

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL NHCOG MEETING OF January 25, 2017

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Goshen, Bob Valentine	Hartland, Wade Cole
Harwinton, Michael Criss	Kent, Bruce Adams
Litchfield, Leo Paul	Norfolk, Sue Dyer
Torrington, Tim Waldron	Warren, Craig Nelson
Winchester, Bob Geiger	

Others in Attendance:

Mike Muszynski, CCM; Michael Rooke, NWCT Community College; JoAnn Ryan, Northwest CT Chamber of Commerce; Tim Waldron, Government Relations Committee Chairman; Marshall Collins, Chamber Lobbyist; Rep. Michelle Cook, Rep. Joe Piscopo, Rep. Jay Case, Rep. Brian Ohler, Sen. Craig Miner, Sen. Kevin Witkos, Rep. Bill Simanski, Rep. David Wilson; Steve Silver, Eversource; Joanna Wozniak- Brown; Rick Lynn; Kathryn Dube, COST; General public and media representatives.

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment.

The meeting, held at the Draper Conference Center, NWCT Community College, Winsted, CT, was called to order by Vice Chairman Bruce Adams and NWC Chamber President JoAnn Ryan at 8:00 a.m.

Welcoming Remarks. Michael Rooke, NWCT Community College President. Dr. Rooke welcomed those in attendance to NWCCC and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be coordinating with the Chamber and the COG.

Summary of NWC Chamber's 2017 Legislative Agenda. JoAnn Ryan, Chamber President; Tim Waldron, Government Relations Committee Chairman; Marshall Collins, Chamber Lobbyist. JoAnn, Tim, and Marshall distributed and reviewed copies of the Chamber's Legislative Priorities for 2017.

Overview of NHCOG Legislative Priorities. Michael Criss, NHCOG Legislative Committee Chairman. Mike Criss summarized the COG's Legislative Priorities for 2017. He stated that the COG is not requesting more funding this year from the State, only to maintain current levels of funding. Towns with good fund balances should not be targeted by the State to pay for more state programs. He emphasized the importance of COG, CCM, COST and the General Assembly to all work together to address the State's fiscal crisis. Mike concluded by thanking area legislators for their cooperation and all the hard work that they do on behalf of the region.

Comments by Area Legislators on What They Propose to Do to Address the Regional Priorities and Other Priority Legislative Issues. Each legislator spoke to their areas of concern and priorities for the upcoming session. Sen. Witkos expressed opposition to increased judicial authority over the level of state spending as proposed by the Governor. He stated that any legislative proposals with a price tag will not be going forward this year. He commented that over 3800 bills have already been submitted for consideration this year. He encouraged COG and Chamber participation in hearings of interest during the course of the session.. Rep. Cook stated that education remains a priority concern of hers and she welcomes suggestions on addressing declining enrollments, MBR, and other areas of concern. Rep. Piscopo stated that he will once again be proposing reform of prevailing wage requirements and is hopeful that labor will participate in cost-savings discussions. He expressed concern that cuts in state aid to towns is almost a certainty this year. Sen. Miner expressed frustration with the length of time DEEP takes to process regulations and is concerned with escalating healthcare costs. He is encouraged, however, that the more even representation in the Senate will be helpful for productive dialogue on these and other issues. Rep. Simanski observed that the region's legislative priorities haven't changed much in recent years and he is hopeful that more progress can be made this year. He said that the municipal spending cap is counter-productive and he is particularly concerned with the potential cuts to education cost-sharing (ECS). Rep Case commented that the

human resources committee stopped a proposal for a \$15 per hour minimum wage and that he has introduced a bill to provide state-aid information to towns by March 1st to enhance municipal budgeting. Rep. Wilson expressed support for the region's legislative priorities and the need to maintain on-going collaboration this session. Rep. Ohler stated that he supports the restoration of funding for tourism boards due the significant economic benefits that tourism brings to the region and the state. He would like to maintain the ECS funds to municipalities at the Fiscal Year 15-16 amounts. He would also like to bring a first responder bill that would address the loss of emergency services volunteers in the smaller towns by offering waivers or reduced fees for participants at the state's community colleges.

Marshall Collins announced two important upcoming dates. The Governor will make his budget address on February 8 and the deadline to raise a bill is either February 14 or 15.

Question and Answer Period.

Bob Valentine noted that, in this difficult budget period, participation in the legislative process is important for the Northwest Hills region. He commented that declining school enrollment does not correlate to reduced education costs for the towns and that the towns work hard to be fiscally responsible. Sen. Miner noted that there is general consensus between the northwest and northeast rural regions of Connecticut and he encouraged the two COGs to work together this legislative session. Rep. Cook asked local officials to send her the three most costly state education mandates that impact municipal budgets.

Don Stein commented that budget cuts to the CT DEEP result in staff and service reductions at recreation facilities. These reductions impact the offerings at the region's many state parks, forests, and campgrounds, thereby reducing potential revenue to the local economies. He asked that the state examine if it is actually generating any true cost-savings through such measures.

Michael Criss explained that the legislature should remember that positive amounts in municipal budgets are often earmarked for large capital purchases to be made when the funds reach the proper amount. Rep. Case suggested that municipalities put such set-asides into line items since the state government does look at the positive fund balance of municipalities.

Adjournment.

Following additional discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 a.m.