

DRAFT

MINUTES OF THE NHTCOG MEETING OF June 11, 2015

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Donald Stein	Canaan (Falls Village), Patricia Allyn Mechare
Colebrook, Thomas McKeon	Goshen, Robert Valentine
Hartland, Wade Cole	Harwinton, Michael Criss
Kent, Bruce Adams	Litchfield, Leo Paul, Jr.
Morris, Barbara Bongiolatti	New Hartford, Daniel Jerram
Norfolk, Susan Dyer	North Canaan, Doug Humes
Roxbury, Barbara Henry	Salisbury, Curtis Rand
Sharon, Brent Colley	Torrington, Elinor Carbone
Warren, Craig Nelson	Washington, Mark Lyon
Winchester, Candace Bouchard	

Others in Attendance:

Catherine Smith, DECD Commissioner	Steve May, ECHIP
Larissa Carr, ECHIP	Jason Giulietti, NWC Chamber
JoAnn Ryan, NWC Chamber	Hon. Jay Case, State Representative
Hon. Kevin Witkos, State Senator	Steve Silver, Eversource
Chuck Burnham, Eversource	Bernie Harrington, LWV
Richard Lynn, NHTCOG Staff	Jocelyn Ayer, NHTCOG Staff
Joanna Wozniak-Brown, NHTCOG Staff	Darlene Krukar, NHTCOG Staff
Media Representatives	

Call to Order, Opportunity for Public Comment. The meeting, held at the NWCT Chamber of Commerce, was called to order at 10:05 am. There was no public comment. On a motion by Mike Criss and seconded by Dan Jerram, the NHTCOG unanimously agreed to modify the agenda and add an update on the legislative session after the Commissioner's presentation.

Introduction of Joanna Wozniak-Brown, NHTCOG's New Administrative and Planning Assistant. Rick Lynn introduced Joanna Wozniak-Brown to Council Members and stated that the staff is very pleased to have her on board. She will be focusing on natural hazard mitigation planning, preparing a bus stop signage and shelter plan for the Northwest Transit District, and assembling GIS information for the NHTCOG.

Guest Speaker: Hon Catherine Smith, Commissioner, CT Department of Economic and Community Development. Topic: Update of Connecticut's Economic Development Strategic Plan and Other DECD Initiatives of Municipal Interest. Commissioner Smith gave a PowerPoint presentation on the update of the strategic plan. She reviewed the various tools available to help strengthen Connecticut's economy. There is a major focus on promoting tourism, manufacturing, and building on the state's strengths. Retaining and building on existing business is another area of focus. DECD is supportive of internships

for local students as a means of trying to keep young people in the state. The six key investment areas under the draft plan are: healthcare, advanced manufacturing, tourism, green technology, digital media, and insurance/financial service. DECD is considering adding education facilities to the list. The Commissioner gave some examples of what is being done in these key investment areas. She stated that she is looking for input from municipalities on the update of the strategic plan. The DECD contacts for the NHCOCG region are: Dave Raccio 860-270-8150 and Eric Hampton 860-270-8122. The Commissioner stated that the Small Business Express Program has impacted 31 local companies in the NHCOCG towns with \$728,500 received in assistance and 480 jobs created or retained. Discussion followed. Don Stein expressed concern about major companies threatening to leave Connecticut due to frustrations over taxes and the state budget. He stated that Connecticut's tax structure needs to be aligned with a comprehensive, long-term economic development strategy. Representative Jay Case pointed out that our region has a lot of small feeder companies that support the larger corporations and he is concerned about the tax package being presented by state officials that will adversely impact these small businesses as well as the large corporations. Rep. Case expressed support for more transportation funding for the Northwest corner.

Update on Legislative Session. Senator Kevin Witkos stated that Connecticut is in a great location between Boston & NY and has a good work-force. He has reached out to employers to find out what they need from students because CT is falling behind in terms of economic growth in the U.S. He stated that the issues that would help business are not being addressed in Hartford. The legislature is placing too many mandates on the small businesses. He stated that there is still time to reach out to legislators before the special session to encourage more business friendly legislation. There was discussion on SB 1. Barbara Henry questioned the thinking behind the proposed commercial mill rate within the state's COGs. Don Stein stated that in many respects Hartford is pitting the large cities against the small towns. Representative Jay Case stated that the budget represents a \$1.8 billion tax increase. Legislators placed many expenditures off-budget to avoid the budget cap. Representative Case commended the COG members from the NW corner that have come to Hartford to testify on issues this session. Senator Witkos stated that we should continue to push for the lock box for transportation improvement and maintenance.

Update on Progress by NHCOCG's Economic Development Consultant on CEDS Implementation. Jason Giulietti, NWC Chamber of Commerce, with Introductory Comments by Jocelyn Ayer. Jocelyn stated that we have a contract with the Chamber to identify resources for implementing the CEDS plan. Jason distributed and reviewed a handout on his work to date.

Discussion of the Eastern Connecticut Health Insurance Program with ECHIP Board Consultant Steve May and Larissa Carr, ECHIP Administrator with Introductory Comments by Brent Colley. Brent Colley stated that the health insurance cost for municipal employees continues to be a major concern. Several towns in eastern Connecticut have banded together to reduce municipal health insurance costs and he invited representatives from eastern Connecticut to attend and describe their program, which is known as the ECHIP program. Larissa Carr and Steve May stated that health care costs are a major part of town budgets. The advantage of coming together and being self-

insured is that it can save towns money, as it has under the ECHIP program during the past three years. ECHIP now has five towns and each town has its own bank account to let them see the costs for their town. Mr. May stated that it is not a huge investment for towns to establish an insurance collaborative, and he projects that savings will continue to be achieved. A subcommittee consisting of Brent Colley, Sue Dyer, and Dale Martin was set up to further investigate this idea for the NHCOG.

Regional Transportation Planning.

- a. *Proposed NHCOG Letter in Support of Increased Funding for Maintenance of State Highways in the Northwest Hills.* After discussion, on a motion by Dan Jerram and seconded by Mark Lyon, it was decided that a letter be sent to ConnDOT Commissioner Redeker, signed by all the COG members, requesting that the funding for state highways in the northwest corner be increased so that the state highway network can be properly maintained and improved.
- b. *Update on Preparation of Regional Transportation Plan.* Rick Lynn stated that we awarded a consultant contract to Pickering & Parker and it fell through due to Francis Pickering being hired by the WCCOG. As a result we will be going out to bid again for consultant assistance in preparing the Plan, as endorsed under our Regional Transportation Planning Work Program.

Request for Endorsement of NHCOG Goals and Objectives and Work Plan for FY 2015-2016. Rick Lynn stated that the proposed goals and objectives, and associated work plan, represent a continuation and expansion of the COG's current projects. He encouraged COG members to contact Jocelyn or him during the course of the year with any suggested changes. On a motion by Pat Mechare and seconded by Craig Nelson, the NHCOG goals and objectives and work plan for FY 2015-16 were unanimously approved.

Administrative Items.

- a. On a motion by Sue Dyer and seconded by Doug Humes, the NHCOG minutes from the May 14, 2015 meeting were unanimously approved with the correction that the slate of officers is for FY15-16 not FY14-15.
- b. On a motion by Tom McKeon and seconded by Wade Cole, the NHCOG financial statement for 4/2015 was unanimously approved.
- c. On a motion by Bob Valentine and seconded by Wade Cole, the proposed NHCOG officers for FY 2014-2015 were unanimously elected as follows: Don Stein, Chairman; Mark Lyon, Vice-Chairman; Sue Dyer, Secretary; Bruce Adams, Treasurer; Pat Mechare, At-Large Member; and Leo Paul, Jr., At-Large Member.
- d. On a motion by Bob Valentine and seconded by Sue Dyer, the NHCOG members unanimously endorsed the Small Cities Application from Salisbury.
- e. On a motion by Sue Dyer and seconded by Tom McKeon, the former LHCEO members unanimously accepted the LHCEO audit for July 2013-December 2014.
- f. Rick Lynn reported on the progress of the new NHCOG office renovations and hopes that we will be moving in a couple of weeks and we will have our July meeting at the new office.

Committee Updates.

- a. *Legislative Committee.* This was discussed earlier in the meeting.

b. Recycling Advisory Committee. Sue Dyer reported that the HHW Collection Day in Falls Village went very well with 228 residents attending. She thanked Pat Mechare, Bruce Adams, Brian Bartram, Darlene Krukar, and Rick Lynn for working the event. Bob Valentine stated that as a resident who attended, it was very well run.

c. Public Works Equipment Cooperative. Wade Cole reported that the material screeners have been ordered and training will be held when they arrive. The money left over from the material screeners can be used toward the purchase of a used catch basin cleaner or other equipment. A third sweeper will be purchased through OPM's ICE program grant, with the Town of Warren serving as the lead town. Wade stated that the asphalt recyclers and hot boxes are still underutilized, and he encouraged towns to make better use of this regional equipment. The regional salt bid will be released next week with 22 towns participating, including Bethlehem and Thomaston.

Town by Town Issues and Updates by COG Members. Jocelyn Ayer distributed a hand out regarding the "Cozy Home Loan" program from Eversource. Bruce gave a review of his meeting in Washington DC regarding tribal recognition.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment. On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 12:09 pm.