

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF September 26, 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
North Canaan, Charles Perotti	Salisbury, Curtis Rand
Warren, Craig Nelson	Washington, Mark Lyon
Winchester, Bob Geiger	

Others in Attendance:

State Representative Maria Horn; Ellen Graham, Sen. Blumenthal's office; Katherine Dube, COST; Steve Silver and Hedy Ayers, Eversource; Deb Aleksinas, LARC; Priscilla Pavel, Cornwall; April Chaplin, Kennedy Center; Bernie Harrington, LWV of Litchfield County; Gary Giordano, Winchester; Bruce Wittchen, CT OPM; Wiley Wood, Norfolk; Rufus deRham, NWC Arts Council; John Johnson, Kent Streetscape; Clay Cope, Regional Hospice and Palliative Care, Danbury; JoAnn Ryan, NWC Chamber of Commerce; Commissioner Giulietti, Dennis Solenski, Pam Succato, Maureen Lawrence, and Sara Radacs, ConnDOT; Kim Maxwell, NWConneCT; Dan Reese, CEDS Implementation Consultant; Owen Quinn and Christina Emery, United Way; Abe Hilding-Salorio, SustainableCT; Rista Malanca, Torrington Economic Development Director; Janell Mullen, Jocelyn Ayer, and Rick Lynn, NHCOG staff; Media Representatives

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment. Hedy Ayers announced an upcoming workshop for first responders and a small scale development conference focusing on mixed use development. JoAnn Ryan distributed a flyer on a presentation by Ken Gronbach that will focus on demographic changes. Clay Cope described the Regional Hospice and Palliative Care facility in Danbury and announced that a new office facility was being established in Washington in October. Bruce Adams requested that two items be added to the COG agenda under Administrative Items: 1) Appointment of Nominating Committee for vacant positions, and 2) consideration of a request from Wheels of Opportunity. On a motion duly made and seconded, the addition of these two items was unanimously approved.

Welcome to Janell Mullen, NHCOG's New Regional Planner. Bruce Adams introduced and welcomed Janell Mullen, the COG's new Regional Planner. He stated that Janell grew up in the area, graduated from HVRHS and UConn, has a Master's Degree in Planning from USC, and ten years of experience working as a professional planner.

Update by ConnDOT Commissioner Joseph Giulietti on Priority Transportation Issues and the Status of Roadway and Transit Improvements in the Northwest Hills Region. Commissioner Giulietti provided background information on himself and stated that budgeting for transportation maintenance and improvement is still a work in progress. A major concern is that 40% of the budget is being used for debt repayment. The Commissioner offered to attend future NHCOG meetings as budget issues and improvement priorities become better known.

Gordon Ridgway expressed concern about the limited funding provided each year for maintenance of the state highway network. He stated that the 30-year rotation now being followed, providing for work on only 3% of the state highways each year, is not prudent. He also expressed concern about the use of calcium and magnesium products by the state for deicing of roadways as they are rotting out cars and crumbling roads. The Commissioner responded that ConnDOT is working with UConn on utilizing the best science for

roadway deicing. Gordon also asked the Commissioner to look into the spraying of trees along the Housatonic railroad right-of-way as trees are being killed and are becoming hazardous when they fall.

Don Stein emphasized the importance of town-aid-road payments to the towns in a timely manner so that local roads can be maintained. Wade Cole expressed concern about wells being polluted along the state highway network in Hartland. Pam Sucato from ConnDOT suggested that a workshop may be appropriate in the region to discuss road deicing chemicals and application rates and best practices with local and state road crew representatives.

Bob Valentine expressed concern about the excessive and onerous paperwork involved with the Rural Collector Program. The Town of Goshen is currently in construction on a local roadway being funded under the Rural Collector program and the construction cost is probably double what the town could construct the project for using local funds. The Commissioner stated that the LOTCIP program is proving a good way to fund local projects and avoid all the requirements of federally funded projects. Rick Lynn stated that only six of the towns in the region now qualify for LOTCIP funding and a LOTCIP program for rural towns would be most welcome.

Dan Jerram requested that ConnDOT be more accommodating when it comes to the removal of farm signs from the state highway ROW as local farmers depend on these signs to stay in business.

Next Steps for Fiber-Optic Broadband Deployment in the Northwest Hills. Kim Maxwell, President of Northwest ConneCT showed PowerPoint slides to update COG members on fiber-optic development in the region. He stated that nearly half of the employees at Aetna now work at least some of the time at home. He stated that installing fiber optic broadband is the best short-term opportunity to attract young people to our region and facilitate economic prosperity. He commented that the State of Pennsylvania is planning to invest \$1 billion in the coming years to connect every home and business to broadband. The network we now have in the region is not very good and 35% of our region's residents do not have broadband. Our region will not qualify for federal grants for fiber-optic because cable TV is available in the region. Kim then summarized the work in progress in Norfolk and Falls Village.

Dan Reese, the COG's CEDS implementation consultant, is available to attend local meetings in COG towns to discuss broadband. Jocelyn Ayer encouraged member towns to take advantage of this opportunity as the RPIP grant is only available through December of this year to pay for such technical assistance. Dan Reese stated that fiber-optic should be thought of as the roads of the future as people will need this to work at home.

United Way Services in the Northwest Hills Region. Owen Quinn, Executive Director of the United Way of Northwest Connecticut distributed a flyer and summarized the major focus areas of the United Way in our area, which serves 26 towns. He encouraged town leaders to contribute to the United Way to sustain the important services provided by the United Way. Christina Emery commented on the importance of the United Way to Prime Time House as it helps to maintain their core services such as the wellness program.

SustainableCT Community Match Fund. Abe Hilding-Salorio, SustainableCT Community Outreach Manager, distributed a handout and summarized the new Community Match Fund that provides funding support for towns pursuing the implementation of SustainableCT actions. He stated that up to \$25,000 can be provided in matching funds for a new project that is being pursued as a SustainableCT initiative. SustainableCT is partnering with IOBY to facilitate community buy-in and participation in the project. Don Stein asked if an on-line campaign with IOBY is required to qualify for the funding and Abe stated that it is.

Summary and COG Ranking of Applications Submitted under ConnDOT's Transportation Alternatives

Program. Two applications were received for funding under ConnDOT's TAP program. A copy of each of the applications was distributed to COG members in advance of the meeting. Bruce Adams and John Johnson summarized the proposed Phase 2 Kent Streetscape Enhancement Project. Then Rista Malanca summarized the proposed Torrington Sue Grossman Still River Greenway Enhancement. Since ConnDOT requires that COGs rank the TAP applications from their region or the applications will be considered incomplete, COG members were asked to complete a paper ballot on their top choice. The ballots were subsequently collected and tallied by staff. Staff announced that the Kent project was ranked as the number one COG priority and the Torrington project was ranked as the number two priority. The NHCOG will request that both projects be funded by ConnDOT as they are both regionally significant.

Administrative Items On a motion duly made and seconded, the following items were unanimously approved: a) Minutes for Meeting of July 11, 2019, b) Financial Statements for June and July 2019; c) MOU for COG Collaboration on 2019 Homeland Security Grant Program.

Bruce Adams stated that since several members of the COG's Executive Committee are not running for re-election, he is re-appointing the COG's Nominating Committee to make recommendations on filling the unexpired terms. He appointed Craig Nelson (Chairman) and Tom McKeon and Bob Geiger to the Nominating Committee and requested that they report at the October 10th COG meeting.

Erin Kennedy distributed a handout and summarized the Wheels of Opportunity (WOO) initiative being pursued to enhance access to jobs and job training by low-income residents in the region. She asked if the NHCOG would be willing to serve as the fiscal agent for a grant application that they are developing that would provide funding for WOO to establish a 501(c)(3) organization. Following discussion, and on a motion by Don Stein and seconded by Henry Todd, the COG unanimously voted to serve as the fiscal agent for the grant application.

Town by Town Issues and Updates by COG Members. Due to time constraints, this agenda item was tabled.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment. There was no other business raised and the meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.