

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROPOSED ORDINANCE

Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

WHAT IS A COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS?

A Council of Governments (COG) incorporates the functions of the regional planning agencies and the councils of elected officials. A COG gives the chief elected officials of the member towns greater input on regional issues and a powerful voice at the state and federal level. Federal and state funding will flow through the COG. The COG will perform regional planning and facilitate regional collaboration.

HOW DO WE BECOME A COG?

The first step was taken when Connecticut River Valley Council of Elected Officials (CRVCEO) voted on July 27, 2011 to become a Council of Governments—the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments. The Office of Policy and Management (OPM) then approved the merger of the two regional planning agencies and the creation of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments.

Now, according to Connecticut law, the agreement among towns to form a COG must be approved by the legislative body of each town. Once eleven of the seventeen member towns have voted to ratify, the COG can be formed.

WHAT IS CRVCEO?

CRVCEO comprises a group of the chief executives of the towns of Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth, Lyme, Middlefield, Middletown, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland and Westbrook. Two state regional planning agencies, the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency (CRERPA) and Midstate Regional Planning Agency (MRPA), currently serve these towns. CRVCEO facilitates collaborative agreements on such matters as cooperative purchasing, mutual aid, joint grant applications, and information sharing.

WHY WAS CRVCEO FORMED?

The towns of this region have much more in common with one another than with the surrounding areas, which include larger cities such as Hartford, New Haven and New London. The council of the 17 towns gives our region a stronger voice in state and federal government matters than one town would have. The council also provides a forum for town leaders to work collaboratively on matters that affect our area.

WHY FORM A COG NOW?

The CRVCEO towns have been discussing this option for many years. Over the past few years, however, the state legislature has considered several measures that would reduce the number of regions and regional planning organizations in Connecticut to fewer than the current 15. Some proposals are for as few as five regions. These proposals could divide the CRVCEO towns and fold them into districts centered on much larger cities. The members of CRVCEO decided to take the proactive step of establishing a COG to protect our regional identity and organization. The state will provide funding for two years to help defray costs for regions that voluntarily consolidate and form a COG. As the first region to take this step, we expect to be awarded funds that will significantly defray the costs of the transition.

WHAT GUARANTEE DO WE HAVE THAT ONCE WE FORM THIS GROUP THE STATE WON'T CHANGE IT?

While there are no guarantees, OPM has been tasked by the legislature with recommending a regional structure for the state. OPM has indicated that it will recommend no changes to any regions that voluntarily consolidate now. OPM will not have to review these boundaries again until 2032.

WILL THERE BE ANY SAVINGS TO THE TOWNS?

We anticipate that there will be savings as the two offices are consolidated into one, with the benefits of economies of scale and voluntary employee retirements. Some services currently provided to individual towns through the regional planning agencies will be spun off and paid for separately. Other services will be expanded for some towns, and so the per capita contributions that currently support the regional planning agencies will eventually rise somewhat for towns now in the Midstate RPA and fall somewhat for towns in the Connecticut River Estuary RPA.

WHERE WILL THE OFFICES BE LOCATED?

A location has not yet been selected, but the plan is to locate the newly formed COG centrally in the lower Connecticut River valley. At this point in time we are investigating office space in Deep River.

HOW WILL THE COG BE STRUCTURED AND WHAT WILL BE ITS DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES?

A subcommittee of CRVCEO has conducted transitional planning and financial analysis. We hope that the transition can officially begin on July 1 and expect that the process will take a year to complete. If the COG is formed, the two planning agencies will continue to function individually and then close their books at the end of FY 2013.

Fees will remain the same as they are now for each regional planning agency, and the fees for the COG for FY 2014 will be established over the next few months.

DOES IT MAKE SENSE FOR OLD LYME TO JOIN THE LCRVCOG, OR THE SOUTHEASTERN CT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (SECCOG)?

After attending a meeting of the SECCOG, and understanding the differences, it was felt by the Board of Selectmen that the Lower CT River Valley Council of Governments is the best fit for our community. Most of the 17 towns are fairly small towns with much in common with our community. In addition, we have worked for years with many of them in our regional planning. In addition, the Connecticut River is common to many of us, and gives us a unique perspective on regional planning. But the COG to our east was considered to be sure that we are making the best decision for our community.