

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF July 12, 2018

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Canaan, Henry Todd
Colebrook, Tom McKeon	Goshen, Bob Valentine
Hartland, Wade Cole	Kent, Bruce Adams
Morris, Tom Weik	North Canaan, Charles Perotti
Roxbury, Barbara Henry	Sharon, Brent Colley
Torrington, Elinor Carbone	Warren, Craig Nelson
Winchester, Candy Perez	

Others in Attendance:

Tim Abbott and Stacy Deming, Housatonic Valley Association; Aron Steeves, CTDOT District 4 Planner; Kathryn Dube, COST; Mike Muszynski, CCM; David T. Wilson, CT State Representative; Lila Tuxbury, NHCOG Regional Election Monitor; Brooke Mercaldi, Sustainable CT; Jocelyn Ayer, Joanna Wozniak-Brown and Rick Lynn, NHCOG staff; Media Representatives

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment. Bruce Adams, Chairman,

The meeting, held at the NHCOG office, was called to order by Chairman Bruce Adams at 10:07 a.m.

Bruce Adams welcomed members and invited public comment.

Tim Abbott invited attendees to an event co-hosted with the Kent Land Trust and Litchfield Hills Greenprint on July 13 from 4:00pm – 5:30pm. The event is to celebrate a large land acquisition made possible by federal funding from the Highlands Conservation Act. Senator Murphy, CT DEEP Commissioner Klee, and Bruce Adams are expected to attend.

Brian Ohler expressed concern at HealthQuest's announcement of closing the maternity ward at Sharon Hospital. At the recent transition of the Hospital, HealthQuest said they wouldn't change or reduce services for a minimum of three years. He urged the NHCOG to write a support letter to maintain the services at the hospital. Bruce Adams asked if this was a violation of the Certificate of Need. Brian Ohler said the certificate is a contractual agreement but they can change it if there is a "safety" issue.

Craig Nelson, seconded by Bob Valentine, made a motion to write a letter in support of maintaining the maternity services at Sharon Hospital. Candy Perez asked if we can make a motion under the public comment section of the meeting. Bruce Adams stated it was possible. Felicia Jones commented that this recent proposal by HealthQuest is another example of the changing demographics in the region with a declining young person population. Following additional discussion, all voted in favor of the motion.

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

Craig Nelson said Warren is utilizing LOCIP funding for the library and impending road projects.

Bob Valentine mentioned Goshen is finalizing the year's budget, working on road projects, and planning Goshen Fairgrounds events.

Henry Todd said Canaan had a successful car show with several thousand visitors. He said the Rural Collector program appears to be prohibitively expensive for a project he had hoped to initiate in town due to all the state and federal requirements that accompany the program.

Tom McKeon said Colebrook is starting road and bridge projects, and NorBrook Farm Brewery is opening within the month.

Charlie Perotti, following on Henry Todd's comment, noted that North Canaan will be using local funding for paving projects as well instead of pursuing Rural Collector Program funds. The town is in the process of interviewing for a new town attorney and looking for a new ZEO.

Don Stein noted Barkhamsted is training their new assessor and assistant. He asked if other towns accept credit card payments for licenses and permits. Charlie Perotti said they are using it at the transfer station through Salisbury Bank. Several towns stated they use it for tax payments and are considering it for other municipal operations.

Elinor Carbone said Torrington received a \$2 million Smart Growth Grant for sidewalks and a \$400,000 housing rehab grant. The City is moving forward with bonding for the regional animal facility and bridgework on Bogue Road. The city is working to consolidate the Board of Education and city financial offices and looking at other administrative consolidations.

Brent Colley announced the upcoming meeting on the town green to discuss the proposed closing of the maternity ward at Sharon Hospital. He recently coordinated with Tim Abbott to start a "History at the Hall" program in the town hall. The town is having a "Hops in the Valley" beer festival. .

Wade Cole stated Hartland is finishing bridge and roof replacement work, and the fireman's carnival is later this month.

Tom Weik is in the process of appointing a new Treasurer and Tax Collector. Morris has a new fire company as of July 1 with over 30 members. South Farms will be hosting social nights with beer and a farmer's market.

Candy Perez said there will be a public hearing soon for the Sue Grossman Greenway, and Winchester will be doing roadwork and bridgework.

Bruce Adams stated the town is conducting a management review of municipal operations, with a budget not to exceed \$5,000. There are many upcoming events in Kent including Kent Presents, Gilmore Girls Festival, and sidewalk festival.

Rick Lynn mentioned that ConnDOT's Rural Collector program, mentioned by several COG members today, has been very popular in the past but state and federal requirements are burdensome. He stated that he and the Falls Village Road Supervisor recently met with ConnDOT officials to see what can be done to reduce local costs. ConnDOT agreed to look into streamlining procedures to try and control local costs and reduce the administrative burden. Discussion followed.

Enhancement of NHCOC's Web-based "Regional Trail Map" and Opportunities for Improving Awareness of this Resource. Tim Abbott and Stacy Deming, Housatonic Valley Association with Introductory Comments from Rick Lynn and Joanna Wozniak-Brown.

Rick Lynn explained that the regional transportation planning process typically focuses on road improvements and bus service. The COG's recent Regional Transportation Plan also called for preparation on a regional trail map, however, and this project was undertaken with the technical assistance of the Housatonic Valley Association. In addition to documenting the regional trail network in the region for recreational use and enjoyment, the regional trail map also serves to enhance the quality of life for residents and encourages economic development.

Joanna Wozniak-Brown reviewed the NHCOC trails webpage and how it directs users to the interactive trail map. Visitors can find it through the home page and through the mapping page. The NHCOC website also hosts the other planning documents associated with the project and will also host directions on how to use the interactive map. She noted that other COGs have expressed interest in creating other regional trails map with an eye to creation of a statewide trail map. NHCOC will be discussing this project at an upcoming CTDOT – COG coordination meeting in September.

Tim Abbott expressed his excitement about the final product. This web application has higher functionality than the previous set-up and includes many new details. The interactive map has search options, accurate trails, photographs of every trailhead, degree of difficulty for the trails, and parking information.

Stacy Deming walked through the viewer options, which includes difficulty, bike use, and trail length. Also included are featured trails with family-friendly, longer-loop, and scenic trails. Parking areas were reviewed and if they were unsafe, they are not marked on the map. The trail data is produced up to federal standard.

Rep. Wilson asked how this is being promoted. Joanna Wozniak-Brown explained that the larger promotion efforts were held until the product was more complete and it should now be distributed widely. She noted that there is a marketing plan. Several towns said they will be posting it on their websites. Henry Todd stated he is excited about this project and the promotional opportunities.

Craig Nelson referenced a letter distributed to attendees from the Connecticut Forest & Park Association, seeking support for an East-West Trail. He asked the NHCOC to express support for this project. Don Stein, seconded by Henry Todd, made a motion to express support in a letter of this project. All voted in favor of this endorsement.

ConnDOT Plans for Maintenance of the State Highway Network in the Northwest Hills in 2018 and 2019. Aron Steeves, ConnDOT District 4 Planner, distributed the tentative list for paving projects on the state highway network in the region. The final list will be determined by the Commissioner, and some projects may shift. The previous District 4 director made decisions based on daily road traffic and maintenance projects, which de-prioritized some roads in the NHCOC region because of lower travel rates compared to the rest of the state. Now, there is a renewed focus on maintaining the entire statewide network. He said this is a challenge as the funding has remained the same while costs have increased.

Barbara Henry asked about the selection process. She said that Rte 317 in Roxbury is in worse repair compared to the section in New Milford listed for improvement. Aron Steeves said he would review Rte 317 again. Currently, a state van travels the roads and identifies the conditions electronically. Craig Nelson asked if the review information was available by town and Mr. Steeves stated that it is.

Candy Perez had Lenard Engineering conduct a Paizer rating on their local roads to help determine local improvement priority. Aron explained that this process differs from the state process. Bob Valentine asked if the state is looking at any chip sealing projects. Mr. Steeves explained that there is very little funding now provided for chip sealing. Rep. Wilson stated Litchfield moved chip sealing into operations over a five year period, and that Representatives Ohler and Case may wish to consider this in the legislature's Appropriations Committee.

Next Steps in Implementing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs). Jocelyn Ayer. Jocelyn Ayer presented on the five year implementation plan for the newly completed CEDs plan.

NWCTEconomicDevelopment.org is a new website that hosts the strategies. The full report is available on the website. She invites NHCOG members to share this with interested residents.

The roll-out of the plan included press releases, outreach to local economic commissions, partner outreach with NWCT Community Foundation, Housatonic Heritage, NCCC, PSHC, and Northwest ConneCT. U.S. EDA awarded \$20,000 to the regional Economic Development District to start implementation of the plan. This step will include a Virtual Jobs Hub, Rural Innovation lab, CEDS Outreach, Rural Broadband, and connections with the Rural Resiliency Project currently underway.

Immediate next steps include: launching www.discoverlitchfieldhills.com on the CivicLift platform; creation of town specific sites including Cornwall, Canaan, Litchfield, and Torrington; and a webinar for local BOS, EDC members, and other interested parties on Wednesday, July 25th, 7pm. Members can watch the replay of the webinar at a later date. There will be an additional webinar available to local businesses on Wednesday, August 15 at 10am. She asks that NHCOG members share this information with residents and businesses.

Overview of Regional Election Monitor Services. Lila Tuxbury, Regional Election Monitor for the NHCOG. Lila Tuxbury encouraged COG members to urge their town voting officials to participate in the training opportunities available to them, including those in Hartford and Middlesex College. It is now mandatory training. She is hosting a moderator certification training, required every 2 years, at the NHCOG office. Barbara Henry expressed concern about the mandatory nature of this training since it is difficult for registrar volunteers to attend. Lila agreed to convey to the state the local concerns about the lack of readily accessible and convenient training. Lila encouraged towns to continue implementation of the maintenance plan for the voting machines.

Implementing the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development in Cooperation with the SustainableCT Program. Brooke Mercaldi stated that Burlington, Roxbury, and Cornwall are pursuing SustainableCT certification this year, with several interesting projects. She is helping participating towns to look back about 5 years for past actions and potential credits. She is available through mid-August to assist other towns gets started with the program. On Monday July 30, from 9 – 11:30am SustainableCT staff will be at the NHCOG to answer questions and offer assistance to towns.

Administrative Items

- a. Approval of Minutes for Meeting of June 14, 2018. On a motion duly made and seconded, all voted in favor.
- b. Approval of Financial Statement for May 2018. On a motion duly made and seconded, all voted in favor.

Committee Reports and Updates

- a. Public Works Equipment Cooperative. Wade Cole stated that consistent with our regional replacement plan, the Sharon catch-basin cleaner was sold and steps are being taken to purchase a new one. The capital improvement fund will be utilized to cover that expense. Wade expressed gratitude for the town maintainers hosting the equipment for keeping the equipment in good operating condition.
- b. Regional Animal Facility. Mayor Carbone previously provided an update on this item under town updates.
- c. DEHMS. Rick Lynn reported that DEHMS Region 5 is receiving Homeland Security Grant funding again and is seeking town input on planning, training, and equipment needs. There will be an REPT meeting next month to discuss the proposals. Barbara Henry asked for a copy of the authorized equipment list for potential purchases.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment

Joanna Wozniak-Brown invited towns to attend the July 26 Resiliency Forum at the NHCOCG office.

Kathryn Dube noted that several towns have been passing ordinances to ban fracking waste and require certain certifications for products used on roadways. Since no certification process exists for the road material, the ordinance has stalled some projects. A state-wide ordinance passed in 2017 did not discuss the certification process. A ban was passed on a certain kind of material. COST is researching an alternative ordinance.

Wade Cole asked if other towns are having issues with salt contamination from state roadways. Discussion followed.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:08 p.m.