

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF NOVEMBER 10, 2016

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Canaan, Patricia AllynMechare
Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway	Goshen, Bob Valentine
Hartland, Wade Cole	Kent, Bruce Adams
Litchfield, Leo Paul	Morris, Tom Weik
Norfolk, Sue Dyer	New Hartford, Dan Jerram
North Canaan, Doug Humes	Roxbury, Barbara Henry
Salisbury, Curtis Rand	Torrington, Elinor Carbone
Warren, Craig Nelson	Washington, Mark Lyon
Winsted, Bob Geiger	

Others in Attendance:

Joe DeLong and Zachary McKeown, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities; Katy Shafer and Kayleigh Lombardi, Partnership for Strong Communities; Maureen Hubert and Tina Hasapis, Friendly Hands Food Bank; Sarah Ficenec, Connecticut Economic Resource Center; Noreen Laurinaitis USDA; Sara Radasci, ConnDOT; Steve Silver, Eversource; Jocelyn Ayer, Joanna Wozniak- Brown, and Rick Lynn, NHCOG staff; Media Representatives

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment.

The meeting, held at the NHCOG office, was called to order by Chairman Mark Lyon at 10:03 a.m. No public comment was offered.

Town by Town Issues and Updates by COG Members.

Pat Mechare stated that the new emergency facility should be done at the end of February/beginning of March. Bruce Adams reported that they broke ground on the new Kent welcome center and bathroom, funded by a STEAP grant, and it will be completed by winter. Kent also received a Main Street Investment Grant to work on Kent sidewalks and he thanked Jocelyn Ayer of NHCOG for her work on the grant application. He also expressed discontent with a major culvert replacement project in town, as difficulty between ConnDOT, engineers, and the contractors continues. Tom Weik announced that the Morris town budget was finally approved, and the town received a STEAP grant for bathroom and shower renovations to the fire house. Mark Lyon reported that, overall, the Gilmore Girls weekend was a success with good publicity for the town. Barbara Henry asked if other members had heard about the proposed Panda power plant in New Milford which is of concern. General town updates were provided by other COG members.

Update on Activities of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. Joe DeLong, Executive Director.

Joe DeLong reported on CCM's recent efforts to address state budget cuts and the potential impact on municipalities. He stated that various legislative committees were expressing concern about some of the MORE Commission's recommendations. As a result, the Board of Directors of CCM established an independent panel, known as the State-Local Partnership, to study ways to more effectively enhance inter-governmental efficiency. The Partnership is comprised of 21 municipal chief elected officials and has retained the services of an economic policy consultant to assist them in their work. They hope to identify potential data-driven efficiencies in municipal operations that are more appropriate adjustments than those proposed in the past. Emergency services and public education are two focus areas. Mr. DeLong expressed interest in hearing about any and all concerns from CCM member towns. Rick Lynn asked if the COG will have a chance to review the Partnership's report before it is finalized. Mr. DeLong said that near-final drafts will likely be distributed to the COGs for review. Sue Dyer asked how Partnership members Elinor Carbone and Leo Paul felt about the work of the Partnership. Elinor Carbone reported that the

meetings have been very enlightening and productive and that the Partnership is addressing both options for reducing expenditures and increasing revenues. Leo Paul agreed the Partnership meetings have been productive and that he has been encouraging CCM to work more closely with COST so that a united municipal lobbying force can be developed. Both Elinor Carbone and Leo Paul have expressed opposition to proposals that increased taxes. Elinor expressed support for alternative and diverse methods for increasing revenue such as franchise fees for operations in municipal rights of way. She noted that Torrington, with a population less than 50,000 people, struggles to find funding just as the region's smaller towns do. Barbara Henry asked what the timeframe is for release of a final report by the Partnership. Mr. DeLong responded that the goal is to release the report by the beginning of the 2017 legislative session. Leo Paul expressed support for the work of CCM and encouraged COG members to actively participate in CCM.

Expanding Housing Choices in Your Municipality to Promote Economic Growth and Vibrancy – New Tools and Resources. Katy Shafer, Interim Policy Director, Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC).

Katy Shafer reiterated that Connecticut is an expensive place to live, especially in housing costs. It's especially difficult in this region as the NHCOC region's housing stock is primarily single-family homes. She explained that baby boomers are seeking smaller and accessible housing and that millennials are burdened with student debt and can be reliant on parental housing. She noted that the Partnership for Strong Communities does not tell towns where and/or what to build but offers guidance. Old Saybrook, Simsbury, Fairfield, and Newtown are just some of the towns with active housing plan efforts. The Partnership has launched a new municipal resources webpage that includes data and explanations to inform the housing discussion. They have a zoning catalog on their website from towns across the state. Jocelyn Ayer reported that the Cornwall Housing Corporation had used both the Lakeville Journal news articles written by Mary Close (on NHCOC website) that provide real stories of local residents struggling with housing and the statistical data offered by PSC to inform a recent local discussion on housing. She felt these tools worked well. Ms. Shafer distributed and reviewed the updated municipal "Housing Profiles" developed by the PSC for the NHCOC member towns.

Release of New "Regional Profile" Report 2016: Demographic, Economic, and Housing Trends Affecting the NHCOC Region. Jocelyn Ayer.

Jocelyn Ayer reported that a data profile is now available in both narrative and raw data formats for the region and each of its member towns. She showed the COG members where they can find the information on the NHCOC website. Jocelyn utilized the NHCOC voting clickers to "quiz" members on the Regional Profile's findings. Questions included: Which town had the largest percentage increase in population between 1960 and 2000? (Burlington); What town has the highest rate of self-employment in the region? (Cornwall); What is the region's largest employment sector? (health care and social services); How many residents in the region are spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs? (17,000). Sarah Ficenec of CERC was in attendance to answer any questions COG members had about the data.

Overview of the Friendly Hands Food Bank. Maureen Hubert, Executive Director and Tina Hasapis, Assistant Director.

Maureen Hubert provided a history of the Friendly Hands Food Bank, which she started over 20 years ago. The Food Bank currently serves 8 towns and feeds about 300 families. In addition to weekly food support, they have a number of supportive programs including back-to-school supplies, birthday bags, winter coats, Thanksgiving packages, and Christmas gifts. They maintain a list of additional services to direct their clients to places that can help meet their other needs including food stamps, heating bill support, etc. They previously had funding from the Department of Social Services and the Feinstein grant but those funding streams, totaling about \$60,000, have ended. Their costs, including worker's compensation, utilities, and organization insurance, have risen. They've done a variety of fund-raising projects including a pasta dinner, silent auction, etc. but costs are increasing beyond what they have been able to raise. They have 3 full-time staff members and 15 consistent volunteers. Bob Valentine asked what sectors of the population the food bank serves. Maureen Hubert expressed that they have a lot of single parents working

multiple part-time jobs. She explained that they do help people who receive SNAP benefits. They do collect food from local businesses such as bread from Panera and Bantam Bread and milk from Arethusa Farm. She said that their van is incredibly important because the donations aren't delivered. Barbara Henry asked how much the \$184,000 budget goes to food purchases. Maureen explained that the major challenges are in Food Bank overhead costs, including insurances.

Regional Transportation Plan Implementation. Rick Lynn explained that the NHCOG's Transportation Planning Work Program for this fiscal year includes a budget of \$20,000 for the NHCOG to retain consultant planning services "to address a regional priority as defined in the Regional Transportation Plan". As discussed in a staff memo included with the agenda packet, two options recently considered and endorsed by the NHCOG's Executive Committee for the use of these planning funds include 1) a planning study to designate priorities for regional trail connectivity, and 2) hiring a regional engineer to address regional transportation planning needs and provide municipal assistance on a fee basis. Both projects are specifically recommended in the "Five-Year Implementation Program" of our Regional Transportation Plan. Rick explained that both projects could be funded if consultant contingency funds included in this year's COG budget were utilized.

Don Stein expressed support for the regional trail plan and commented that it would be important to identify the different types of trails (bike, hiking) and the trail holder (land trust, municipal, state) and to prioritize the trail connectivity options. Barbara asked if the plan would cover all towns and Rick affirmed that it would. Rick mentioned that Curtis Rand had expressed some concern about publication of local trails and he clarified that it would be up to each municipality to choose which trails to include in the project.

Following discussion, Don Stein made a motion which was seconded by Wade Cole to support the implementation of the proposed regional trail project with \$20,000 budgeted from our annual ConnDOT transportation planning grant. The motion was unanimously approved.

Bob Valentine, Brent Colley, and Bob Geiger expressed support for retaining the services of a regional engineer. Bob Valentine stated that this can be done through contracting with an on-call consulting engineer or by hiring a new COG employee. He stated that the Northeastern CT COG has an engineer on staff that several municipalities utilize as their municipal engineer. Barbara Henry said she prefers the on-call consultant approach as towns may want to continue hiring their local person. Rick said that area road supervisors have expressed interest in an on-call engineer and they will be discussing this at an upcoming meeting of the Northwest Hills Road Supervisor Association.

Following additional discussion, and on a motion made by Sue Dyer and seconded by Bruce Adams, the NHCOG unanimously authorized budgeting \$20,000 from available contingency funds to contract with a Professional Engineer to provide regional technical support as needed and to be available to provide municipal engineering assistance on an on-call, as-needed basis at municipal expense.

Administrative Items

- a. Approval of Minutes for Meeting of October 13, 2016. On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes were unanimously approved. Tom Weik, Don Stein, and Leo Paul abstained.
- b. Approval of Financial Statement for 9/2016. On a motion duly made and seconded, the financial statement was unanimously approved.
- c. Proposed Meeting Schedule for 2017. On a motion duly made and seconded, the proposed meeting schedule was unanimously approved.
- d. Letter for Support for Food Hub Farm Viability Application. Following a brief discussion, and on a motion duly made and seconded, the NHCOG unanimously endorsed the proposed letter of support for the application.

Committee Updates

- a. DEMHS Region 5. Mark Lyon, Region 5 Steering Committee. Mark Lyon explained that the recent TEEEX training was valuable. Sue Dyer and Bob Valentine also expressed support and appreciation for the program.
- b. Regional Animal Shelter Committee. Elinor Carbone reported that the Committee is waiting on the RPIP contract from OPM prior to releasing the RFP for facility design. Committee members recently visited the Northeast COG animal control facility which services seven towns. The NECCOG runs the facility and information was shared regarding appropriate sizing and the potential of a public-private partnership in the operation of NHCOC's facility.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment.

Barbara Henry said Roxbury has a senior bus and asked how other towns set up rides. Sue Dyer stated that Norfolk hires drivers for their van and the Northwest Transit District sets up the rides. Bob Valentine stated that Cornwall and Goshen do the same for their new senior bus.

Mark Lyon noted that on Wednesday, November 16 at 10:00 am, some NHCOC members will be meeting with Northeast COG to discuss legislation. Also, on November 22 at 8:30 am, there will be a road supervisors meeting to discuss the CT Tech 2 programs, and training for road crews and supervisors. On November 22 at 10:00am, NHCOC will have a special meeting at the Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce building (333 Kennedy Drive, Torrington) for an overview of municipal responsibilities required by the CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities for municipal public works projects.

No other business was raised and the meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.