

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF June 13, 2019

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Canaan, Henry Todd
Colebrook, Tom McKeon	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Goshen, Bob Valentine	Hartland, Wade Cole
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:

Emily Boushee, Sen. Chris Murphy's office; Rufus de Rahm, NWCT Arts Council; Sara Radasci, CT DOT; Betsy Gara, COST; Denise Raap, Litchfield Planning & Zoning Commission; Bernie Harrington, League of Women Conservation Voters; Steve Silver and Hedy Ayers, Eversource; State Rep. Jay Case; State Sen. Kevin Witkos; Deb Aleksinas, LARC; Gertrude O'Sullivan, Foundation for Community Health; Dan Reese, Regional Economic Development Consultant; Kelly-Anne Moffa, NHCOG/Sustainable CT; 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 was called to order by Chairman Bruce Adams at 10:04 a.m.

Bruce Adams invited members of the public to introduce themselves.

Dan Reese introduced himself as a consultant to the NHCOG working on implementing the CEDS strategy. Emily Boushee from Sen. Chris Murphy's office introduced herself. Hedy Ayers from Eversource shared the availability of a new mobile app for customer service.

Rep. Jay Case thanked COG members for sending their housing representatives to the recent meeting he helped coordinate. Sen. Kevin Witkos stated that he anticipates returning for a special session of the legislature this summer.

Bruce Adams stated that the June 1st Household hazardous Waste Collection Day was a success and he encouraged other NHCOG members to volunteer at future events.

Guest Speaker: Hon. Susan Bysiewicz, Lt Governor. Bruce Adams introduced Lt. Governor Bysiewicz. She thanked him for the opportunity to attend today's meeting and stated that she has been making efforts to meet with all of the chief elected officials across the state to enhance collaboration.

The Lieutenant Governor stated that, upon taking office, the primary goal of the administration is addressing the state deficit. They are seeking to reduce the long-term debt service and increase economic development by changes to the state employee retirement program, elimination of the \$250 business entity tax, raising the minimum wage over the next five years, and adopting a paid family medical leave policy. They are also maintaining the ECS formula and providing additional school funding. They are creating online platforms for state forms and registrations. She encourage communities to support the Census since for every person counted, states receive \$2,900. Torrington has formed a Complete Count Committee and

she hopes that other towns will form similar groups. She introduced Jimmy Tickey, her economic advisor.

Gordon Ridgway thanked her and the governor for making such efforts to reach out to the towns and the NHCOC. He thanked them for the protection of municipal aid. He encouraged them to move the teachers' pensions to defined contribution plans similar to the towns. He also asked about the plans for rural broadband initiatives. The Lt. Governor responded that new state employees have a partial defined benefit plan with the state and a partial 401k style arrangement. She anticipates a loss of 25% of state employees across the departments in a few years and the digital efforts should increase departmental efficiency. Governor Malloy had already reduced the state workforce by 11%. She recognized the importance of broadband as well and mentioned that the 5G program passed in the legislature

Don Stein responded that the 5G technology works for the urban areas but it is not the appropriate technology for the rural, less densely populated and hilly regions. He explained the efforts of Northwest ConneCT and the study proposed by Sen. Needleman. She said they'll make the DECD Commissioner aware of this and will look forward to working on this issue.

Barbara Henry said that she is concerned about the potential health problems from 5G. She also expressed concern about municipalities taking on the teachers' pension liability. The Lt. Governor said that they have heard the municipalities' concerns and are evaluating their next steps. One strategy is re-organizing DECD and CERC to bring in more businesses to the state.

The Lt. Governor thanked NHCOC members for their service to the state.

Overview of the Legislative Session from the Perspective of the CT Council of Small Towns. Betsy Gara, Executive Director of COST, distributed a report prepared by COST summarizing the legislative session. Towns were largely held harmless with some small increases to the struggling school districts. She reflected that the legislative session amounted mostly to what was avoided as opposed to what was accomplished. For example, the proposed school regionalization and shifting of teachers' pensions liabilities to the towns did not move forward. She noted that the participation by residents and chief elected officials was critical to the success achieved this session. Towns should anticipate the return of many of these issues however and it will be important to remain vigilant. One "win" for the region was the animal control shelter bill. She said there will likely be a cost to towns to increasing the minimum wage but the cost from Paid Family Medical Leave is unclear. She encouraged the towns and COGs to work proactively to increase economic development at the local level in preparation for increased costs from the state. She also thanked the legislators for their hard work and the chief elected officials' participation.

Bob Valentine echoed Betsy Gara's comments that the towns must be vigilant about the state's budget crisis and thanked her for her work. Leo Paul supported those comments and the need to shift new employees to defined contribution retirement programs and giving local authorities more participation in the pension negotiations.

Don Stein questioned the state's relationship with the Dalios Foundation and stated that it is not subject to Freedom of Information Act or other transparency.

Dan Jerram asked about the use of Paid Family Medical Leave. He specifically inquired about employees of collective bargaining units, and whether they will have money taken from it unless they negotiate it in.

ConnDOT Paving Plans for State Highways in the Northwest Hills and Prospects for Development of a 3-Year Paving Plan by ConnDOT. Aron Steeves, ConnDOT District 4, shared a list of anticipated paving projects for 2019 and hopes to have a tentative list for 2020 soon. He stated that at current funding levels,

CTDOT can pave about 55 miles of roadway each year in District 4. This puts the state road network on a 30 year paving schedule which is less than optimum. He stated that twice this funding level is needed to properly maintain the state roads. Barbara Henry said Route 317 into Woodbury is in terrible condition. Discussion about the prioritization of road paving by the state followed.

Introduction of Summer Intern and SustainableCT Fellow Kelly-Anne Moffa, and Summary of Proposed Work Plan by Joanna Wozniak-Brown. As a sidebar, Joanna Wozniak-Brown reminded COG members of the GIS Parcel Development Workshop coming up on Tuesday, June 18 from 2-4pm. She encouraged interested towns to attend to hear about the process.

She then introduced Kelly-Anne Moffa, the NHCOC Sustainable CT fellow for the summer. A dual Environmental-Economics major at UConn, Kelly-Anne will be available to assist NHCOC towns as they pursue or explore Sustainable CT. Kelly-Anne expressed appreciation for the opportunity to work with the NHCOC this summer.

Request for Acceptance of “Regional Transportation Safety Plan for the Northwest Hills” as prepared by VN Engineers, Inc. under contract to ConnDOT. Rick Lynn explained that the purpose of the Safety Plan is to reduce injuries and fatalities in the region. ConnDOT is in the process of creating a new funding program for local road safety improvements and will be considering this recently completed plan. On a motion by Craig Nelson, seconded by Leo Paul, the plan was unanimously endorsed.

Administrative Items

- a. Approval of Minutes for Meeting of May 9, 2019 and Financial Statement for April 2019. On a motion by Craig Nelson, seconded by Leo Paul, these two items were unanimously approved.
- b. Election of NHCOC Officers and Executive Committee for FY 2019-2020.
On a motion by Henry Todd, seconded by Barbara Henry, the slate of officers was unanimously approved.
- c. Approval of Proposed NHCOC Budget for FY 2019-2020 as Endorsed by NHCOC Executive Committee. Don Stein noted that the recent health insurance change by Rick Lynn and Darlene Krukar has resulted in significant cost savings for the COG. On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Craig Nelson, the budget was unanimously approved.
- d. Request for Endorsement of NHCOC Work Plan for FY 2019-20.
On a motion by Don Stein, seconded by Craig Nelson, the proposed work plan was endorsed.
- e. ConnDOT Request for Endorsement of Amendment to Statewide Transportation Improvement Program Pertaining to 1) East Main Street Corridor Management Plan in Torrington, and 2) Load Ratings of Bridges as Required by FHWA. On a motion by Leo Paul, seconded by Craig Nelson, the request was unanimously endorsed.

Town by Town Issues and Updates by COG Members

Bob Valentine asked other NHCOC members about affordable housing initiatives in their town. Many COG members had comments about the challenge of pursuing affordable housing initiatives, but all agreed that the provision of affordable housing in the region is critical to maintain and augment the diversity of housing in the region. This is important not only to retain and attract young people to the region, but also to address the growing needs of the elderly .

Other comments included:

- Warren is looking for job descriptions for its land use department.
- The Morris Fire Company is celebrating its first birthday with a picnic.
- Cornwall will be having a presentation about broadband in July.
- Infinity Hall has a new owner. Also a 19-unit affordable housing development was recently approved in Norfolk.
- The North Canaan community hub recently opened. Also, there are currently two lawsuits related to planning and zoning issues in town.
- Salisbury has new sewer and transfer station projects underway.
- Work on the Naugatuck River Greenway is progressing, including some mixed use development on Franklin Street near the river.
- Concern was expressed about the impact on nearby wells from the heavy use of road deicing salt by the state.
- Bruce Adams deferred his time to Rufus de Rahm, who noted that House Bill 6939 allows for towns to identify cultural districts. He noted that the state allocates about \$0.42 per capita to towns for the arts while surrounding states allocate about \$2 per capita.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment. There was no other business raised and the meeting was adjourned at 12:17 p.m.