

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF June 14, 2018

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Canaan, Henry Todd
Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway	Goshen, Bob Valentine
Litchfield, Leo Paul	Morris, Tom Weik
Norfolk, Matthew Riiska	North Canaan, Charles Perotti
Torrington, Elinor Carbone	Warren, Craig Nelson
Washington, Mark Lyon	Winchester, Bob Geiger

Others in Attendance:

Bridget Beaucoup and Bob Gomez from VN Engineers; Carl Zimmerman, WestCOG; Sara Radasci, CT DOT; Priscilla Pavel, town of Cornwall; Paul Woodell, GeoDesign Inc.; Parker Rodriguez, Housatonic Railroad; Evan Dobos, CivicLift; Gertrude O'Sullivan, Foundation for Community Health; Bernie Harrington, LWV; Ellen Graham, Sen. Richard Blumenthal's office; Kathryn Dube, COST; Mike Muszynski, CCM; David T. Wilson, CT State Representative; Brooke Mercaldi, Sustainable CT; Joanna Wozniak-Brown and Rick Lynn, NHCOG staff; Media Representatives

Call to Order, Opportunity for Public Comment, and Introduction of Summer Intern and SustainableCT Fellow Brooke Mercaldi. Mark Lyon, Chairman.

The meeting, held at the NHCOG office, was called to order by Chairman Mark Lyon at 10:04 a.m.

Mark Lyon introduced Brooke Mercaldi, Sustainable CT Fellow and summer intern at the NHCOG.

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

Most towns reported recent passage of their budgets.

Craig Nelson said the town recently worked with the Lake Waramaug Task Force to install new drainage in order to reduce erosion at the town beach.

With a reduced mill rate, Tom Weik reported that the town budget passed in Morris.

Bob Valentine noted a new procedure for use of the Goshen Fairgrounds which includes pre-event meetings to discuss traffic, safety, and crowd control with various emergency, fairgrounds, and personnel. The town is also working to increase vehicle and pedestrian safety at the traffic circle.

Henry Todd said Classic Car will devote an entire episode to the Canaan car show on July 8. Along with the budget, the town passed a tax incentive policy.

Matt Riiska announced that Sue Dyer will be moving out of state and that he will need to appoint her replacement to the Board of Selectmen within 30 days.

Charlie Perotti reported that North Canaan is looking for new town attorney and a new zoning official.

Gordon Ridgway announced the re-opening of the lumberyard in Cornwall Bridge and he looks forward to the town participating in SustainableCT.

Elinor Carbone announced the search for a new police chief and superintendent for schools. Main Street

marketplace will start the first week of July.

For Winchester, Bob Geiger noted the passing of the budget and the soon to open new brewery.

Don Stein recently hired a new assessor in Barkhamsted and the Riverton Fairgrounds will host a music festival this year.

Leo Paul conveyed that Litchfield hosted another successful Litchfield Road Race this year. He also reported on continuing discussions about the Annex in Bantam.

Bruce Adams said Kent is busy with upcoming streetscape construction, two new restaurants opening, and an expansion to an affordable housing complex. He encouraged NHCOC members to contact Raz Alexe, Public Works Director in Litchfield, if they'd like to purchase speed signs.

Mark Lyon noted passage of town and education budgets and ongoing bridge projects. There will be a lot of town events this summer and they're reviewing the process for publicizing them.

Mark Lyon asked Rep. Wilson if he had any comments. Rep. Wilson reported on a probable veto session by the legislature in the near future.

#### Presentation of ConnDOT's Draft "Regional Transportation Safety Plan for the Northwest Hills".

Project Manager Bob Gomez from VN Engineers summarized the draft Regional Transportation Safety Plan, which was previously distributed to COG members. The Plan covers historical safety concerns, emerging safety concerns, and potential solutions and priorities. In the past two years, there have been 1,607 fatal or serious injury crashes in the region. The information is presented by town and for the entire region. The suggested solutions also identify potential funding mechanisms.

He asked COG members to review the report and offer comments or clarifications. Suggested countermeasures to address safety concerns range from simple maintenance changes to major redesign. Crash reduction strategies have a mix of enforcement, education, and design elements.

After receiving comments, VN Engineers will finalize the report and hope to update the report on a regular basis.

Rick Lynn commended VN Engineers for their work on this project and stated it will be helpful in updating the COG's Regional Transportation Plan.

#### Overview of Proposed Housatonic Railroad Enhancement Project and Request for Authorization to Submit Grant Application under the Federal BUILD program.

Parker Rodriguez from the Housatonic Railroad Company (HRRC) explained the services performed by HRRC and the grant application that requires NHCOC participation. HRRC is short-line freight carrier operating from Danbury CT to Pittsfield MA, serving customers like BD, Kimberly Clark, and Specialty Minerals. The rail line, mostly constructed in the late 1800s, has fallen into disrepair resulting in derailments. They are asking the federal government for a grant of \$12.5 million to replace the ties along the line and the rails and ties along the Specialty Minerals spur. They anticipate matching funds from ConnDOT and in-kind donations from the HRRC.

The application must be submitted for HRRC by the NHCOC. The HRRC will prepare the details for the

application, including the cost benefit analysis. The application deadline is July 17.

Bob Valentine asked about the organizational structure of the HRRC and the effect of this work on possible future passenger service. Mr. Rodriguez responded that the proposed changes to rail and tie would not preclude future passenger service but installing passenger service would require a huge investment to make it passenger-based. Installing passenger service would require new rail, which is not proposed for this grant except along the spur. Passenger service would also need new signals and other safety upgrades.

Henry Todd asked if there would be any increase in traffic along the line after the improvements. Parker Rodriguez said they didn't have exact estimates but expected an increase in traffic with a longer train. Henry Todd suggested the HRRC confer with the Housatonic River Commission, especially if there is any planned transfer of hazardous materials such as PCB-contaminated soil. Mr. Rodriguez explained that there was no expectation of such material traveling through the region. Henry Todd expressed his support for this project.

Gordon Ridgway also expressed concern about the recent derailments, and inquired about liability coverage and environmental impacts, especially to trees damaged by herbicides. Parker Rodriguez explained the HRRC carries liability insurance and encouraged the town to contact the HRRC Project Engineer regarding the tree damage. Gordon suggested that since even large grant applications can be considered under the the BUILD program, that the HRRC consider including some rail replacement in addition to the tie replacement.

Don Stein asked if the HRRC could continue to operate without the grant. Mr. Parker responded that the HRRC would continue to operate, and address priority tie replacement areas, but there would be continued risk of derailments.

Don Stein, seconded by Henry Todd, made a motion to endorse the grant application. Mark Lyon stated that he supports efforts to improve the rail safety. Rick Lynn noted that maintenance of rail is a priority in the Regional Transportation Plan. The motion carried by a unanimous vote of the COG Board..

#### Status of Municipal GIS in the Northwest Hills Region and Potential for Establishing a Regional GIS Program in Cooperation with WestCOG.

Joanna Wozniak-Brown explained the spectrum of GIS capacity in the region and the possibilities offered by creating a regional GIS system. The Request for Information (previously issued) and the Request for Proposals (forthcoming) solicits a wide range of potential services that would reflect the range of current GIS efforts among municipalities. Most other COGs offer a version of a regional viewer with accurate parcel data connected to assessors' information. An accurate regional parcel layer could bring economic development benefits as well as planning benefits. NHCOC's GIS survey indicated a strong interest among municipalities in creating parcel and zoning data.

Carl Zimmerman, WestCOG's GIS Manager, offered an overview of the contents of the RFI and RFP. He noted a large enthusiastic consultant response to the RFI, making him optimistic about the RFP.

Don Stein asked how many towns don't have GIS and how would the RFP would address existing systems. Joanna Wozniak-Brown explained that only half of the NHCOC towns have GIS systems and the RFP brings an economy of scale and may reduce ongoing costs for municipalities that already have systems. A regional parcel viewer offers information to town employees, residents, businesses, and vendors. Vendor

responses may allow towns to re-negotiate their existing arrangements. When consultant responses are received from the RFP, including pricing for various services, then further discussion can be held on the feasibility of establishing a regional GIS program.

#### Update on Northwest ConneCT Broadband Project Including Implications of Recent PURA Decision Pertaining to Municipal Gain.

Kim Maxwell from Northwest ConneCT asked towns to mark up the town maps he distributed for approximate cell phone dead-zones. He also distributed updates on recent broadband news. Northwest ConneCT is starting both a general community campaign about broadband, and a legislative campaign to address recent PURA rulings. Barkhamsted and Sharon would qualify as interveners against the recent damaging PURA ruling regarding municipal gain on utility poles. Northwest ConneCT hopes to make this an issue in the 2018 elections.

Rep. Wilson asked for feedback from NHCOC members about their positions. Don Stein said broadband enhancement is part of the CEDS plan that the NHCOC has endorsed. Rep. Wilson suggested that Northwest ConneCT reach out to the state representation.

Kim Maxwell requested that the NHCOC endorse the recommendation by Northwest ConneCT to contract with Rosemary O'Brien, who would work in addition to Felicia Jones and the One Eleven Group under the COG's RPI Grant. Rosemary O'Brien, Felicia Jones, and One Eleven will work together on the community campaign, while Felicia Jones would continue to work on the Leadership Campaign. Rick Lynn noted there was a competitive RFP process conducted that resulted in the recommendation of hiring Rosemary O'Brien. On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Henry Todd, all members voted in favor.

#### Administrative Items

- a. Approval of Minutes for Regular Meeting of May 10, 2018. On a motion duly made and seconded, all voted in favor.
- b. Approval of Financial Statement for April 2018. On a motion duly made and seconded, all voted in favor.
- c. Election of NHCOC Officers and Executive Committee for FY 2018-2019. On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Henry Todd, all voted in favor of the proposed slate.
- d. Request for Endorsement of NHCOC Goals and Objectives and Work Plan for FY 2018-2019. On a motion by Don Stein, seconded by Craig Nelson, all voted in favor.
- e. Approval of CivicLift MOU. On a motion by Don Stein, seconded by Henry Todd, the previously distributed Memorandum of Understanding was unanimously endorsed.
- f. Approval of MOU for Public Works Equipment Cooperative. On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Craig Nelson, the MOU was unanimously approved.

#### Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment

Mark Lyon asked if there were any comments from CCM and COST. Katherine Dube from COST reported on their recent legislative status update report and the upcoming emergency management training. Mike Muszynski distributed a Pass/Fail list on legislative bills, and reported that CCM is working on an annual compendium that will be going out next week. CCM is also working with an attorney on the municipal gain/utility pole issue. He's not entirely optimistic about appealing the PURA ruling but does recognize it as a top priority.

Bruce Adams thanked Mark Lyon for his service as Chairman of the NHCOC for the past two years, and

gifted him with a plaque from the NHCOC. Mark Lyon thanked members for the opportunity to serve as Chair and he said the NHCOC works the way he wished state government would work.

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