

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF FEBRUARY 14, 2019

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	Morris, Tom Weik
New Hartford, Dan Jerram	Norfolk, Matt Riiska
North Canaan, Charles Perotti	Roxbury, Barbara Henry
Salisbury, Curtis Rand	Torrington, Elinor Carbone
Warren, Craig Nelson	Winchester, Bob Geiger

Others in Attendance:

Steve Silver and Hedy Ayers, Eversource; Gertrude O'Sullivan and Natasha Winters, FCH; Julie Scharnberg, NWCT Community Foundation; Wiley Wood, Norfolk Now; John Simoncelli, Greenwoods Counseling; Lauren Pristo, Litchfield County Opiate Task Force; Stephanie Korman, McCall; Ellen Graham, Sen. Blumenthal Office; Priscilla Pavel, Cornwall Selectman; Rep. Maria Horn; Rick Lynn and Jocelyn Ayer, 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 10:05 a.m.

Hedy Ayers commented on utility scams, tree trimming schedules and clean energy programs

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

COG members updated one another on recent activities and issues in town including:

- Development of municipal budgets.
- Municipal building maintenance and bridge repair
- Misinformation with the use of social media
- Upcoming increase in MIRA tip fees (per Don Stein, fees will increase by \$9.61 effective 4/1/19 and an additional \$1.35 effective 7/1/19)
- Hinsdale School improvement project and bonding initiatives in Winchester
- Retirement of Jerry Rollet and appointment of Ray Drew as Torrington's DPW Director
- Blight enforcement
- Municipal website updates
- Greenway trail and streetscape development
- Veterans helping veterans program based in Bristol
- Municipal employee salary adjustments

Update on Opioid Crisis and Vaping in the Northwest Hills. John Simoncelli, Executive Director of Greenwoods Counseling, Lauren Pristo of the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force, and Stephanie Korman, from the McCall Center presented and reviewed PowerPoint slides on the Opioid Crisis and increasing concerns about Vaping. John Simoncelli stated that opioid abuse remains a crisis with 54 fatal overdoses in 2017 in Litchfield County and 38 in the first half of 2018. Throughout the state, over 1,000 persons are projected to die from opioid abuse this year. He stated that personal trauma and isolation are driving the

crisis. Help is available in the region from Greenwoods Counseling, the McCall Center and Charlotte Hungerford Hospital. Lauren Pristo stated that the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force provides a forum for addressing the issue and is developing a best practices manual for Sober Living Homes along with a tool box for response. The Task Force is also addressing the gaps in care and education. Don Stein inquired about their position on legalizing marijuana since this is a legislative issue this year. John Simoncelli stated that it will likely have little effect on changing patterns with usage. Stephanie Korman then reviewed the characteristics and use of e-cigarettes and vaping. The products do contain nicotine and the long-term impacts of vaping are still largely unknown. Henry Todd asked about legislation to increase the age to 21 in order to purchase these products. Representative Horn stated that there are two bills under consideration this session and the bills are being taken seriously.

Ted Shafer asked about school response to vaping and Stephanie responded that prevention and treatment education is being developed. Craig Nelson stated that vaping sensors have been installed at Wamogo. Mayor Carbone stated that the Mayors Committee on Youth is actively engaged in this issue and is developing an ordinance for consideration by the City Council. Bruce Adams inquired about changes in the medical community to lessen opioid prescriptions, and John Simoncelli stated that progress is being made on that front.

Summary of Recent NHCOG Member Surveys (note: copies of all surveys referenced below are available from the NHCOG office)

- a) Elected vs. appointed tax collectors. Dan Jerram distributed and reviewed the results of his survey. Within the NHCOG, eleven towns have elected tax collectors and ten towns have appointed tax collectors. Towns east of the NHCOG generally have appointed tax collectors and Dan stated that the trend is for appointed tax collectors. New Hartford recently changed from an elected tax collector to an appointed one. Dan also provided information on tax collector salaries in the New Hartford area.
- b) Sewer fees and open space. Gordon Ridgway stated that sewer fees vary a great deal throughout the State and Northwest Hills Region. Sewer fees throughout the state vary from \$12 a month to \$122 a month. Sewer fees within the Northwest Hills Region vary from \$25-\$83 per month. Gordon then reviewed a recent profile prepared by the HVA of open space by town in the Northwest Hills.
- c) Policies for renting town buildings and meeting space. Michael Criss stated that several towns provided him with their policies and procedures regarding the rental of town buildings or properties for non-governmental uses. Harwinton will be developing a policy based on the samples provided and will share that with COG members when it is available.
- d) Status of recreation directors in the region. Don Stein distributed and reviewed the results of his survey of Recreation Directors and Commissions in the region.
- e) Local road miles and number of public works employees by town. Barbara Henry distributed and reviewed a handout listing the number of local road miles and public works employees in the NHCOG towns. The survey also provides information on those towns with a PW Director or Supervisor, and the use of seasonal employees
- f) Town auditors. Charlie Perotti distributed and reviewed a survey of town auditors in the NHCOG region.

Legislative Update.

- a) SB-431 AAC Property Tax Reform. Michael Criss expressed considerable concern about this proposed bill. He stated that the total municipal tax loss for Harwinton due to the proposed changes would exceed \$5 million. Mayor Carbone stated that this bill would have a devastating impact on the City of Torrington and City businesses.
- b) School Consolidation Proposals. Bruce Adams distributed copies of Proposed Bill 454 (AAC the Creation of Regional School Districts) and 457 (AAC the Size of School Districts) and expressed concern about the implications of both bills for the NHCOG region. General discussion followed.
- c) HB 3380 AAC Regional Animal Control Shelters. Ted Shafer distributed the testimony he presented to the

Environment Committee in support of this bill which would enable more towns to regionalize their animal control services.

Update on Rural Independent Transportation Service and Request to Include Sullivan Senior Center as a RITS Provider. Rick Lynn stated that the RITS program had a successful first year of operation with 884 rides provided during 2018 to the elderly and disabled for non-emergency medical trips. Geer and the NWCTD are utilizing the available operating funds as anticipated, but EdAdvance is not receiving the number of ride requests that were anticipated. As a result, it is proposed that a portion of the available operating funds be re-directed to the Sullivan Senior Center to help meet their existing demand for non-emergency medical trips. On a motion duly made and seconded, the NHCOCG unanimously voted to provide up to \$18,000 in RITS funding for the Sullivan Senior Center to enhance their capacity to provide non-emergency medical trips for the elderly and disabled during calendar year 2019.

Community and Economic Development Update.

- a) Updated Data Profile of the Northwest Hills Region. Jocelyn Ayer handed out a package of town-level demographic, economic, and housing data available for each town. Also attached was comparison data for all 21 towns on population trends, labor force, school enrollment, and number of affordable housing units. She encouraged towns to think of NHCOCG as a data resource.
- b) Regional Plan of Conservation & Development Implementation (POCD). Jocelyn Ayer reviewed progress made on implementing the Regional POCD over the last year and handed out a chart which provides updates on each strategy and links to tools and resources that towns can utilize. NHCOCG has made progress on 44 of the 77 tasks in the ten-year plan. Jocelyn summarized three main points of progress including the launching of DiscoverLitchfieldHills.com, the region's new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and the Pop-Up Community Hub project.

Administrative Items

On a motion duly made and seconded, COG members unanimously approved the minutes for the meeting of January 10, 2018 and the financial statement for December 2018.

Don Stein stated that the Executive Committee reviewed the COG's anticipated sources of income and expenditures for FY 2019-20 and recommends that local COG dues remain at 80 cents per capita. On a motion duly made and seconded, the COG Board unanimously voted to approve COG dues at 80 cents per capita.

Wade Cole distributed the schedule for the Public Works Equipment Cooperative in 2019 and, following consultation with COG staff, recommends that the equipment rental rates remain at their current levels. On a motion duly made and seconded, the NHCOCG unanimously voted to keep the equipment rental rates at their current levels.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment

Jocelyn Ayer reminded COG members of the upcoming the Economic Development Summit on February 19th.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.