

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF July 13, 2017

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Canaan, Pat Mechare
Colebrook, Tom McKeon	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Goshen, Bob Valentine	Kent, Bruce Adams
Litchfield, Leo Paul	North Canaan, Doug Humes
Norfolk, Sue Dyer	Salisbury, Curtis Rand
Sharon, Brent Colley	Roxbury, Barbara Henry
Warren, Craig Nelson	Winchester, Bob Geiger

Others in Attendance:

Dan Morley and Bruce Wittchen, CT Office of Policy and Management; Abby Conroy, town of Burlington; Steve Silver, Eversource; Peter Cordeau and Joel W. Jones, Sharon Hospital; Michael Muszynski, CCM; Ellen Graham, Senator Richard Blumenthal's office; Richard Carmelich, EdAdvance; Mary Glassman and Cara Hart, CREC; Felicia Jones, NWCONNect; Dean Saccardi, Cornwall; 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 Vice Chairman Bruce Adams at 10:05 a.m.

Bruce Adams asked members of the public to introduce themselves. He also announced a successful opening of the Kent Welcome Center.

Update on Regional Plan of Conservation and Development for the Northwest Hills.

Jocelyn Ayer summarized the draft Regional Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) and asked for authorization to release the draft plan for public comment. After an opportunity for public review, and a public hearing, the plan is scheduled to be finalized in the fall. She reviewed the public outreach process used to create the plan, which included meetings with every Planning & Zoning Commission in the region, a regional resident survey, focus group sessions, and outreach to a senior center and high school.

In addition to the plan, there will be a web-based toolkit hosted on the NHCOG website that will have a variety of tools for local boards, commissions, and decision-makers to consider including regulatory examples, case studies, and a checklist for towns as they complete their municipal plan of conservation and development.

The six core goals included in the plan are: attract and retain young residents, protect water quality and natural resources; support farm businesses and protect farmland; strengthen our town centers and Main Streets; meet the needs of older adult residents; and continue to foster regional collaboration, resource, and information sharing. Each goal is accompanied by policies and specific actions that the NHCOG can take in partnership with town and other partner agencies to meet the goals. The plan also includes sustainable growth and conservation policy maps.

On a motion by Bruce Adams, seconded by Curtis Rand, the NHCOG unanimously voted to authorize the release of the draft plan for public comment.

Presentation and Public Hearing regarding "Revised Draft 2018-2023 Conservation and Development Policies: The Plan for Connecticut". Dan Morley and Bruce Wittchen from the CT Office of Policy and Management introduced themselves and initiated a public hearing on the state's draft "Revised Draft 2018-2023 Conservation and Development Policies: The Plan for Connecticut". Dan Morley explained that the plan is based on the "Sixth Growth Management Principles" set by the state legislature. State agencies are required

to be in compliance with the state plan for projects over \$200,000 that involve acquisition of real property and/or involve certain transportation facilities. The plan is available to serve as an advisory guidance document for municipalities, COGs, and others.

Bruce Wittchen explained that Dan Morley and he had met with the NHCOG staff on a couple of previous occasions including attendance at a 5th Thursday Forum to review the draft state plan maps with land use commission members in the region. A draft of the plan is available at www.ct.gov/opp/cdplan. OPM will accept written comments up to October 16, 2017. Comments can be mailed, faxed, and/or emailed to Dan Morley at CT OPM.

Rick Lynn requested that the OPM representatives comment on the difference between the previous state plan and the current draft as it relates to the Northwest Hills. Dan Morley stated that there are few changes between the previous state plan and the draft plan. Basically the current draft has small technical changes based on public hearings and state agency feedback.

Dan and Bruce also reviewed the priority-based funding mapping strategy. There are limitations to the map as most data is collected and based on census blocks. To be a priority funding area (PFA), the area must meet at least one of the following criteria: bus line operating 7 days/week, water or sewer service, boundaries within a ½ mile of mass transit station, or US Census Bureau urban area mapping. Priority funding areas mean that a state project designed for an area outside of a PFA must go through an exception process. The exception process requires consideration of the municipal POCD and then meet selected additional criteria.

Bob Valentine asked for confirmation that the intended use of priority funding areas is limited to consideration in awarding of state grants. Dan Morley explained that the term "priority funding area" is somewhat of a misnomer as areas within a priority funding area may not necessarily be a priority for particular projects. State law only requires that projects outside of PFAs follow an exception process. It would apply to both state and federally funded projects. He also commented that the regional POCD may be helpful in directing development and/or conservation to particular areas.

Sue Dyer asked which types of state agency's grants the PFA process affects. Dan Morley stated that it would affect state initiated project grants as well as municipal grant applications under programs such as STEAP and funding from DPH and DEEP.

Leo Paul asked if any changes are expected to the criteria used to define priority funding areas. Dan Morley stated that the criteria are not expected to change except for potentially the number of criteria required for designation.

Barbara Henry suggested that land trusts be contacted to comment on the conservation maps as there are more preserved lands than shown on the draft conservation map. She asked how a town could make sure they can qualify for a particular grant before spending time to apply. Bruce Wittchen replied that the text of the State Plan of Conservation & Development may offer support for a particular project and that an exception can be requested for project proposals outside a PFA.

Don Stein complimented the OPM staff for providing flexibility in the use of PFAs and creating a path for investment within rural towns.

Gordon Ridgway asked if the plan provided for strategies such as incentive-based housing or enterprise areas to maintain or expand population as that is a major regional priority. Bruce Wittchen answered that the plan has support for strengthening village areas and addressing economic development and regional housing needs. Generally the plan encourages development in areas of existing infrastructure. The local POCD is important for detailing town goals. Dan Morley mentioned that the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is another document to review for advocated projects.

Leo Paul asked how a proposal like work-force housing could be funded if it is was not noted in the local plan. Dan Morley explained that the definition of growth-related projects in state statute provides an exception for housing. It is also possible to use the Interim Change process through state legislature. Bruce Wittchen pointed out that towns could also amend their municipal POCD prior to the ten-year deadline.

Overview of the “New” Sharon Hospital. Joel Jones, Chairman of the Sharon Hospital Board of Directors introduced Peter Cordeau as the new CEO of Sharon Hospital.

In August, Sharon Hospital will return to a non-profit hospital when it joins the HealthQuest network. Peter Cordeau noted that 54% of Sharon Hospital patients are from Connecticut and 44% are from New York. They plan to create a primary care network in northwestern Connecticut and will invite doctors in the region to join the network. He pointed to a study that showed doctors that trained in rural areas typically stayed in rural areas. They will also be conducting community forums to receive public feedback. Joel Jones provided his contact information to receive any comments, questions, or concerns.

Bob Geiger asked how Sharon Hospital’s strategic plan fits with projected population loss and how much investment would actually be directed to Sharon Hospital from the system. Mr. Cordeau stated that Sharon Hospital hopes to attract additional people from both states as well as capitalize on the attractiveness of local health care options. Felicia Jones added that a strong hospital in the region may assist in maintaining or welcoming population. Brent Colley commented that HealthQuest’s plan to invite medical residents and students to the area may serve to benefit the region.

Comments about regional health care systems and adjacent hospitals ensued.

Regional Focus: Opportunities for a Collaborative Approach to Self-Insurance for Towns and Boards of Education in the Northwest Hills. Richard Carmelich, EdAdvance, and Mary Glassman, CERC, with Introductory Comments from Brent Colley and Don Stein. Brent Colley introduced Rich Carmelich of EdAdvance to speak about a possible regional cooperative for health insurance for municipalities. There is an existing regional model, the ECHIP consortium, consisting of seven towns and boards of education on the eastern side of the state. Mary Glassman of CERC announced an informational meeting the following Wednesday at EdAdvance in Litchfield and asked interested parties to RSVP.

Richard Carmelich explained that an insurance cooperative reduces administrative burden and also reduces risk. Don Stein explained that most union plans support maintenance of current plan or better and that now, between budget cycles, is a good time to plan for such changes. Barbara Henry expressed interest in learning more about a potential consortium.

Mary Glassman from the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) explained that they’ve created a stop-loss program to be initiated by the Capitol Region. Kara Hart from CREC noted that they could set up a training session for towns to use the free CREC Cooperative marketplace, available to educational systems. CREC also has the program CT Prime to help towns and schools deal with increasing costs of healthcare with a particular focus on health, wellness, and preventative care. CT Prime leverages a larger purchasing power with 10,000 members over 14 towns. CCM, by law, cannot offer a healthcare model similar to what is provided to municipalities through CIRMA insurance.

Several towns explained that they are self-insured, which pay first-level of claims to a certain amount then need to purchase second-level through stop-loss insurance.

Sue Dyer asked if this could benefit fully-insured towns. Mary Glassman explained that there may be some cost-effective options by having group self-insurance and stop-loss coverage. CT Prime saved \$3 million in the first year of participation. The plan also includes an employee assistance plan that allows for medical, legal, and financial advice for members. Members pay \$12 instead of \$40 per year per employee.

It was suggested that a feasibility study could be conducted for interested towns to show if it would make financial sense to self-insure through a regional cooperative. CREC and EdAdvance could conduct the analysis for interested towns. They will be accepting applications for currently self-insured towns through December 2017 for participation in FY 2018-2019. Currently fully-insured towns and schools may contact CREC and EdAdvance to join the collaborative study.

Rich Carmelich and Mary Glassman expressed their appreciation to NHCOG for the invitation.

Legislative Update. Michael Criss, NHCOG Legislative Committee Chairman, and Michael Muszynski, CCM.

Michael Muszynski of CCM explained that CCM recently distributed a pass/fail list of all legislative actions that were proposed in the recent session. There is still no state budget at the moment. Discussion about cuts to municipal support and transference of burdens ensued.

Request for NHCOG Resolutions in Support of Municipal Applications for Funding Under the Responsible Growth and Transit Oriented Development Grant Program.

Rick Lynn introduced several municipal applications for state funding, including:

- Burlington, Pavement Remediation Farmington River Greenway
- Torrington, E. Main Street (Route 202) Corridor Management Study and Sidewalk Construction Project
- Winchester, Willow Street/Bridge Street/Depot Street/Prospect Street Traffic and Pedestrian Improvement Project
- Winchester, Sue Grossman Trail Commuter Connections- Route 44 Pedestrian Improvements
- Winchester, Whiting Street/Downtown Winsted Gateway Improvement Project

On a motion by Barbara Henry, seconded by Don Stein, all members voted in support of these applications.

Administrative Items

- a. Approval of Minutes for Meeting of June 8, 2017. On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes were unanimously approved.
- b. Approval of Financial Statement for 5/2017. On a motion duly made and seconded, the financial statement was unanimously approved.
- c. Request for Approval of Consultant for HouBike Route Assessment. Bruce Adams stated that this project was awarded funding through a Responsible Growth Program Grant. On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Don Stein, members voted in favor of hiring Milone & MacBroom to conduct the route assessment as recommended by the consultant selection committee for this project.

Town by Town Issues and Updates by COG Members.

This item was tabled due to time.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:27 p.m.