



## MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 9, 2020 MEETING

### Members in attendance:

Don Stein, (Chairman) Barkhamsted  
Tom McKeon, Colebrook  
Bob Valentine, Goshen  
Michael Criss, Harwinton  
Denise Raap, Litchfield  
Daniel Jerram, New Hartford  
Charlie Perotti, No. Canaan  
Curtis Rand, Salisbury  
Jim Brinton, Washington

Henry Todd, Canaan  
Gordon Ridgway, Cornwall  
Wade Cole, Hartland  
Jean Speck, Kent  
Tom Weik, Morris  
Matt Riiska, Norfolk  
Barbara Henry, Roxbury  
Elinor Carbone, Torrington Mayor  
Bob Geiger, Winchester Town Manager

### Others in attendance:

Dan Bolognani, Western New England Greenway Committee  
Dan McGuinness, Western New England Greenway Committee  
John Simoncelli, Greenwoods Counseling Referrals, Inc.  
Sara Toomey, Greenwoods Counseling Referrals, Inc.  
Janet Carlson, One Eleven Group  
Eric Epstein, LCD  
Jonathan Barbagallo, LCD  
Joe DeLong, CCM  
Rufus DeRham NWCT Arts Council  
Betsy Gara, CT Council of Small Towns,  
Kathryn Dube, CT Council of Small Towns  
Amy Tobin & Ann Green, Members of Goshen EDC  
Emily Armstrong, Representative for Congresswoman Hayes  
Ellen Graham, Representative for Senator Blumenthal  
Rick Lynn, Janell Mullen and Jocelyn Ayer, NHCOCG Staff  
Media Representatives

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment: The Chairman, Don Stein called the meeting to order at 10:01 am. Eric Epstein of Litchfield County Dispatch (LCD) noted that 19 of the 21 towns are currently served by the LCD and asked for volunteers from the NHCOCG Board to fill the four (4) open seats on the LCD Board of Directors. Jean Speck, Bob Geiger, Jim Brinton, Charlie Perotti and Dan Jerram volunteered to serve.

Hedy Ayers of Eversource announced a municipal webinar on sustainability which will take place on February 11<sup>th</sup> from 11:30-12:30 to talk about clean energy funding, Sustainable CT certification, and other sustainability initiatives. It is Eversource's goal to be carbon neutral by 2030.

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

Matthew Riiska talked about an ice event in town during which an active power line was down for about three (3) days. He was wondering if there is a way to get a faster response when lines are down. Other towns expressed similar concerns. Chairman Stein stated that a meeting will be scheduled with Eversource in February to address this.

Tom McKeon of Colebrook discussed the status of the wind turbine project where BNE Energy has brought a suit against Colebrook with respect to tax assessment.

Bob Geiger discussed the recent addition of Winchester into LCD. He mentioned that when Torrington and Winchester had their own dispatch, both towns were working on arcane equipment. He also commented on how Torrington and Winchester will share funds awarded through the Building Healthy Communities Program, which will foster regionalism and economic strategic partnerships.

Elinor Carbone elaborated on how the partnership of the two largest urban centers in the region under the Building Healthier Communities grant will benefit all towns in the region. There will be a marketing strategy component of this project.

Charlie Perotti announced that North Canaan hired an assessor this month. He is waiting for a judgment on the B. Metcalf Asphalt Plant. Zoning will soon be discussing boarding houses.

Henry Todd stated that Falls Village is selling the municipally run water company.. Jean Speck spoke about the opposition to the cell tower in Kent and public discussions to seek alternatives. The Schaghticoke tribe is seeking federal acknowledgement via the Department of Interior Board of Indian Appeals (IBIA). Additionally, the Town will be applying for a CDGB grant for affordable housing and is thinking through security and safety in its municipal buildings.

Denise Raap mentioned Litchfield became the 90<sup>th</sup> town to join Sustainable CT. They have a committee of nine (9) working on this. They have also established a facilities committee to discuss the municipal buildings in the town. They anticipate one of the school buildings being used alternatively. They are also considering a proposal to put solar onto school buildings.

Tom Weik discussed the state bridge project that opened about four (4) months late. They are working on a solar project at their transfer station.

Jim Brinton mentioned working on upgrades to the transfer station such as compactors.

Bob Valentine brought up the newly formed Economic Development Commission in Goshen. Goshen is working through their budget. They have partnered with Litchfield to bid for their health insurance. Region 6 is challenged this year as far as enrollment goes and budget.

Don Stein is working through a lawsuit regarding taxation on a solar field. They are working with Colebrook on this issue. He then spoke about insurance, mentioning that collaboration with other towns could keep costs low.

Barbara Henry spoke very positively of CIRMA's active shooter training and CIRMA will be offering cyber security training at the end of January.

Update on Western New England Greenway. Dan Bolognani of the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area opened by mentioning that the Heritage Area supports the Western New England Greenway (WNEG) project, which is a bikeway that connects Norwalk, CT to Montreal. Dan McGuinness then reviewed PowerPoint slides and spoke about the economics of bicycle tourism. He stated that bike routes bring visitors to the region and they spend money and support local businesses. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) designates official US Bicycle Routes (USBRs). The WNEG has been officially designated as USBR 7. He mentioned that area first selectmen, acting as the Local Transportation Authority, signed off on the designation. The Upper Housatonic Heritage Area has created maps of the route which can be found on the WNEG website. Their next steps will be to install signage throughout the region for the bike route.

Gordon Ridgway asked about amenities being included on the area maps, such as the Electric Bike Rental business in West Cornwall. Dan Bolognani responded that they are responsive to adding these in order to promote the bikeway. Jean Speck asked about the timing of the signage, which is dependent upon CTDOT.

Mental Healthcare Services in the Northwest Hills. John Simoncelli introduced himself as the executive director of Greenwoods. A core mission of his organization is referrals for mental health service. Their goal is to best match the client with a clinician. They have been adding to this mission in the region for about thirty (30) years. He stated that Litchfield County is diverse when it comes to income and health insurance. Accessing mental health services in the region can be very challenging. Recently, Greenwoods received its first state grant for community outreach and recovery. Sara Toomey is the new outreach coordinator.

Mr. Simoncelli then addressed the opioid epidemic in the region. There are about thirty (30) opioid overdoses a month in the Litchfield County area. Since July there have been about thirty (30) deaths caused by overdoses. It is a misconception that they mainly occur in Torrington and (Winsted) Winchester. Two-thirds of the deaths occur outside of these regional hubs. Most are acquiring drugs locally, using them, and dying within their home community. Through the Litchfield County Opioid Task Force, they are developing a communication strategy so that Greenwoods can help provide treatment. Greenwoods is looking for how they can partner with the small towns to improve the statistics in the small towns.

Jim Brinton stated that an e-blast to residents would be helpful, especially citing the local statistics. Barbara Henry stated that she is on the Prevention Counsel in Roxbury, Bridgewater, and Washington and she would like to distribute this new information in the area. Jean Speck spoke about registering with ODMAP through the Department of Public Health. Torrington is the only member town that is currently registered.

John Simoncelli talked about how a negative stigma is a challenging factor to overcome in the area. He mentioned that viewing the film "Uprooting Addiction, Healing from the Ground Up" could be very impactful.

Rufus DeRham mentioned that this film will be shown at the Five Senses Festival in Washington.

A Collective Campaign to Attract Families to the NW Corner of CT. Don Stein, NWCEDC Chair with Janet Carlson, One Eleven Group. Janet Carlson, of One Eleven Group, is working on a school marketing campaign. They started their work marketing Cornwall Consolidated School. One Eleven Group is currently working with Region 1 high school on a marketing campaign. Students can come out of state from MA or NY and pay \$7,000.00.

The firm is planning to launch an umbrella campaign to market the public high schools in the region. They are requesting a contribution to this effort from NHCOC of \$2,400.

Dan Jerram inquired about why they didn't request the funding directly from the schools. J. Carlson responded that they have approached the schools directly and many of them are contributing funding to this project. They hoped NHCOC would be open to a small contribution to this project to show the schools that they support the initiative to attract new families to the region.

Michael Criss expressed opposition to funding this initiative and suggested that investment in other considerations is more pressing such as jobs, transportation, and access to the schools.

Bob Valentine talked about the challenges of economic development in the area. He feels that funding this marketing project is in line with the mission of the NHCOC.

Don Stein added that if you bring families, you bring jobs, and you bring economic development.

Mayor Carbone asked about the basis for the target audience defined for this marketing effort. On a motion by Henry Todd, and duly seconded, the COG voted to contribute \$2400 from the contingency fund for the proposed project with Dan Jerram, Mike Criss, and Elinor Carbone opposing the motion.

NHCOG Sponsored Training Session on “Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace”. Janell Mullen stated that this training is now statutorily required for all town staff. There is an option to watch a two hour online video to fulfill this requirement but the training session offered in March will be more interactive. She mentioned that the CHRO (CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities) staff will be in attendance for two trainings in one day offered at Harwinton Town Hall on March 10. A flyer about this event was sent to the NHCOG Board. There are other opportunities for this training in the region. Barbara Henry mentioned CIRMA hosted one in Roxbury. Kent also hosted their own.

#### Administrative Items.

- a. Approval of Minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 12, 2019. On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes were unanimously approved.
- b. Approval of Financial Statement for 11/2019. On a motion duly made and seconded, the financial statement was unanimously approved. Bob Valentine stated that in the future the minutes should reflect the name of the person making and seconding the motions.
- c. Approval of Lease Extension for NHCOG Office. Rick Lynn requested authorization to extend the NHCOG lease agreement that includes a modest rent increase each year. Dan Jerram asked about the status of the drinking water quality, which has been high in Chloride for some time. Bob Valentine mentioned the Goshen Housing Trust’s option to purchase this property and how the well water issues would need to be addressed as part of that. Barbara Henry made a motion to make approval of the lease extension contingent upon the water system being repaired by July 1, 2020. Dan Jerram seconded and the motion unanimously passed.

Don Stein requested a motion to add another item to the agenda, a proposed Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) amendment pertaining to a bridge replacement project on Route 109 in the Town of Morris. Tom Weik expressed support for this STIP amendment. On a motion by Tom Weik and seconded by Henry Todd, the COG unanimously agreed to add this item to the agenda and subsequently voted unanimously to support the proposed STIP amendment.

#### Committee and Other Updates.

- a. Recycling Advisory Committee, Curtis Rand asked who was at the recent MIRA Board of Directors meeting and stated that if the presentation was missed it is located under Public Documents on [ctmira.org](http://ctmira.org). Don Stein added that the cost to rebuild the facility is \$330M. The air permit for the turbines expires in 2023. If there is no help from the state to finance this, the cost will go to the towns. Towns used to make money on recyclables but that is no longer the case.

There is a 6 month window for towns to commit to MIRA and if not the South Meadow Facility could be shut down. It is anticipated that tip fees could swell to \$145 per ton if the reconstruction takes place. There will be a non-binding document outlining the potential costs. If there are not enough commitments from towns, the facility will shut down and waste will need to be trucked out of state.

Gordon Ridgway asked for alternatives to be outlined. Don Stein suggested reaching out to MIRA in order to understand the regional alternatives.

Roundtable Discussion on the Upcoming Legislative Session with CCM Executive Director Joe DeLong. Joe DeLong stated that this legislative session will likely be dominated by the controversial

tolls issue and by the fact that it is an election year. J. DeLong mentioned that CCM is seeking increased predictability from the legislature which includes developing an on-time budget and the timely release of a bond package. This is important for fiscal stability, which cannot be accomplished in CT without pension reform. Recycling is another important legislative issue for CCM this session, as is special education reform.

Following further discussion, Rick Lynn stated that the COG's Annual Meeting with Area Legislators will be scheduled in the near future at EdAdvance based on the availability of area legislators.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment. Janell Mullen mentioned that a land use workshop with Attorney Mike Zizka is scheduled for February 4<sup>th</sup>. There was no other business raised and the meeting was adjourned at 12:17 p.m.