

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF April 12, 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, Mike Criss	Kent, Bruce Adams
Litchfield, Leo Paul	Norfolk, Matt 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:

Governor Ned Lamont; Rich Meinert and Laura Maur, UConn Extension; David Gronbach, town of New Milford; Chris Sanders, Goshen Housing Trust; Jennifer Dewitt and Allison Fulton, HVCASA; Deb Aleksinas, LARC; Jen Bucci, town of Harwinton; Greg Simpson, Beacon Health Options; Judith McElhere, Five Points; Amber Sands, Fitchburg MA; Jim O'Leary, town of Goshen; Tim Waldron, CT General Assembly; Johan Strandson and Ben Gonzaba, USDA Rural Development; Sara Radasci, CT DOT; Dan Reese, Torrington resident; Kathryn Dube, COST; Mike Muszynski, CCM; Priscilla Pavel, town of Cornwall; Steve Silver, Eversource; State Sen. Kevin Witkos; State Sen. Craig Minor; State Rep. David Wilson; State Rep. Jay Case; State Rep. John Piscopo; Gertrude O'Sullivan, Foundation for Community Health; Rick Lynn, Jocelyn Ayer, and Joanna Wozniak-Brown, NHCOG staff; Media Representatives

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

The meeting, held at the UConn Torrington Extension Center, was called to order by Chairman Bruce Adams at 10:30 a.m.

Bruce Adams introduced the Governor and asked NHCOG members to introduce themselves.

Guest Speaker: Hon. Ned Lamont, Governor.

Gov. Lamont discussed three key priorities of his administration: resolving Connecticut's fiscal challenges including health care, taxes, and teachers' pensions; transportation issues; and preparing the Connecticut workforce for expected jobs.

Chairman Adams then invited NHCOG members to present priority regional issues of concern.

Talking Point #1: Helping our towns keep taxes low

Michael Criss commented on current proposed changes to the property tax program, the homestead exemption, and motor vehicle tax. He explained this would burden both the aging population and young families in the region. Those changes would cost Harwinton most of its existing budget. He also noted significant progress in the Northwest Hills to achieve regional cost-savings. Bob Valentine echoed these comments.

Gordon Ridgway noted that current practices at the state are sometimes counter-intuitive such as the use of corrosive road salt that is damaging infrastructure. He commented that the state should not push the

financial crisis at the state level on to municipalities.

The Governor responded that he will discuss the infrastructure issue with CTDOT. He hopes that towns will contribute to teachers' pensions with 1/3 of the costs over three years. He said that towns that pay teachers above the average will be asked to pay a proportional increase.

He said that towns should not be concerned about forced regionalization but he hopes to reduce costs to municipalities through demonstrated cost savings in things like regional education administration.

#### Talking Point #2: Supporting voluntary regionalization

Barbara Henry said that incentivizing shared services with a voluntary approach is preferred to mandating. The small town of Roxbury shares a Resident Trooper, a dispatch service and assessor; and participates in a regional school district. She said these locally initiated programs have been successful unlike the state mandated shared probate services which cost more to the town. There needs to be more support for emergency services as towns have less recruits but more mandated training burdens. She stated that the ACIR needs administrative support to be successful. The Northwest Hills region is a good example for regional coordination. She also expressed support for maintaining COG funding.

Leo Paul also expressed support for ACIR and asked highlighted various regional efforts, such as storm response, the region's Public Works Equipment Cooperative, a regional animal facility, and cooperative purchasing.

#### Talking Point #3: Support broadband development in the region and the state

Don Stein highlighted the region's efforts to build a fiber-optic broadband network to meet evolving technology needs in areas like education, economic development, and healthcare. He referenced the PURA decision on municipal gain which denies municipalities the right to use its space on the utility poles for broadband if they wish has delayed the project and will add cost if not addressed. The NHCOC supports Senate Bill 846 which would remove this obstacle. In Massachusetts, the state has invested in wiring its rural towns. The region must be able to compete with western Massachusetts to attract young families and workforce. NHCOC would appreciate the Governor's support with this effort.

Brent Colley explained that fiber-optic broadband creates opportunities for healthcare, business, agriculture, etc. The region not only competes with Massachusetts but also the Hudson Valley. He mentioned that many of his residents are concerned about radiation from 5G antennas. Fiber-optic wiring to the home would reduce or eliminate the need for antennas.

Governor Lamont said the state hopes to be one of the first 5G states.

#### Talking Point #4: Consider bonding for critical projects.

Mark Lyon said that zero new bond funds in the State budget for affordable housing will seriously harm local efforts in our region to create workforce housing options. Housing efforts in the region are conducted by small, local non-profit organizations and they need state funding support to construct the housing. He mentioned the region's affordable housing pipeline and that many of these projects are ready to be built, they just need State funding support. The State has already invested \$1.3 million in pre-development funding for these projects and without state funding support to build these projects, they will not happen and that investment will be wasted. Without affordable housing, there are less opportunities to develop a workforce and volunteer pool.

Henry Todd said he's speaking as a third generation Connecticut resident. Canaan is the second smallest village in the state. The community just started an affordable housing project with 12 units. But the state bonding budget has suddenly gone from \$300 million to zero. Affordable housing is also required to invite young people to the community. They need volunteers for their emergency services. Bonding is one of the most critical economic development tools for municipalities.

Governor Lamont said he is putting the State on a bond diet but it won't be a starvation diet. He said there will be funding for affordable housing but that the state is returning to the average bond budget prior to Governor Malloy. He explained he doesn't want to put the transportation bonds on top of the GO bonds. He wants to separate the two funds to maintain a standard level of bonding without adding more debt to the General Fund.

Rep. Jay Case said the Housing Committees in the region will be meeting on May 23 with the Commissioner of Housing.

#### Talking Point #5: Protecting towns on educational proposals

Dan Jerram said that New Hartford and Barkhamsted contain significant amounts of MDC properties, simultaneously limiting population growth and protecting drinking water. State funding cuts through ECS and MBR changes, result in local tax increases at a time where other costs are increasing. In the region, 17 of the municipalities use regional schools. And 11 of the 21 towns receives less than \$50,000 in education support. Cornwall and Sharon receive \$5,000 in support.

Michael Criss said that education is 70% or more of local budgets. ECS funding has dropped 12-13% over the last five years and special education hasn't been funded as promised. Regional proposals should be directed where regionalization isn't happening as many schools already share services. Region 7 is pooling towns together for cooperative healthcare purchases. MBR needs more flexibility to allow for local oversight. He noted that ECS cuts to municipalities affects the regional schools as well.

Governor Lamont commented that he will be addressing ECS issues and also said that the special education funding needs to be re-organized.

Chairman Adams thanked Governor Lamont for attending the COG meeting and sharing his insight on the various issues of regional concern. COG members applauded Governor Lamont for his participation at the meeting.

Request for NHCOC Endorsement of "Rural Resiliency Vision and Toolkit" and Next Steps in Regional Planning for Resiliency and Sustainability. Joanna Wozniak-Brown asked NHCOC members for an endorsement of the Rural Resiliency Vision and Toolkit, presented at the December 2018 NHCOC meeting. Only minor changes are anticipated for the final toolkit document. On a motion by Michael Criss and Henry Todd the Rural Resiliency Vision and Toolkit was unanimously endorsed. She also noted that NHCOC hopes to host a Sustainable CT intern this summer to support towns in their Sustainable CT certification efforts and to identify potential resiliency projects.

Municipal Parcel Data Reminder (PA 18-175), Census PSAP assistance, and Regional GIS Update. Joanna Wozniak-Brown reminded towns of the requirement under PA 18-175 to send NHCOC parcel GIS and CAMA data, if they have it, by May 3. She also invited towns to review proposed boundary changes for the 2020 Census and to add Census Designated Places to their communities to help track economic development efforts in village centers. Lastly, NHCOC is reviewing proposals by GIS companies to digitize

municipal parcels and reduce costs.

Selection of Economic Development Implementation Consultant. Jocelyn Ayer said that NHCOC and the Northwest CT Economic Development Corporation has raised funding to allow them to hire a consultant to implement the region's 5-year comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS). She distributed a memo describing the tasks that the consultant would be carrying out: community outreach on the proposed broadband network, pursuing specific project funding opportunities for other CEDS initiatives, promoting workforce development services, and organizing a rural healthcare technology innovation workshop. The selection committee recommends the selection of Dan Reese to complete tasks 1-3 and Janet Carlson of OneEleven Group to complete task 4.

On a motion to endorse Dan Reese for Tasks 1-3 and Janet Carlson for Task 4 by Don Stein, seconded by Henry Todd, the motion unanimously passed.

#### Administrative Items

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

On a motion by Craig Nelson, seconded by Curtis Rand, items a and b were unanimously approved.

- c. Appointment of Nominating Committee for NHCOC Officers and Executive Committee for FY 2019-2020. Bruce Adams appointed Wade Cole, Bob Geiger, and Craig Nelson to serve on the Nominating Committee. Craig Nelson was appointed to serve as the Chairman of the Nominating Committee.
- d. ConnDOT Request for Endorsement of Proposed STIP Amendment Pertaining to CTRides Program. On a motion by Michael Criss, seconded by Don Stein, the Amendment was endorsed.

#### Committee & Program Updates

- a. Legislative Committee. Michael Criss.  
Michael Criss said there were two new education bills about shifting pension funding to towns and about shared school services. The bill for separate taxing for the schools died. Committees have rapidly approaching deadlines to complete their proposals.  
  
Don Stein stated that although the Governor is committed to seeking a state budget by June, the towns actually have to set a mill rate by the end of May.
- b. Regional Animal Facility Committee. Rick Lynn stated that the Committee is in the process of securing the land use permits for the facility and the final design package should be completed in the coming weeks. Once the final design is completed, the City of Torrington plans to issue a request for construction bids. Bob Valentine said the Committee members agreed to create a 10-year agreement among the current participating municipalities. Bruce Adams asked what the structure would be for other towns to join. Bob Valentine said that there would be a buy-in arrangement for newly participating towns. He said that the operational expenses would be shared based on reasonable criteria such as size of municipality.
- c. DEMHS Region 5. Mark Lyon.  
Mark Lyon said Paul Gibb reviewed responses to the May 15, 2018 storms and plans to present on the best practices at an upcoming NHCOC meeting. The Public Works Committee (ESF-3) is looking at establishing a mutual aid arrangement for support in the towns in Region 5 to

enhance coordination and response. DEHMS has also been inquiring about an incident of a pole that was struck in New Hartford and how it affected service as far as Salisbury.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment. Barbara Henry polled COG members on local permitting procedures for waste haulers at their transfer stations.

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