

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF January 12, 2017

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Burlington, Ted Shafer
Colebrook, Thomas D. McKeon	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Goshen, Bob Valentine	Hartland, Wade Cole
Harwinton, Michael Criss	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	Sharon, Brent Colley
Torrington, Elinor Carbone	Warren, Craig Nelson
Winchester, Bob Geiger	

Others in Attendance:

Lynn Stoddard, Institute for Sustainable Energy; Jessica Wilcox, Foundation for Community Health; Katherine Freygang and Deb Bennett, Cornwall; Steve Silver, Eversource; Allison Fulton, Housatonic Valley Coalition Against Substance Abuse; Richard Van Nesse, Morris; Janet Serra and Jim Whitney, Western Connecticut Convention & Visitors Bureau; Mike Muszynski, CCM; 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 Vice Chairman Bruce Adams at 10:04 a.m. No public comment was offered.

Town by Town Issues and Updates by COG Members.

Most towns reported that they had started the annual budget process. In reference to the budget process, Bob Valentine commented that the presentation at the recent COST meeting was not optimistic and towns with a good balance sheet may be punished. Don Stein concurred and relayed a story about over-signage in the historic district and the difficulties involved in applying state procedures to town issues. Michael Criss reported that Harwinton will not release any of their fees to the state of Connecticut until further notice about state aid. The town is not optimistic about the state's budget and is very concerned about the \$15 minimum wage issue. Elinor Carbone commented on the Working Cities Challenge grant opportunity that the City is pursuing and the focus on retention of young people. Bob Geiger discussed contract negotiations with the Gilbert School and potential changes to the state control of the local elementary school. He also noted that the Northwest Connecticut Community College will open a new building for veterinary technology. Brent Colley commented that he's asked town departments to work together and keep budgets flat. He recently experienced success using online auction services to sell a truck. Sue Dyer commented on successful online auction services in Norfolk. In addition to local budgets, Leo Paul is dealing with school maintenance and the upcoming vacant courthouse in Bantam. Dan Jerram said New Hartford has a budget surplus and that they will be doing union negotiations soon. Bruce Adams reported that the welcome center in Kent is underway. He congratulated Leo Paul for being named President of COST and thanked Barbara Henry, Gordon Ridgway, Bob Valentine, and Don Stein for serving on the COST board. He recommended that other towns participate. Barbara Henry asked which towns have electric charging stations. Kent, Burlington, Harwinton, and Torrington have one. Discussion about costs for these stations ensued.

Overview of New "Sustainable CT" Project. Lynn Stoddard, Institute for Sustainable Energy, with Introductory Comments by Ted Shafer.

Ted Shafer introduced Lynn Stoddard, Executive Director for Institute for Sustainable Energy (ISE) at Eastern Connecticut State University. Ted complimented ISE's leadership on the Sustainable CT project. Ted said the Northwest Corner has been well-represented in the development process and he noted Don Stein's

participation on CCM's Sustainability Task Force. Lynn Stoddard introduced the project and said it offers potential financial and ecosystem benefits. She explained the framework for the program, which is funded by Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation, Hampshire Foundation, and Common Sense Fund. All privately funded, the work has been a partnership between the funding organizations, CCM, and academic institutions. Modeled after Sustainable New Jersey, it is an incentive-based program for communities to complete sustainability actions. Over the next six months, multiple working groups will be exploring actions municipalities can take on the following topics: Transportation, Physical Infrastructure and Operations, Public Services, Planning, Land and Natural Resources, Local Economies, Housing, and Cultural Ecosystems. They expect a full launch at the CCM annual convention in November 2017. Ted Shafer said a number of local representatives, including Don Stein, Jerry Rollet, and Marty Connor, from our region have volunteered for the working groups. A brief discussion followed.

Katherine Freygang asked about project communication. Lynn responded that most communication will be through the website. They also envision a form of 'peer-sharing', perhaps through regional hubs. Gordon Ridgway said the idea is great but he would like to see emphasis on retaining young families in town. Leo Paul asked what the final objective of the program is since many towns are already working on sustainability actions. Ted Shafer responded that the point system creates energy among participants, encouraging further action. He also noted that it is a marketing and quality of life opportunity. Discussion ensued and most agreed that retaining and attracting young people needs to be a priority and Sustainable CT is one way to encourage that. Concern was expressed that the program could be counter-productive if it results in towns competing with one another. Lynn Stoddard commented that this has not been an issue in New Jersey.

Importance of Regional Tourism Districts and Destination Marketing and Request for a Letter of Support for the Western CT Convention and Visitors Bureau. Janet Serra, Executive Director, Western CT Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Janet Serra and Jim Whitney presented on the role the Western CT Convention and Visitors Bureau has played in the region. They explained that the state recently ceased funding the regional Bureaus despite the important economic role of recreation and tourism to the Northwest Hills. The western region represents \$4 billion of the \$10 billion state-wide tourism income. The state legislature created the bureaus in 1982 with varying amounts of support over the years. The cessation of funding makes Connecticut the only state without state-funded regional tourism marketing. While other states have local and county taxes, Connecticut originally used a room tax with directed portions to the generating town, regional economic development agency, and regional tourism district. Eventually, the legislature diverted all room tax funds into the general fund. The Bureau offers a variety of regional marketing programs from regional advertising, research, and public relations. Jim Whitney suggested language for a legislative bill and accompanying letter to reinstate funding. They are asking for a letter of support for reinstatement of funding (previous \$400,000) and individual communication to individual legislators.

Gordon Ridgway noted that the recent agreement between the state and Airbnb to pay room tax to the state could represent a new source of revenue for support of the Visitor Bureaus. Discussion followed. Sue Dyer said that the Weekend in Norfolk event, supported by the Bureau, had a robust visitor turn-out from across the state. Jim Whitney noted that the Bureau did a survey and research project that asked attendees about their experience, resulting in useful economic impact numbers. Following a motion by Don Stein, seconded by Leo Paul, the NHCOC unanimously voted to write a letter in support of restoration of funding to the Visitor Bureaus.

Proposed NHCOC Legislative Priorities for 2017 and Upcoming Legislative Breakfast Meetings. Michael Criss, Legislative Committee Chairman.

Michael Criss thanked the COG's legislative committee for their support. He emphasized the importance of COG representation in Hartford this year. Leo Paul agreed, stating that NHCOC members need to show

up en masse, especially on the region's legislative priorities. CCM and COST will put CEO names on the sign-up list and will help develop testimony. Don Stein said there is a bi-partisan small-town coalition in the legislature and that they can also help coordinate messages. Gordon Ridgway expressed concern from the recent COST meeting that there are potentially more municipal funding cuts that might be proposed by the state. He encouraged state-wide coalitions on municipal interests. Michael Criss suggested holding some legislative meetings in the capitol in addition to meetings within the region. On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Craig Nelson, the NHCOCG unanimously approved the legislative priorities developed by the COG's Legislative Committee.

Administrative Items

- a. Approval of Minutes for Meeting of December 8, 2016. On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes were unanimously approved.
- b. Approval of Financial Statement for 11/2016. On a motion duly made and seconded, the financial statement was unanimously approved.
- c. Approval of Prescription Assistance Agreement with the Foundation for Community Health. On a motion by Sue Dyer, seconded by Craig Nelson, the motion carried with Barbara Henry abstaining.
- d. Acceptance of FY 2015-16 NHCOCG Audit. On a motion by Barbara Henry, seconded by Michael Criss, the audit was unanimously accepted. Rick Lynn commented that the NHCOCG finished the fiscal year in good financial shape.

Committee and Staff Reports

- a. Public Works Equipment Cooperative. Rental Rates for 2017 and Proposed Disposition of Litchfield-Based Asphalt Recycler and Hot Box. Wade Cole stated that the Northwest Hills Road Supervisor Association recently met and recommends an increase in the rental rates for the sweepers and catch basin cleaners from the current \$500 per day to \$700 per day. Wade explained that the sweepers and catch basin cleaners are reaching the expected life of 10 years and the cooperative needs to build funds to replace the equipment. Wade stated that another recommendation of the Road Supervisor Association is to sell one of the asphalt recyclers and one hot box. These units are not being used by the member towns as anticipated. Following discussion and on a motion by Barbara Henry, seconded by Wade Cole, the NHCOCG unanimously voted to table both proposals pending development of additional financial information, including a capital replacement plan, and conversations with town highway departments about potential use of the asphalt recycler and hot box.
- b. Update on Western CT WUCC. Joanna Wozniak-Brown thanked NHCOCG members for their patience on an evolving issue that has a lot of complicated issues. CT DEEP declared ESAs for all of their lands, which conflicts with a number of towns requesting to remain unassigned. Most conflicts were resolved with discussions among interested parties. She will update the COG as the process evolves.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment.

Rick Lynn reported that the NHCOCG has received a number of proposals in response to the RFPs for engineering services and the preparation of a regional trail connectivity plan. Two selection committees are needed to review the proposals and present a recommendation to the COG. Bob Valentine and Don Stein volunteered for the engineering proposals. Craig Nelson and Dan Jerram volunteered for the trail committee.

Jocelyn Ayer announced increased participation in the Regional POCD survey. Winsted has the highest number of participants to date. The survey will close on January 30. While the number of participants is already statistically significant, she asked members to still encourage more residents to take survey. She noted outreach to high school students as well with a target survey of four questions for the students. Bob Valentine suggested outreach to recent

high school graduates as well that are looking for careers.

Leo Paul asked Mike Muszynski from CCM if he had anything to add about the upcoming legislative session. Mike Muszynski emphasized the importance of testifying in the public hearing portion of proposed bills of interest and continued communication with legislators and staff outside of the hearings.

Jocelyn Ayer commented that the NHCOC will once again be hosting land use training sessions through the CLEAR program and she invited members to the upcoming Economic Development Summit in Litchfield.

Allison Foulton of the Housatonic Valley Coalition Against Substance Abuse introduced herself. She stated that Rudy Marconi and she will be speaking at the March meeting of the NHCOC. She thanked Bob Valentine for office space in the Goshen town hall.

No other business was raised and the meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m.