

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG SPECIAL MEETING OF July 6, 2017

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Burlington, Ted Shafer
Canaan, Pat Mechare	Goshen, Bob Valentine
Hartland, Wade Cole	Harwinton, Michael Criss
Kent, Bruce Adams	Litchfield, Leo Paul
Morris, Tom Weik	New Hartford, Dan Jerram
Norfolk, Sue Dyer	Salisbury, Curtis Rand
Sharon, Brent Colley	Torrington, Elinor Carbone
Washington, Mark Lyon	Winchester, Bob Geiger

Others in Attendance:

Maribel La Luz and Mark Ojakian, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities; Michael Rooke, Northwestern CT Community College; John Piscopo and Brian Ohler, CT State Legislature; Catherine and John Harding, Cornwall; Joel W. Jones, Falls Village; Ethan Shafer, UConn, Matt Ouellete, CT Rides; Tim Abbott, Ryan Williams, and Stacy Deming, Housatonic Valley Association; Bernie Harrington, League of Women Voters of Litchfield County; Joanna Wozniak-Brown, Jocelyn Ayer, 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.

Rep. John Piscopo and Rep. Ohler expressed appreciation to Mark Ojakian, President of Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, and Dr. Michael Rooke, President of Northwestern Connecticut Community College, for attending today's NHCOG meeting to discuss the administrative consolidation proposal.

Financial Challenges of CSCU and Proposal for Administrative Consolidation. Mark Ojakian, President of CT State Colleges and Universities.

President Ojakian expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review his goals and vision for the state colleges and universities system. When he took office, he observed that there was an increasing budget problem with over reliance on tuition for funding, drastic cuts to state funding, and high employment costs restricted by bargaining agreements. To avoid cutting students services, the CSCU committee has reviewed a variety of strategies including closing institutions and making regional campuses branches of universities. However, upon further review, they felt that integration of administrative "back-office" functions across the 17 partner institutions may produce significant cost-savings without impacting teaching and learning. President Ojakian had also tasked Dr. Rooke, president of Northwestern CT Community College (NWCC), with leading a committee comprised of presidents and senior deans to consolidate management and leadership while maintaining the mission and identity of each institution. They are also taking special efforts to ensure that the changes do not affect student financial aid or school accreditation.

Along with these efforts, CSCU does have a two year schedule to increase tuition but at a rate less than proposed in the past three years.

Don Stein applauded their efforts for maintaining the identity of each campus based on local needs and population. Dr. Ojakian explained that CSCU is reviewing several ways to maintain the identity including individuals at each campus that are chief operating officers or using a regional approach to presidencies. When they've had some vacancies, they've asked existing presidents to take on two colleges. Dr. Rooke said they keep individual identities at each campus and stress relationships between the campus and local community, with local campus management teams. In addition, Dr. Ojakian explained that the easiest way to create an integrated model is to close campuses; however, CSCU does not want to add barriers to attending.

Bob Geiger asked about current foundation support and funds at NWCCC. Dr. Ojakian replied that the foundation

stays with NWCCC and it's up to the campus how to spend it.

Michael Criss expressed concern about the changing demographics and encouraged the CSCU leadership to consider transportation, rising costs for young families, and limited infrastructure for young residents. Dr. Ojakian mentioned Charter Oak College now offers online masters' degrees. They've also implemented a small \$20 transportation fee at other colleges that allows any student to ride without restrictions.

Ted Shafer asked about methods to increase revenue to community colleges by aiming for particular demographics. Dr. Ojakian responded that, as a system, they are looking at all of the opportunities. A consolidated approach would allow community colleges to get larger grants from foundations such as Gates or Lumina. Dr. Rooke said they aren't looking at adding programs considering the diminishing resources and tight budgets. They are, however, looking at dual enrollment opportunities between high school to college and community colleges to universities.

Leo Paul expressed gratitude for the efforts at CSCU, viewing it as a model for other state agencies to follow in reviewing their budgets.

Dan Jerram asked what residents will experience with online programs. Dr. Rooke explained that they are looking at consolidating IT functions but expect little to no interruption to existing student use. Dr. Ojakian further explained that the regional schools have local-based programs. Dan Jerram encouraged them to consider partnering with regional manufacturing businesses.

Elinor Carbone also expressed gratitude for the meeting and the efforts at CSCU. She noted the city of Torrington encounters similar struggles with expanded administrative services and changing demographics. She asked what CSCU is doing to retain young people and if they have a 10-year goal. Dr. Ojakian explained that the working group is reviewing enrollment management and goals. While they educate 30% of all students in the state, there are still barriers and misconceptions about public education. He specifically mentioned active discouragement by some guidance counselors coupled with high costs of marketing efforts. Mark Lyon also agreed that marketing and perception are significant influencers. Maribel La Luz, of CSCU, noted that parents have a strong influence on their children's decisions for attendance. CSCU hopes to focus on parent groups in the fall.

Discussion about education debt and business classes ensued. Additional comments included potential partnerships with state agencies such as Department of Children and Families and Department of Transportation.

Don Stein raised discussion about Charter Oak, the fully online college designed for working adults. Credits easily transfer between NWCCC and it is an attractive option for those with transportation challenges.

Bruce Adams asked about the proposed collective bargaining agreement and if it's happening in other states. Dr. Ojakian expects that they'll need to look strategically about filling vacant positions and sharing positions of retiring positions. CSCU has reviewed programs occurring in Florida, Rhode Island, and Maine but CSCU's efforts are the most advanced.

Following additional discussion, Dr. Ojakian and Dr. Rooke expressed appreciation to the NHCOC for today's meeting.

Presentation of Regional Trail Index Map and Connectivity Assessment. Tim Abbott and Ryan Williams, Housatonic Valley Association.

Tim Abbott introduced himself and his co-workers, Ryan Williams and Stacy Deming. Tim Abbott explained the various work products they prepared including: an inventory of existing trails throughout the region, an online regional trails map, and a trail connectivity assessment.

The online trail component has information about parking, distance, trail maintainer, allowable uses, etc. During their assessment, they found that the region has an impressive 538 miles of trails with about 40% as regional trails and 60% as local recreational trails provided by land trusts and towns. There was a wide disparity in trail equity among the towns. While Burlington and Kent had 56+ and 54 miles, respectively, some towns such as Hartland had less than

one mile of local trail. Equity considerations also included distance between the trail and the municipal center. HVA's trail assessment revealed a variety of trail uses with significant equestrian use in Burlington and mountain biking in Burlington and Harwinton.

It is important to note that some trail organizations asked not to share trail information publicly due to crowd control or on-going trail revisions. Notably, there are often informal trail networks within communities that could be considered during future trail projects. Tim commented that future research could include public outreach to determine demand for trails and uses.

Sue Dyer asked for confirmation on the definition of a blue-blazed trail. Tim explained it is a state-wide designation for trails maintained by the Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA).

Regarding connectivity, there are several options such as intra and inter-local connections of local trails or connecting large systems across regions. To fund such activities, towns may wish to consider property acquisition or trail creation to meet public access requirements for state or federal open space grants.

Don Stein commented that Barkhamsted has no town trails, and then asked if the online trail map notes accessibility or uses a difficulty rating system. Tim Abbott replied that the "improved" designation in the trails description helps denote the trail accessibility. HVA also had to make some decisions about whether to include some trails that were not well-marked or maintained. He also observed that many towns have significant protected/conserved lands and open space but little access such as Canaan and Hartland.

Ryan Williams reviewed the most recent version of the online interactive trails map. The map has three basic depictions of the trails: Appalachian Trail, Blue-Blazed, and other (more local) trails. The map also shows open space, large conservation lands, NHCOC towns, waterbodies, and roads. The "contents" tab allows you to turn on or off various layers. Some information is only visible when you zoom in to a specific trail. When you click on a trail, an informational pop up box lists the town, trail system name, distance, trail manager, allowed uses, etc. There are also parking icons where parking is known. When a visitor clicks on the parking icon, they'll be taken to a Google Maps page to determine directions. This is free and available to the public. Visitors can also use the ESRI Explore App to access the maps on their mobile devices.

Ted Shafer asked if there are any resources on best practices and safety that can be posted with the trails map. Tim Abbott replied that there would be a landing page before the trail map that will offer a variety of disclaimers and safety notes.

Rick Lynn commended HVA for their laudable effort on this project and requested NHCOC members to review and comment on the draft trail products. Following an opportunity for public review and comment, it is anticipated that NHCOC approval of the regional trail map products will be requested at the September meeting of the COG. Tim Abbott expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to partner with the COG on this project and the significant amount of cooperation received from member towns and the regional trail committee.

No other business was raised and the meeting was adjourned at 11:47 a.m.