

SCCOG NEWSLETTER

Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments

March/April 2007

5 Connecticut Avenue
Norwich, CT 06360
860-889-2324
860-889-1222 (Fax)
Office@seccog.org
(Email)
www.seccog.org

Member Towns:

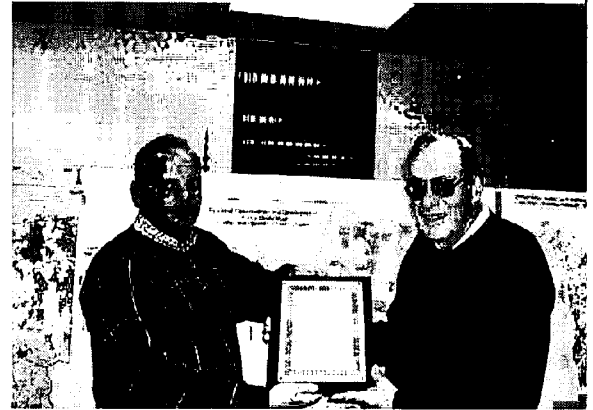
Bozrah
Colchester
East Lyme
Franklin
Griswold
City of Groton
Town of Groton
Ledyard
Lisbon
Montville
New London
North Stonington
Norwich
Preston
Salem
Sprague
Stonington
Borough of Stonington
Voluntown
Waterford

Gene Lohrs Retires From RPC

Gene Lohrs, Regional Planning Commission alternate member from the Town of Waterford, retired after 26 years of continuous service to the organization. Gene was first appointed to the Southeastern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency (SCRPA) precursor to the SCCOG and RPC, in 1981. Gene was the last remaining Regional Planning Agency member serving on the Regional Planning Commission. Gene served as Chairman of the SCRPA in 1987, the year in which the 1987 Regional Plan of Conservation and Development was adopted. This was the last regional plan adopted by SCRPA. During that period, SCRPA had a Program Committee on which Gene served that oversaw all the activities of the Agency.

In 1992, as a member and officer of SCRPA, Gene participated in the transition from a Regional Planning Agency to a Council of Governments. Gene then served as Secretary of the Regional Planning Commission for a period of 12 years, from 1993 to 2005. But perhaps Gene's biggest influence on the concept of regionalism over this 26-year period was felt as a result of his 20-year chairmanship of the Reference Committee. In this capacity, Gene oversaw monthly statutory referrals to SCRPA and the RPC of proposed municipal zone changes and subdivisions where they bordered or crossed abutting town lines. These referrals averaged about 100 per year. In that 20-year time frame, Gene's imprint was on perhaps 2,000 referrals. He rarely missed a committee meeting and staff can attest to his attention to detail with each and every referral.

In 1997, one of Gene's most demanding tasks was overseeing a complex review of a proposal for a Six Flags amusement park in North Stonington which, despite not meeting the statutory requirements for



Bob Baron, RPC Chairman presents Resolution to Gene Lohrs (right)

mandatory referral, was nevertheless referred to the Regional Planning Commission for its regional perspective. Perhaps no other referral in the 46 years of SCRPA/SCCOG was as politically charged or required as much staff review. That process resulted in a recommendation that the zone change be put in the form of a special exception rather than as a permitted use, so as to give North Stonington greater control over the development outcome. North Stonington agreed with this assessment, but Six Flags eventually withdrew its application.

The contribution of Gene Lohrs to SCRPA, the RPC, and regionalism is unique, not just for his longevity of service, but more for his energy, commitment and dedication to the various tasks that needed to be addressed in a fair, thorough and technically competent manner. Gene never backed away from an assignment and each job he took on he saw to its completion.

We wish Gene and his wife Marilyn all the best.

Census 2010

The Boston regional office of the U.S. Census Bureau conducted a workshop at the SCCOG office in Norwich on March 15, 2007 concerning the 2010 Census Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program. The LUCA program offers local officials an opportunity to provide input on the Census Bureau's address list that is used to control the distribution and collection of census questionnaires. The completeness and accuracy of the address list is essential to a complete and accurate census of each municipality. In addition to apportioning the U.S. House of Representatives, numerous federal and state programs allocate funding based on U.S. Census population data.

Vincent Pito of the Bureau presented the program,

assisted by Michael Horgan. Eighteen local officials and/or staff attended the program. Major topics covered were purposes of the program, participation options, confidentiality and security, and federal/local responsibilities. Local officials are requested to indicate their willingness to participate in the program between July 2007 to January 2008. The Bureau will be conducting detailed training for program participants beginning in late summer 2007. Participants must conclude their reviews by April of 2008 and will have 120 calendar days to review the material if they are registered by November 19, 2007.

Anyone wishing more information on the program should contact Vincent Pito in Boston at 1-617-424-4597 or vpito@census.gov.

SCCOG/RPC to Host Transportation Hearing

A public hearing on the Draft Long Range Regional Transportation Plan for FY 2007-2035 is scheduled for 7:30 p.m., Monday, April 9, 2007 in the main meeting room of the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments, 5 Connecticut Avenue, Norwich. The thirty day comment period for the Plan began on March 15, 2007 with a posting of the document on the SCCOG website (www.seccog.org). The 30-day comment period runs through April 16, 2007. Those not able to speak at the public hearing should submit written comments by mail to Dick Guggenheim at the above address; by email at rguggenheim@seccog.org; or by fax to 860-889-1222.

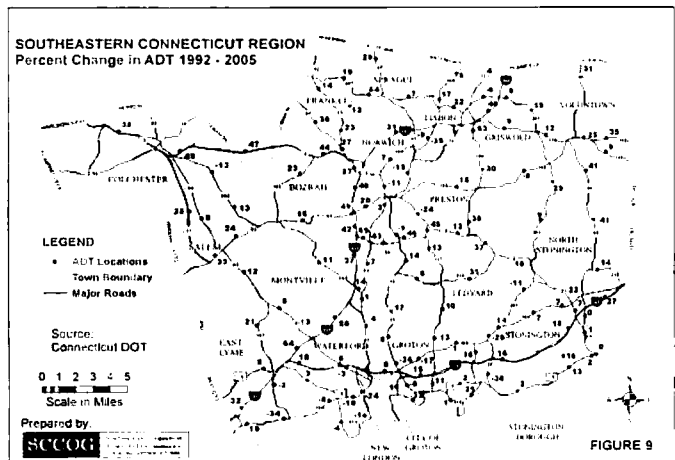
The 2007 Plan is the first to be drafted under guidelines of the new federal umbrella transportation act, SAFETEA-LU: Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act, A Legacy for Users. The new planning regulations direct Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) like SCCOG to expand their traditional highway and transit functions and include many more organizations in a consultative relationship. This includes a new emphasis on a link to land use planning at both the State and local level. Also required is a new emphasis on coordination of demand-response transportation for elderly, disabled and low-income people, known by the acronym LOCHSTP (Locally Coordinated Health and Social Services Transit Program), this effort for low-income people as well as the New Freedoms Program for disabled people under the American's With Disabilities Act (ADA) with other local and regional on-going transit programs for the elderly and disabled.

SAFETEA-LU is also emphasizing Safe Routes to Schools, a new program aimed at getting elementary school children who live within proximity of a neighborhood school to walk or ride bikes to school rather than travel on a bus or be driven by a family member. The federal government has recognized that health and obesity are linked to lack of exercise in the formative years of a child's life. Couples with the potential savings in petroleum fuels, this new program will look at possible ways to build sidewalks, bike paths, office lights and other infrastructure to add impetus to this program. A planning phase

of this program is scheduled to begin within the next several months.

The opening of the public comment period was triggered by a ConnDOT finding Air Quality conformity of the proposed projects in the Plan. Following the close of the public comment period, staff will then address the comments and suggestions for change and present a final draft of the Plan to the SCCOG for adoption at their regular meeting scheduled for April 18, 2007. This target date for adoption was accelerated in order to enable ConnDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) adequate time to review plans for completeness.

A map from the proposed 2007 Transportation Plan depicting the percent change in Average Daily Traffic (ADT) on the region's highways between 1992-2005 is reprinted below.



Route 11 GAC Acquires Parcel

At its January 26th meeting, the Route 11 Greenway Authority Commission (GAC) celebrated the acquisition of its first parcel of land. This property, consisting of 8.3 acres, is located in Salem. Both Congressman Joe Courtney and former Congressman Rob Simmons attended the ceremony. The Route 11 GAC has since acquired a second parcel in Waterford, and is poised to acquire two more parcels, one in East Lyme and one in Montville.



Former Congressman Simmons, Route 11 GAC Chair, Peter Sielman, and Congressman Joe Courtney at Route 11 GAC Meeting

Regional Plan of Conservation & Development 2007 Update

The RPOCD update process is underway and is still on track to be completed this year. The SCCOG staff have recently completed the compilation of back-ground data for the 2007 plan update. This information was presented to the RPOCD Steering Committee during its March meeting. It is also being analyzed to develop the Recommended Regional Development Plan map. Some of the key findings from the background data are as follows:

- The estimated growth in regional population between 2000 and 2005 has been nearly 3 times the percentage of growth during the decade of the 1990's. Overall, the region in the first decade of the 21st Century may experience a population growth rate similar to the 1980's.
- Housing activity between 2000 and 2005 has increased by 31 percent from ten years earlier. In fact, the annual permitted housing totals for the years 2003, 2004, and 2005 exceeded 1,000 units. This level of housing activity occurred only once during the 1990's and that was in 1994. This level of housing activity is very much in line with estimated housing needs of the regional housing study compiled by SCCOG in 2002. That study estimated a needed rate of 860 to 1,020 units per year. Nevertheless, as indicated in the above referenced study, meeting the housing challenge facing southeastern Connecticut will be neither easy nor swift.
- The region's median income, while still lagging behind the state as a whole, has improved from 89 percent of the state's median

to 94 percent by 1999. During this same time period, the gap between the municipality with the lowest and the highest income has increased. Additionally, the number of persons living below the poverty level increased by 2.6 percent.

- The region's economy has experienced a restructuring and a shift away from manufacturing-type jobs to service-type jobs.
- During the past 10 to 15 years, the region lost almost 11,000 manufacturing jobs at an annual average wage of \$67,000. During this same time period, the service sector increased employment by more than 27,000 jobs at an annual average wage of about \$33,000.
- For a variety of reasons, the capacity of many of the region's key roadways is being exhausted. SCCOG's Long-Range Regional Transportation Plan has identified potential projects to address many of these problems. Additionally, the region has identified a wide range of public transit needs, that include special needs groups such as the elderly, disabled, low-income, those without automobiles as well as the general public.
- Either water and sewer systems or water only systems serve some 55 square miles of the region, or approximately 29 percent of the region's developed area, and approximately 10 percent of the region's total land area. It is estimated that over 70 percent of the region's population is served by one of these utility sys-

(Continued on page 4)

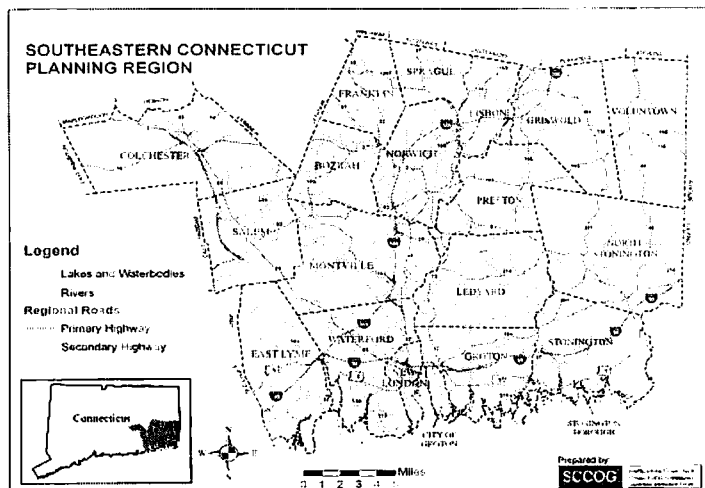
SCCOG GIS Update

A draft of the 2005 Existing Land Use Map has been completed, in conjunction with the updating of the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development. The map depicts 16 land use classes within the 2 major categories of developed (e.g. residential, commercial, industrial) and undeveloped (e.g. open space, recreation, agriculture) land. Unlike earlier versions of the regional Land Use Map, the new version is predominantly parcel-based. The information used to compile this map consisted of parcels, when available, and land use descriptions from the towns, as well as 2004 aerial photography.

The 2007 Recommended Regional Development Plan map is near completion. This resource will show areas of existing and planned urban, suburban and mixed urban development., existing and proposed major institutional uses. Federally recognized Native American Tribal Reservations, existing and planned conservation areas, recreation and open space uses. SCCOG staff will circulate a draft of this map to all SCCOG municipalities for comment before it is finalized.

SCCOG staff is in the process of digitizing some of our historical data layers, such as urban land use for the previous three decades.

The SCCOG has purchased a new HP 800 series plotter, which allows the production of large format maps of outstanding quality.



An example of a SCCOG GIS map

(Continued from page 3)

tems.

- Significant water system expansion will require additional sources. Groundwater wells are envisioned as having the biggest potential for future water supply. Protecting identified high yield ground water source locations is imperative.
- Significant natural resources extend throughout the region. These areas present development limitations and care and caution must be exercised to protect these areas. Failure to meet this challenge will create significant impacts on every facet of economic growth and quality of life within southeastern Connecticut.
- Compilation of recent land use data indicate a continuing of past general trends which include an increasing percentage of land being developed for residential use. This should not be surprising since the vast majority of land, some 90 percent, is zoned for residential use. A continuing challenge for the region is to ensure that non-residentially zoned land be located to reflect site characteristics that lend themselves to a more intensive form of development as well as in appropriate with regard to needed infrastructure accessibility.

- The results of the "Regional Issue Identification Questionnaire" indicate broad regional support for the following issues:
 - ◆ Promoting growth in compact urban and village centers.
 - ◆ Preserving the physical character of communities.
 - ◆ Promoting existing businesses and attracting new business.
 - ◆ Protecting special natural resources.
 - ◆ Improving mass transit.

While the above items received broad support, there were a number of items that only received moderate support, but are worth noting here. Some respondents concluded that promoting a framework for joint community land-use regulatory control on large scale projects at the municipal level may be relevant. A number of respondents stated that encouraging affordable rental and/or owner-occupied residential units are somewhat important. However, although some respondents appear to recognize the need for more affordable housing, it is unclear to them who is responsible to supply these units. Also, there is general support for spending taxpayer money on improving mass transit versus building new roads.