

MINUTES OF THE NHCOC MEETING OF MARCH 14, 2019

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Canaan, Henry Todd
Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway	Goshen, Bob Valentine
Hartland, Wade Cole	Harwinton, Mike Criss
Kent, Bruce Adams	Litchfield, Leo Paul
Morris, Tom Weik	Norfolk, Matt Riska
North Canaan, Charles Perotti	Salisbury, Curtis Rand
Torrington, Elinor Carbone	Warren, Craig Nelson
Washington, Mark Lyon	Winchester, Bob Geiger

Others in Attendance:

Kira Bonomo and Paul Fabula, New York Regional Census Center; Joe DeLong and Mike Muszynski, CCM; John Field, DEMHS Region 5; Rufus de Rham, NW CT Arts Council; Johan Strandson, USDA; Paul Woodell, GeoDesign; Sara Radasci, CT DOT; Bernie Harrington, League of Women Conservation Voters; Priscilla Pavel, town of Cornwall; Steve Silver and Hedy Ayers, Eversource; State Rep. David Wilson; Rick Lynn, Jocelyn Ayer, and Joanna Wozniak-Brown, NHCOC staff; Media Representatives

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

The meeting, held at the NHCOC office, was called to order by Chairman Bruce Adams at 10:03 a.m.

Bruce Adams welcomed members and invited public comment. Rufus de Rham of the NW CT Arts Council announced two events: Make Music Day on June 21 and annual Open Your Eyes studio tour on August 24 & 25.

Steve Silver let attendees know about Eversource's tree trimming initiative.

Johan Strandson, USDA Rural Development, informed attendees about the Community Facility program for roads, schools, bridges, and municipal treatment facilities.

Paul Woodell of GeoDesign, a geotechnical and environmental consulting firm, introduced himself and explained his available services.

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

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

- Preparing municipal budgets,
- Improving local roads, repairing bridges, and replacing school roof with solar,
- Reviewing regionalization of local schools,
- Managing legal issues,
- Testifying on proposed bills in the state legislature,
- Celebrating new businesses (brewery in Winsted, restaurant in Torrington).

Matt Riiska noted the conversations about regionalizing their local schools. Don Stein explained they attempted to review that opportunity but it wasn't cost effective. Mark Lyon announced the retirement of a long-term and valued employee, Janet Hill, from her position as Land Use Administrator. Leo Paul asked Rep. David Wilson about the tolls. Rep. Wilson explained that there hasn't been any

determinations on it. Mayor Carbone suggested towns submit testimony on Friday for Senate Bill 431.

U.S. Census Bureau Complete Count Committees and Participant Statistical Area Program (PSAP) Participation. Kira Bonomo and Paul Fabula, New York Regional Census Center.

Kira Bonomo explained the PSAP program as an opportunity for municipalities to participate in their representation. Municipalities can review and update their statistical boundaries that will be used in the 2020 Census, American Community Survey, and other Census programs.

This is the *only* opportunity to review and update the geographical boundaries. This data is used in transportation planning, qualified opportunity zones, and grant applications. Opportunity Zones, overseen by the US Department of Treasury, are determined by census tract.

The Census Bureau needs updates by the end of May 2019. Confirmation of receipt will take place in July 2019. Verification will take place in January 2020.

Currently, the region has no special use block groups, which are for employment centers, airports, parks, forests, etc. with little to no population or housing units.

Bruce Adams asked about identifying private schools in the census count. Kira Bonomo explained that those locations are collected separately as group quarters.

Paul Fabula, Partnership Specialist for the state of Connecticut, said the state hopes to have a “Count Committee” in every municipality. They are currently conducting an American Community Survey and Census Day is April 1, 2020. Residents may be wary of sharing their information or may be hard to reach. He stressed that Census employees are subject to fines and jail time if they release personal information. He noted that CEOs should encourage residents to participate. Libraries, religious institutions, and local events are good outreach opportunities. US Census has sample email messages, articles, and social media content. The Data Dissemination Program assists municipalities in learning how to access and use the resulting data for planning.

Rep. Wilson asked about counting of “illegals”. Paul Fabula and Kira Bonomo explained that, per the Constitution, everyone living in the United States is counted. It’s estimated that every person equates to approximately \$2,900 of federal funding.

Rick Lynn commented that Joanna Wozniak-Brown is the COG’s contact person for Census related information, and that she is available to assist member towns in defining Census Designated Places and other tasks.

Overview of Key State Budget Issues and Legislative Priorities of CCM. Joe DeLong, Executive Director.

Joe DeLong said that CCM is at 100% representation of Connecticut municipalities. He explained that the current property tax crisis is limiting Connecticut’s growth. He also noted that the state’s pension crisis is the primary threat to Connecticut’s fiscal health. The proposed cost shift from the state onto towns and cities for teachers’ pensions is simply a cost shift instead of proper reform.

The bill on separate taxing authority for boards of education is an opportunity to communicate on the teachers’ pensions. He explained that the public review on budget is cumbersome since 70% of the education budget is in a single line item. Currently, towns have no opportunity to negotiate the pension agreements; however, permitting municipal leaders to negotiate the contracts is unlikely to be approved. If the labor concessions and sales tax expansion proposals are not approved, there will likely be additional

burdens on the municipalities to make up the loss in revenue. He stressed the importance of municipalities in participating in the legislative process early as the state budget evolves and by expressing a willingness to be a part of the solution. For example, instead of consolidating schools, sharing administrators may be a better cost savings.

Bob Valentine suggested improved oversight between the Board of Finance and the Board of Education to achieve a balance of improvements and fiscal responsibility.

Don Stein supported the idea of advocacy instead of the simple dismissal of proposals since some strategies might work elsewhere such as bifurcation of the education budget from the municipal budget.

Gordon Ridgway explained that one-on-one meetings with their legislators should also be used in addition to testimony. He stressed that the guarantee on pension returns is unsupported and unique to Connecticut. Regionalization of taxes and consolidation of tax collection should also be a concern since municipalities rely on the collection of property taxes.

Summary of Recent NHCOC Member Survey: Municipal Employee Contributions to Health Insurance.

Bob Valentine explained that the survey is included in the agenda packet and he is available to respond to any questions as they arise.

Introduction and Comments by John Field, DEMHS Region 5 Coordinator.

John Field stated that he previously worked as the Fire Chief for the City of Torrington and now works for the CT Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. He replaces Tom Vaninni as the Region 5 Coordinator. He encouraged towns to complete and submit their School Security Plans. He's also looking for electronic copies for the Local Emergency Operations Plans. He announced the following events: CCM Emergency Management Symposium (April 25), a National Weather Service in Albany briefing for Litchfield County (April 18), and the region's annual EMD meeting (April 8).

Administrative Items

- a. Approval of Minutes for Meeting of February 14, 2019.
- b. Approval of Financial Statement for January 2019.

On a motion by Craig Nelson, seconded by Michael Criss, items a and b above were unanimously accepted.

- c. Approval of Farm-to-School Consultant and Distribution of Northwest ConneCT CD. Jocelyn Ayer.

Jocelyn Ayer explained that NHCOC will be hiring a consultant through an AgViability grant to study potential avenues for incorporating local food into regional schools. Based on a recommendation from the Selection Committee, and on a motion by Don Stein and seconded by Craig Nelson, members voted unanimously to hire Renee Giroux as the consultant.

Each town in attendance received a CD with information from the Rural Broadband Study for their town. Rosemary O'Brien collected data on broadband and mobile coverage in each town and prepared a CD of data for each town. Key findings of the study were:

- 35% of households (26,000) in region do not have access to broadband speeds.
- No one in region has service today that they will need in 10 years. Broadband is foundational piece to a number of economic development opportunities.
- A municipal fiber optic broadband network such as the one Northwest ConneCT is

- proposing would reduce residents' monthly internet costs and provide better service.
- 34% of homes (18,000) do not have cell phone reception.
- 475 miles of roads don't have reception. That might be higher as not all areas are covered by all carriers.

Jocelyn Ayer handed out folders from the NWCT Economic Development Summit which includes a description of next steps for addressing the lack of fiber optic broadband in our region. She noted that Norfolk is planning to move forward on the fiber project and will share information with other towns in the region.

Legislative Update

- a. Priority Bills Being Tracked. Michael Criss, Legislative Committee Chairman, reviewed a list of bills being tracked through the NHCOG. He stated there are a number of bills of regional concern and encouraged COG members to submit testimony on these bills.

He noted SB 431 for its tax revenue reduction to towns but increase on residents and HB 7319 for its construction. He's also following the bill on the consolidation of the tax assessment.

Craig Nelson noted a proposed bill on printing of assessment data.

- b. Draft CTCOG Legislative Priorities.

On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Don Stein, the priorities as presented in the agenda packet were unanimously endorsed.

- c. Proposed Letter of Support for SB 868 entitled "An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Commercial Rail Freight Line Improvements".

On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Craig Nelson, the proposed letter was unanimously approved.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment

Joanna Wozniak-Brown asked NHCOG members to send in any remaining comments on the Draft Rural Resiliency Vision & Toolkit presented at the December 2018 NHCOG meeting. She will ask for endorsement at the meeting next month.

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