTION: To approve the minutes (Pianka, Chmielewski). Motion passed unanimously.

4) Treasurer's Report:

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

5) Communications

There were no communications to report on.

6) Public Comment:

Josh Kelly of Thames Valley Council Community Action provided an update on the operations at his organization and legislative implications under the new administration. He warned that the LIHEAP program may be cut. He urged municipalities to plan accordingly to provide assistance for needy families in the absence of the LIHEAP program.

Additionally, he spoke about: TVCCA'S Family Bridge Program for parents of newborns, a childcare center in Groton, and the completion of a cold weather shelter for the homeless population in Norwich.

7) Committee and Liaison Reports:

a) Executive Committee

- i) Ms. Kennedy announced that the minutes of the last Executive Committee Meeting on December 2nd are available. She shared that the Executive Committee recommended three resolutions for adoption.

MOTION: SECOG MPO Board to endorse amended 2025-2028 TIP Narrative (Allyn-Gauthier, Allyn). Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: SECOG MPO Board to endorse the Town of Stonington's LOTCIP application for Culvert Replacement on Taugwonk, Road (Scheffers, Carlson). Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: SECOG MPO Board to endorse the safety metrics and targets (Passero, Sparkman). Motion passed unanimously.

- b) Legislative Committee – Mr. Allyn began by summarizing SECOG's recently-finalized Legislative Agenda, comprised of 7 items. He highlighted the Veterans Tax Exemption item and the one-year delay that was proposed during a meeting with local state legislators after the Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce panel on December 10th, 2024. Mr. Allyn urged the board members to utilize their connections with local legislators to advocate for SECOG's agenda in the upcoming legislative session. He then returned to the

issue of Veterans Tax Exemption to clarify that state legislators passed the bill with faulty data that underestimated program eligibility rates. Mr. Salomone shared that the Norwich assessors were unsure how to act and on how to interpret the proposed bill. Ms. Allyn-Gauthier added that a language clarification was coming in January from the CGA, to which Mr. Salomone replied that he was not optimistic. Mr. Allyn concluded the matter by reminding the board about the necessity of needs testing for the proposed tax-exemption program.

- c) Tribal Liaison Representatives – Mr. Butler of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation shared that he recently was elected to an 8th term, marking 22 years of serving his nation. He thanked those who attended the tribal nation's Holiday Event. He noted the hiring of Administrator Mike Purcaro, as well as a new Police Chief and Director of Development. Mr. Butler also spoke on the upcoming opening of the Great Wolf Lodge water park in April 2025. He concluded by stating his optimism in working with the tribal nation's neighbors of Stonington, Preston, North Stonington, and Ledyard – and included a thank you to all members for their hard work and partnership. Mr. Bunnell of the Mohegan Tribal Nation expressed his gratitude to the board members and their families for working diligently to make the SECOG region better – and added a special thank you to those who do not sit on the board. He concluded by wishing all present a happy holiday season.
- d) Military Command Representatives – Captain Curtin began by thanking those who attended the SUBASE's event on December 17th. He then shared that most of the SUBASE's submarines will be returning for the holiday season, but urged the board to remember the two submarines that will stay deployed and to keep those sailors and their families in mind. Captain Curtin also spoke about the ribbon cutting on the base's microgrid that had been in development for nearly a decade. He also announced that work on a large pier revitalization project had begun. Captain Curtin concluded with two callouts to SECOG staff. Firstly, he recognized Ms. Zincavage's work in securing grants for the SUBASE that totaled around \$1 million for a variety of usages. Secondly, he recognized Ms. Kennedy for her prior work on the 2017 JLUS Study and for also securing large amounts of grant funding for base-related projects.
- e) Congressional Office Report – Ms. Graham of Senator Blumenthal's Office shared that a continuing resolution will be provided by the U.S. Congress this week to avoid a government shut down. She added that FEMA funding had been approved, and that a wait-and-see approach will be adopted in regard to the implications of the incoming presidential administration. Ms. McBride of Senator Murphy's Office notified the board that the Assistance for Firefighters grant is due on Friday December 20th. She concluded with mentioning Senator Murphy's new leadership roles in the U.S. Senate. Mr. Carver of Representative Courtney's office echoed Ms. McBride's notice of grant deadlines and encouraged the board to reach out to Representative Courtney's staff for technical assistance. He concluded with sharing the passing of the Water Resource Development Act and the National Defense Authorization Act – and added a word of hope for avoiding a government shutdown.

- f) seCTer – Mr. Whitescarver announced that \$6 million that had been provided for the State Pier in New London, CT and spoke generally about redevelopment at the Crystal Mall. He conclude with reminding the board that seCTer has small business loans and grants available.
- g) SEAT – Mr. Carroll said ridership rates increased in the last month and that rates had successfully recovered from the hits that the Covid-19 pandemic delivered. Additionally, he shared that microtransit operations had been expanded in Groton, Waterford, and Stonington. He also spoke of expanded service on Sundays. He notified the board that SEAT hired 8 new bus operators this year, but SEAT still needs more to accommodate expanded service. Mr. Carrol also shared that SEAT was transitioning from a flag-down system to a system of bus stops. On the buses themselves, Mr. Carroll stated that new validators had been installed and use of the Token Transit app had been integrated, with card payments coming soon. Mr. Carroll also reminded the board about the closing of SEAT services on Christmas Day. He concluded by thanking SECOG for including the addressing of frozen transit funds on the legislative agenda, as well as announcing the construction of a new SEAT facility in Preston in Fiscal Year 2026.
- h) Cultural Coalition – Ms. Mathiasen did not have any major updates and expressed to the board that she is looking forward to working together in 2025.
- i) Health Districts – Ms. Muggeo of Ledge Light Health District spoke on their upcoming focus groups and surveys to gauge the public’s thoughts on public health issues and what matters are most important to the district. She reminded the board that Covid-19 cases are still present and to expect spikes in this winter season, along with spikes in cases of RSV. She expressed that Ledge Light Health District has masks and tests available and shared that vaccines remain imperative for public defense. Additionally, she shared that January 1st, 2025 will mark the next drop in acceptable in lead levels via federal legislation. Comprehensive investigation will be needed if a child has lead blood levels of 3.5 ug/dl. She urged that funding will be needed to support his work once ARPA funds run out soon. She also stressed that support is needed from the state on this matter. She concluded with mentioning that she and Patrick McCormack of Uncas Health District wish everyone a happy holidays.
- j) Solid Waste Committee – Mr. Allyn stated that SCRRRA towns should expect a new per ton price for waste treatment, which is subsidized by SCCRRA. He shared that their next meeting will be on January 28th, 2025 and will be via Zoom only.

8) Executive Director’s Report:

Ms. Kennedy shared that SECOG’s Annual Report was available. She announced the launch of SECOG’s rebranding – including a new logo, website at secogct.gov, and name (from SCCOG to SECOG). Additionally, she stated that SECOG is accepting new LOTCIP applicants and that funding is available. She added that the transportation grant for rural towns closed on Monday, December 16th. Also, Ms. Kennedy noted that the Bicyclist and Pedestrian Microgrant will be expanding to 2025, with a deadline in March. She included a summary of

her visit to the CT DOT regarding corridor studies, a SEAT bus shelter meeting on December 16th, and the securing of paratransit funds for Lebanon, East Lyme, and Colchester. Along the line of SECOG staff work, Ms. Kennedy spoke of applications for the CT DEEP MMI grant, EPA BRIC grant, and EPA Community Change grant. She also announced that the staff's work with municipalities adjacent to the Yantic River is moving ahead to select three flood mitigation sites. Ms. Kennedy concluded by individually recognizing all of the SECOG staff and commended them for their efforts in helping the region, highlighting those who were hired in 2024: Helen Zincavage, Emily Bigl, Daniel Robinson, Lana Melonakos-Harrison, Debra Pierce, and David Cook. Chairman Brule thanked Ms. Kennedy for her outstanding leadership and quality of work.

9) Old Business

There was no old business to report on.

10) New Business

MOTION: To approve the TIP amendments as of December 2024 (Sparkman, Cwikla). Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: To approve the appointments to the Executive Committee (Sparkman, Schefers). Motion passed unanimously.

11) Next Meeting

Chairman Brule stated that the next board meeting will be on January 15th, 2025 at 8:30 AM at the SECOG Office. He thanked everyone present for their work, expressed gratitude for his time as the SECOG Board's Chairman, and highlighted the incoming Chairwoman – Ms. Cheryl Blanchard.

12) Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting (DeVivo, Schefers). Motion passed unanimously. Meeting ended at 9:25 AM.