

## MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL NHCOG MEETING OF February 23, 2017

### Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Burlington, Ted Shafer	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Goshen, Bob Valentine	Hartland, Wade Cole
Harwinton, Michael Criss	Litchfield, Leo Paul
New Hartford, Dan Jerram	Norfolk, Sue Dyer
Sharon, Jessica Fowler	Warren, Craig Nelson
Winchester, Bob Geiger	

### Legislators in Attendance:

Rep. Jay Case, Rep. Brian Ohler, Sen. Kevin Witkos, Rep. David Wilson; Rep. John Piscopo

Others in Attendance: Media representatives, Rick Lynn

### Call to Order.

The meeting, held at the Twin Colony Diner in Torrington, CT, was called to order by Legislative Committee Chairman Mike Criss at 8:00 a.m.

Legislative Update by Area Legislators. Each legislator spoke to their areas of concern and focus areas for the legislative session. Senator Witkos thanked the COG for scheduling this meeting and stated that the public hearing portion of the session will run through the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in March and that the Appropriations Committee budget will be released in late April. He stated that even with a wage freeze, saving \$100 million, labor concessions or \$700 million are needed.

Dan Jerram expressed concern about the lack of state aid information while local budgets are being adopted. Jay Case stated that he has submitted a bill to provide estimated state aid information to towns by the end of March.

Brian Ohler stated that all legislators are now working to fix the budget, which adversely impacts the vast majority of towns. North Canaan would require over a 5 mil increase under the proposed budget. On a positive note, he stated that the pesticide bill he has submitted in response to municipal concerns about spraying adjacent to railroads is moving forward.

Gordon Ridgway commented that residents in his town are expressing general support for a local sales tax as an alternative to drastically increasing the property tax which would be needed under the Governor's budget.

John Piscopo commented that he has communicated to OPM Secretary Ben Barnes that the Governor's proposal to shift state taxes to the local property tax will have devastating effects on responsible municipal budgeting. He advised that the evolving State Energy Plan may also adversely impact towns. David Wilson echoed concerns about the Governor's proposed budget and is frustrated that the Labor Committee has no appetite for considering prevailing wage changes and there is also no Committee interest in pursuing binding arbitration reform.

Mike Criss stated that a positive fund balance is no indication of a municipality's ability to pay. Fund balances are generally used as a savings account for major municipal infrastructure projects such as a new town garage. Raiding the fund balance impacts responsible planning for infrastructure improvements and could affect a town's bond rating. Sue Dyer stated that if towns cannot bond due to an unfavorable rate, then projects cannot be done. Bob Valentine agreed stating that towns avoid debt by saving through their fund balance.

Brian Ohler stated that many legislators don't recognize that the resident trooper program actually saves the state money and that requiring towns to pay 100% of the costs will detract from public safety. Dan Jerram concurred and stated that New Hartford once had three resident troopers and they now have one as a result of declining state financial support.

Senator Witkos expressed considerable concern about a proposed bill linking municipal aid to regionalization efforts. David Wilson stated that it is very important for the small towns to keep the pressure on this legislative session in order to overcome the strong representation in urban areas. Jessica Fowler inquired about legislative proposals that could adversely impact hospitals, and expressed concern about proposals enabling towns to tax their local hospitals.

Bob Valentine inquired about the status of municipal payment for the teacher's retirement program. Senator Witkos stated that towns will likely need to contribute to this program but that it will probably be phased in over several years. Bob Valentine stated that if towns are expected to pay for this, then they should be given greater control over the program. Gordon Ridgway stated that Connecticut should look to other states that have gotten their pension programs under control. Sue Dyer stated that many towns, such as Norfolk, have shifted from a defined benefit program to a defined contribution program and the state should do the same.

Adjournment.

Michael Criss thanked all for attending the meeting, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 a.m.