

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF February 16, 2017

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Burlington, Ted Shafer
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, Charles P. Perotti
Salisbury, Curtis Rand	Warren, Craig Nelson
Washington, Mark Lyon	Winchester, Laurie Bissette

Others in Attendance:

Rosemary Bove and Randy Fiveash, CT Office of Tourism, DECD; Jane Williams, NWC Community College; Ron Thomas, CCM; Felicia Jones; Steve Silver, Eversource; Bernie Harrington, League of Women Voters of Litchfield County; 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 10:04 a.m. No public comment was offered.

Town by Town Issues and Updates by COG Members.

Most communities reported that they are working on their municipal budgets. Significant discussion focused on Governor Malloy's proposed budget released prior to the meeting. Bruce Adams thanked Michael Criss for presenting the NHCOG legislative priorities at the legislative breakfast. In turn, Michael Criss thanked Don Stein and other members for testifying on the resident trooper program. He also noted that the Harwinton library expansion and the property negotiations for senior housing are moving forward. Discussion ensued encouraging the chief elected officials to have a presence at legislative hearings in Hartford. Gordon Ridgway, Don Stein, and Bob Valentine urged member participation in COST and CCM. Charles Perotti reported that the North Canaan railroad station renovations are moving forward with a target opening on the North Canaan Railroad Days. They already have a prospective restaurant and brewery tenant. Tom Weik noted a substantial growth in the town's grand list, helping the budget process. Leo Paul explained that Litchfield is losing over a million dollars in state aid under the Governor's proposed budget. He urged CEOs to testify for a more reasonable state budget. Don Stein explained that Barkhamsted is looking to form a Housing Trust to address senior housing. In addition to the budget process, Bob Valentine mentioned that he was going to Hartford to testify on prevailing wage after coordination with CCM and assistance by COST.

Promoting Tourism in the Northwest Hills through the Connecticut Office of Tourism's Regional Marketing Program. Rosemary Bove and Randy Fiveash, CT Office of Tourism, DECD.

Randy Fiveash introduced himself and Rosemary Bove. They presented the new CTVisit.com website that allows towns to actively promote restaurants, attractions, and experiences in their town. Each town has a profile page that can be updated regularly by a municipal designee. Rose emphasized that the material should be timely i.e., cover photos should be seasonal. Towns can have about 10 photos as a showcase and can even link to YouTube videos. Rose Bove explained that 80% of website visits are from articles, e.g. opening the RR station in North Canaan. When an event passes, it automatically goes into storage and can be reused the next year. Other links on the page can be to social media or trip advisor. The Office of Tourism's goal for the website is to extend the visitors' stay in area with easy to find information and additional information about the surrounding areas. The town template has basic information such as annual events, top attractions, and notable citizens. Rose Bove can distribute information through NHCOG about current administrators listed for towns and directions for submissions to the website. Once a town

has administrative control, it can update whenever they have new content. She asked that if they don't have time to input information to let her know so the Office of Tourism can help manage content. Discussion about networking opportunities and additional tourism metrics ensued. They explained that the elimination of regional tourism districts requires the main state office to get more involved in the outreach efforts. They also have a regular newsletter that reports statistics and information.

Overview of NWC Community College's New Entrepreneurial Center. Jane Williams.

Jane Williams thanked the NHCOC for the invitation. On March 15, the Northwest Connecticut Community College is opening an entrepreneurial center. They hope to create sustaining relationships with local businesses. They have established relationships with micro-lenders and the Small Business Administration. They also have a co-working space available at no cost to the user. She welcomed members to the opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony. Ted Shafer asked who would be an ideal mentor. Jane Williams suggested a retired executive who had had their own business in technology, business, restaurant, etc. The mentoring program is somewhat structured as they want to avoid mentors involved for personal business gain. Their local business survey asked about various topics including non-conventional lending and human resources issues. Mark Lyon thanked Jane for presenting and recommended networking with the local economic development commissions.

Survey Results for the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development. Jocelyn Ayer.

Jocelyn Ayer reported on the regional POCD survey results. There were 1,382 responses to the survey with most respondents having lived in the region more than 20 years. The top 3 goals selected by residents were attracting and retaining young people, protecting water quality & dealing with invasive species, and protecting farmland & supporting farm business. With the highest number of participants, Winchester won the ice cream social competition with close competition from Goshen and Kent.

NHCOC is currently doing a survey directed at high school students. Torrington High School had every student participate in the survey. The majority of those students said they are not planning on staying in the area but would be more likely to stay in town if there were more jobs, nightlife, and an ability to live in town centers/downtowns. Jocelyn Ayer encouraged CEOs to get more responses from young people. The survey for high school students is at www.surveymonkey.com/r/nwctstudents. Bob Valentine asked for list of regional schools that haven't been responsive so selectmen can encourage their participation. Laurie Bisette asked for the closing date and Jocelyn Ayer responded that a closing date hadn't been set yet.

COG members were given tailored survey reports for their municipalities. Jocelyn Ayer thanked CEOs for encouraging residents to participate.

Summary of CCM Report on "Service Sharing and Revenue Diversification for Connecticut Municipalities". Ron Thomas, Deputy Director, CCM.

Ron Thomas thanked the NHCOC for allowing him to attend the meeting and for their memberships in CCM. He presented CCM's recent report, "Service Sharing and Revenue Diversification for Connecticut Municipalities". Anticipating that the state budget could gravely impact towns, CCM created a panel that met for 6 months to identify strategies for shared services, cost-containment, and revenue diversification. CCM developed this report as an offering to towns and the state to change the municipal-state funding relationship and allow towns to be more self-reliant. For example, to create opportunity for shared services, the report proposes changes to inter-local agreements and support for regional performance grants to allow regionalization. Another proposal was for revenue diversification by reducing the state-wide sales tax but allow a local sales tax to be returned to municipalities.

The recently released governor's budget shows a potential \$1.7 billion deficit without cuts or changes to the existing budget. Governor Malloy's budget proposes a shift in education funding, moving funds from suburban and rural areas to urban areas. CCM disagrees with this approach. Proposals that would have

significant impacts on municipalities include teachers' retirement fund, education cost-sharing (ECS) allocations, regional health districts, prevailing wage, and spending caps.

Leo Paul asked how CCM is presenting the report to the legislature and the Governor's office. CCM has a marketing campaign and multiple meetings with CT newspapers. While he might not agree with all of the proposed strategies, Leo Paul offered to attend the meetings with legislative leadership. Ron Thomas noted that CCM arranged meetings with the Governor and OPM Secretary Ben Barnes as well as CCM's efforts to get a special hearing with the appropriations committee focused on municipalities. Don Stein reflected on his meeting with Ben Barnes and the differences in municipal operations between the rural and urban towns. Discussion about disproportionate impacts on smaller communities, especially ones with balanced budgets, followed.

Dan Jerram echoed those concerns and suggested that CCM consider the region's changing demographics, changes to revenue, and the needs for jobs and attracting young people. COG members expressed concern about meeting next year's local budget demands, potential impacts to the bond rating, and Hartford's interpretation of the positive capital in their budgets set aside for capital purchases as a surplus.

Request for NHCOC Acceptance of Consultant Proposal for Preparation of Regional Trail Map and Connectivity Assessment (previously distributed). Craig Nelson, Selection Committee Chairman, Mark Lyon, and Dan Jerram.

Craig Nelson reported that the NHCOC received five bids for the regional trails map and connectivity assessment. The selection committee interviewed all five interested consultants, and eventually selected Housatonic Valley Association (HVA). The committee requested that the full council approve their recommendation. The HVA bid was \$14,000 for the mapping and connectivity assessment plus \$5,000 for the online map component. On a motion by Bob Valentine, seconded by Leo Paul, the NHCOC unanimously supported the selection.

Administrative Items

- a. Approval of Minutes for Meeting of January 12, 2016. On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes were unanimously approved.
- b. Approval of Financial Statement for 12/2016. On a motion duly made and seconded, the financial statement was unanimously approved.
- c. Request by ConnDOT for Endorsement of Proposed Amendment to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program Pertaining to Replacement of Traffic Control Signals. On a motion duly made and seconded, the motion was unanimously approved
- d. NHCOC Dues for FY 2017-2018. The Executive Committee met and reviewed the proposed budget and recommends keeping the dues at 80 cents per capita. On a motion duly made and seconded, the dues were unanimously approved.

Committee and Staff Reports

- a. Legislative Committee. Michael Criss, Chairman, reported that there would be a legislative coordination meeting tomorrow at 10am in Hartford at the Legislative Office Building with the Northeastern CT COG. He encouraged CEOs to attend the meeting which will focus on rural legislative issues. Discussion about the importance of testimony at public hearings ensued. Even if members cannot attend, they can submit testimony to Michael Criss or Rick Lynn and they will get it submitted. Don Stein noted that many legislators don't understand the complications of the cuts to the resident trooper program. Discussion about the costs associated with regional police forces ensued.
- b. Recycling Advisory Committee and Request for Sponsoring of CT Product Stewardship Council. Susan Dyer, Curtis Rand, and Brian Bartram. Curtis Rand reported that the

committee met recently and they recommend that NHCOG join the Product Stewardship Council. Through the work of the Stewardship Council promoting producer responsibility, the Salisbury-Sharon Transfer station was able to save \$11,000. The Council works with manufacturers to create disposal options for such products as paint and mattresses. The program normally costs \$300/town, but the Council offered to add the whole region for \$1,200. Joining could potentially help with disposal of tires and drug take-backs. Discussion on the potential program benefits followed. Rick Lynn reported that there were sufficient funds in the contingency account to participate in the Product Stewardship Council if so desired. On a motion made by Don Stein, seconded by Dan Jerram, all members voted in favor of joining the Product Stewardship Council.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment.

No other business was raised and the meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.