

## MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF January 18, 2018

### Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Burlington, Ted Shafer
Canaan, Henry Todd	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Goshen, Bob Valentine	Hartland, Wade Cole
Harwinton, Michael Criss	Kent, Bruce Adams
Litchfield, Leo Paul	Norfolk, Matthew Riiska
North Canaan, Charles Perotti	Roxbury, Barbara Henry
Salisbury, Curtis Rand	Sharon, Brent Colley
Torrington, Elinor Carbone	Warren, Craig Nelson
Washington, Mark Lyon	Winchester, Bob Geiger

### Others in Attendance:

Commissioner James P. Redeker and Kerry Ross, CT DOT; Maria Coutant Skinner, McCall Center for Behavioral Health; Tom Narducci, Charlotte Hungerford Hospital; Kathryn Dube, COST; Raz Alexe, Town of Litchfield; Felicia Jones, NWConneCT; Wiley Wood, Norfolk; Bernie Harrington, League of Women Voters of Litchfield County; David T. Wilson, John Piscopo, Brian Ohler, and Jay Case, State Representatives; 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 10:02 a.m.

### Town-by-Town Issues and Updates by COG Members.

In Kent, Bruce Adams is reviewing the potential joint purchase of responsive speed warning signs. His research suggests prices ranging from \$1800 to \$2500 depending on accompanying features. Rick Lynn noted that the Regional Transportation Safety Plan is underway and the purchase of these signs may be recommended. He will inquire of ConnDOT if there is a grant program that may facilitate purchasing.

Leo Paul said Litchfield is investigating a new potential trail and that the Public Works Director Raz Alexe was also researching speed signs. An Ocean State Job Lot will soon occupy the old Stop & Shop building. He also expressed disappointment in the Governor's recent announcements of stopping LOTCIP projects as municipal money was already set aside.

Michael Criss reported that Harwinton is coordinating a bridge project but he is concerned about the availability of the state funding. The town is proceeding since it has already set aside funding. He noted that a new public act, effective January 1, 2018, now requires towns to pass an ordinance for managing raffles instead of the previous arrangement with state management. The town is hoping to sell 3.1 acres at the Wilcox Property, following approvals from DEEP, to purchase a piece of land contiguous to the municipal complex.

In response to Bruce Adams' inquiry, Bob Geiger noted that Winchester has 4 responsive speed signs along roads entering town. The signs have helped reduce speed in the town. He also noted that the upcoming Economic Development Summit will be hosted at the Mad River Lofts, a recently converted mill. The town of Winchester recently remediated the old Lambert Kay property and hopes to transfer it to an investor who had previously remediated and restored old mill buildings in Unionville. Similarly, Marty Golden has been attracting more tenants to his restored Mad River Lofts property. A new Henny Penny gas station and convenience store will be built near Stop & Shop. Municipal oversight of the local

schools continues to progress. The town has been challenged with blight and opioid issues. They currently have 19 police officers on the municipal force. The Holabird Avenue project should be done in about six months.

Mayor Carbone announced that Hartford Healthcare finalized their affiliation with Charlotte Hungerford Hospital. This affiliation included a set aside of \$2.5 million for a community & economic development fund. She recently met with Brian Mattiello of Charlotte Hungerford Hospital to discuss the administrative arrangements for the fund, which will benefit regional projects. She continues to fight the cap on motor vehicle taxes. A private investor recently purchased two downtown properties and former mill sites, located at 245 East Elm and the Hotchkiss building on Elm Street. The city, obligated by the state, had to find emergency shelter for residents and renters that must leave their homes due to shut off of their electricity or heat or other public health concerns. She also explained to other members that Public Act 17-237 established the technical high school system as an independent agency. The state will no longer fund technical schools and their management will be moved to private institutions. This may require towns to pay tuition for local students, starting in 2020. Representative Jon Piscopo replied that all four legislators in attendance today voted against this act.

Wade Cole expects Hartland's bridge project should be completed soon. They will be going out to bid on a school work project in the spring.

Curtis Rand explained that Salisbury uses speed signs but they continue to have problems. They had asked the DOT to reduce speed limits near crosswalks from 40 to 20. They had a pedestrian fatality in a crosswalk. He estimates that at least a third of the traffic goes 40-50mph through the crosswalk.

Charles Perotti said his first snow storm as the First Selectman of North Canaan went well and they will start soon on the budget.

Matt Riiska reported Norfolk is starting the budget process. He has met with Region 7 school district to discuss keeping the budget at last year's amount. He also noted that a discussion at the Botelle school was held about the speed limit in front of the school. The school has two crosswalks but the speed limit is 40mph. A contact at the CT DOT responded to the school's request to change the speed limit by saying it wasn't prudent to lower the limits because people are "used to traveling that fast" and "probably wouldn't slow down".

In Canaan, Henry Todd announced that the Board of Selectmen and supervisors hosted their first open meeting. While attendance was limited, they expect to continue the practice.

Barbara Henry said Roxbury is moving forward with their AgSTEM school. They are hoping to attract additional enrollment. The Prevention Council of Bridgewater, Roxbury and Washington will host Chris Herren, a former NBA player and current motivational speaker, at the Region 12 School on January 16. Despite challenges earlier in the season, she is grateful for Eversource's response to the most recent storm. She also asked about the policies regarding the regional engineer program. Rick Lynn explained that three pre-qualified engineers were selected through a competitive bid process, thereby eliminating the procedural requirement for the towns to go out to bid if allowed by the town procurement procedures.

Regarding Eversource, Don Stein said one area of town continually loses power as they are at the end of a line from Canton. He will be meeting with the utility to discuss options. He also let members know there will be a tip fee increase at MIRA. There will be a meeting soon for customers to discuss budgets and tip fees. In other news, the town helped to create a "Friends" group to enhance the local trails. The group is

building a boardwalk out towards a pond at People's State forest with materials provided by CT DEEP. He also said Barkhamsted is working on reducing local speed limits but was also told by CT DOT that "people are used to it". The town is working on a federally funded bridge project and starting the budget process for the town. He reported that Kevin Witkos said ECS funding should remain at the levels projected in the two-year state budget.

Ted Shafer reported on the forum Burlington hosted last night on opioid addiction. The format was similar to the CT Forum program and was taped by Nutmeg TV.

Bob Valentine explained that Goshen is reviewing a special events ordinance, which would be needed for events of 1500+ attendees. They will also be evaluating available parking spaces at larger event locations such as the fairgrounds. The town is working with Torrington Area Health District on modern sanitary standards for a new sanitary system. The current system at the fairgrounds is probably limited to 35,000 attendees while the fair attracts an estimated 60,000 people. The ordinance would also require applications 90 days prior to the event instead of 30 days. The application will need to include traffic management and emergency response coordination.

Craig Nelson expressed gratitude for Eversource's response to the most recent storm. And, the re-valuation in Warren is still underway without any major surprises.

In Washington, the plaza project is nearly complete. The landscape planting will be finished in the spring. Mark Lyon noted that the town is starting their budget process. Their federally funded bridge projects will hopefully finish in the spring.

Gordon Ridgway noted that Cornwall is currently working on their agri-business related zoning regulations and Priscilla Pavel, in attendance at today's COG meeting, has just joined the Board of Selectmen.

To further economic development, Brent Colley mentioned that Sharon will partner with One Eleven Group to start marketing the town as a wedding destination.

Status of the Special Transportation Fund and Implications for Towns in the Northwest Hills. James P. Redeker, ConnDOT Commissioner, summarized the current fiscal situation at ConnDOT.

Due to budget shortfalls and decreased revenue, the Department has found it necessary to immediately cut expenses for the remainder of this fiscal year with additional cuts expected for the next biennium budget. He estimated a \$68 million shortfall for FY19 and a cumulative deficit by \$340 million in FY2022. In his PowerPoint presentation (available by request), the Commissioner explained that the department needs to show a positive balance in order to be able to pay the debt service. He noted the short-term issue of limited capacity to buy bonds but a longer-term issue of no additional revenue sources.

As a result, the department reduced available job vacancies and will reduce services by the following:

- Closure of any remaining rest areas
- Reduced maintenance of state highways and bridges
- Elimination of local municipal funds
- Federalization of the LOTCIP program
- Eliminate non-ADA local bus service subsidies
- Increase bus fares and reduce subsidy share of transit districts
- Eliminate \$2 billion of the \$2.8 billion for Let's Go CT.

To increase revenue, he suggested that one option is to increase the gas tax as Connecticut is slightly lower than average in the gas tax compared to surrounding states. He also proposed a Transportation Lockbox to prevent re-allocation of dedicated funding. He likened this budget crisis to a bridge collapse in terms of priority for attention.

Don Stein noted that the towns depend on ECS and road aid and that infrastructure maintenance is essential. The legislature must work to increase revenue for the STF and address this issue.

Brent Colley asked if the Department considered photo enforcement, possibly through an agreement with Xerox.

The Commissioner said he cannot proceed with the long federal approval process for tolls until he is authorized by the legislature. Revenue from tolls must also be spent in the corridor of its origin. Barbara Henry questioned this and the Commissioner said he hopes to argue to the federal agencies that Connecticut is a single travel corridor.

Jay Case asked if the Department needs a comprehensive study prior to installing tolls. The Commissioner said such a study is needed and it would cost about \$5 million. He also commented that the state cannot just do border tolls. Jay Case asked how much federal funding we get now without the tolls. The Commissioner said the items are not connected.

The Commissioner noted that tolls would take 4-5 years to produce revenue while an increase to the gas tax could be implemented immediately.

Representative Wilson commented that the toll bill did not succeed in the last legislative session and that towns should communicate their position on this to the legislators.

Gordon Ridgway commented that the state urgently needs to diversify revenue streams/income and to spend money wisely. Otherwise, it results in municipalities having to raise local property taxes.

Bruce Adams inquired about the Community Connectivity grant program. The Commissioner hoped that it would be the first to come back if the situation changes.

Overview of the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force and Efforts to Combat the Opioid Epidemic in the Regional Area. Maria Coutant-Skinner stated that she co-chairs the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force and serves as the Executive Director of the McCall Center.

In her presentation, she discussed the rising challenge of opioid addiction in the region. She noted the challenge of the addiction narrative as most people interpret addiction as a choice instead of a mental health issue. She noted the continued shame, isolation, and stigma attached to addiction despite its common origins including pre-existing trauma, over-prescription of opioid pain-killers, and limited access to mental health support. She recommended that members watch the documentary at <http://recoveringcommunitymovie.com>, which features people in recovery from northwest Connecticut.

Rural areas are particularly susceptible to the addiction crisis because of various economic, environmental, and social factors, including:

- Traffickers avoid major highways
- The area lacks treatment capacity and facilities
- Physicians are not trained in addiction
- There is less law enforcement presence.

Since 90% of addictions start in adolescence when brain development is most vulnerable, prevention work in schools is vital. Most of the school districts in the region have prevention councils. One effective communication strategy has been talking about the biology of addiction and conveying empathy for the need for relief from pain and suffering. This is a departure from the demonization of any one particular drug, and instead focuses on increasing resiliency in children and adolescents. This will be particularly important as millennials face high rates of suicide, depression, and anxiety.

A discussion about the legalization of marijuana followed.

From an economic standpoint, a single dollar towards treatment results in \$4-7 in savings. But, as Barbara Henry commented, the support system is restricted to either those severely poor or wealthy with limited options in between.

Maria invited NHCOC members to attend the monthly meetings of the Litchfield County Opioid Task Force on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month from 8:30-10am at the McCall Center. The Task Force focus even created the position of a Community Case Manager for the emergency department to connect overdose patients to care. The Task Force works to educate communities about prevention, intervention, and treatment. They've seen increases in referrals to help patients as well as an increase in providers that accept Medicaid for treatment medications like Suboxone.

Request for NHCOC Endorsement of Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Application by the Salisbury Association Land Trust for the protection of 244 Acres on Mt. Riga. Curtis Rand explained that Alice Yoakum hopes to sell 244 acres to the Salisbury Association Land Trust with eventual public access. The property has an important ridgeline from Lakeville Lake going to Sharon. The purchase would be funded with a 50% donation from her, a fund drive from the land trust, and a component of Connecticut Open Space or Highlands funds.

On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Don Stein, the NHCOC unanimously endorsed this grant application.

Update on Public Works Equipment Cooperative and Proposed Rental Rates for 2018. Wade Cole reported that the cooperative generated \$113,000 in funds last year and they hope to purchase a new catch-basin cleaner as set in the capital replacement plan. On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Wade Cole, the NHCOC voted unanimously to maintain the rental rate structure for 2018 as recommended by the area road supervisors.

Legislative Priorities for 2018 and Upcoming Meeting with Area Legislators. Michael Criss reported that a draft of the legislative priority list was included in the agenda packet and that input from COG members is welcome. The Legislative Committee will be meeting to finalize the list for COG Board consideration at the February meeting. Discussion about the upcoming legislative breakfast meeting followed. The state legislature goes into session on February 7, 2018 and Michael encouraged a continued partnership with the Chamber, CCM, COST and NECCOG throughout the legislative session.

Don Stein noted that all bills need to be on the table in the first 1-3 weeks of the session in February. February 9 is the deadline for legislators, then all bills need to go to committee by third week of February. This legislative session will focus on financial related bills.

Kathryn Dube from COST announced that they had just started a regional school district working group. They are also finalizing legislative priorities.

Update on Regional Animal Facility Design. Mayor Carbone.

Mayor Carbone explained the Committee is close to completing a final design. The Committee hopes to balance construction costs with an appropriate size. They are trying to find funding between grants and private investment. The committee hopes to bring more definitive information back to the region in about two months.

Administrative Items On a motion duly made and seconded, the following administrative items were unanimously approved: a) Approval of Minutes for Regular Meeting of December 14, 2017, and 2) Approval of Financial Statement for 11/2017.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:13 p.m.