



MINUTES OF THE APRIL 9, 2020 NHCOCG ZOOM MEETING

DATE: Thursday, April 9, 2020

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

ACCESS: Zoom Meeting Platform (Meeting ID: 270 179 528 Password: 180644)

This virtual meeting did not entail screen sharing of documents. It featured a gallery view of attendees who had video capabilities along with audio. A recording of the meeting is available.

Members in Attendance:

Don Stein, Barkhamsted
Bob Valentine, Goshen
Charlie Perotti, North Canaan
Mike Criss, Harwinton
Gordan Ridgway, Cornwall
Tom Weik, Morris
Bob Geiger, Winchester Town Manager
Candy Perez, Winchester Mayor

Henry Todd, Canaan
Denise Raap, Litchfield
Curtis Rand, Salisbury
Barbara Henry, Roxbury
Jim Brinton, Washington
Timothy Angevine, Warren
Ted Shafer, Burlington
Magi Winslow, Hartland

Others in Attendance:

State Senator Kevin Witkos
U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal
Robert Rubbo, Torrington Area Health District
Dierdre DiCara, FISH
Jessica Kubicki, Supportive Housing Works
Rick Lynn, NHCOCG Director
Janell Mullen, NHCOCG

Jennifer Kertanis, Farmington Valley Health District
John Field, DEMHS Region 5 Coordinator
David Rich, Supportive Housing Works
Cathy Awwad, NRWIB
Jocelyn Ayer, NHCOCG
Darlene Krukar, NHCOCG

Opportunity for Public Comment. Don Stein, Chairman, confirmed a quorum was in attendance and called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM by asking for public comment. No one in the audience asked to speak. NHCOCG Staff, Janell Mullen, did inform all those attending the meeting that it was being recorded.

Update on the Coronavirus Situation

Hon. U. S. Senator Richard Blumenthal was introduced by Chairman Stein. Senator Blumenthal began with outlining the Emergency Relief Packages that have been approved by the legislature as a response to the Coronavirus pandemic. He mentioned the Dept of Treasury will be sending relief checks to individuals in the amount of \$1,200 to all residents as a "life line". He also spoke of the 350 billion dollar [Paycheck Protection Program](#), which is already over-subscribed in Connecticut. This relief effort is intended for small businesses and non-profits who keep people on their payrolls so that their short-term loans for staying afloat can be forgiven. There is also the Enhanced Unemployment Insurance Program which is a four-month program to bring employees up to equivalent of their full-pay if they are furloughed or laid-off.

Senator Blumenthal is aware of the challenges all across the state seeing high demands in food banks, homeless shelters, and in other services. He is doing what he can to keep the small businesses going and get money into people's pockets. He is aware that the government will need to do more.

Even with \$1.5M of federal assistance, Connecticut will be in a budget deficit this year. The Medical Marshal Plan is absolutely necessary, according to Senator Blumenthal, “until we turn the tide on this disease”. This funding is for hospitals and healthcare providers. It will help them, but it is not nearly enough as hospital profits are way down.

Senator Blumenthal mentioned that work is underway on a fourth Emergency Relief Plan, called Covid 4. He knows there are a lot of questions surrounding many of the relief packages. He advised us all to consider this as a “pause” and not to relax too early or become complacent. He does believe the social restraints that we have taken so far have been successful measures.

Bob Valentine asked a question about the duration of the Payroll Protection Program, asking if it was for eight (8) weeks specifically and if that was the cut-off. Sen. Blumenthal mentioned that the legislature is hoping to extend the program and is getting more clarification about the programs each day. He encourages people to reach out to him with questions.

Robert Rubbo and Leslie Polito, Torrington Area Health District and Jennifer Kertanis, Farmington Valley Health District

Robert Rubbo began mentioning that there are 186 cases, 11 deaths in the Torrington Area Health District (TAHD) service area, which represent 20 communities in NWCT. There are 20 hospitalizations in Litchfield County and several cases in long-term care facilities. The number of cases are probably much greater than the numbers being published as it is wide-spread in Connecticut and many are not being tested or reported. TAHD has been making contact with those who are testing positive.

Last night, a training took place for EMS providers (60 individuals attended) regarding infection control. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) continues to be distributed, but the supply is getting low. Various ESF-8 partners are being assisted with plan developments for Covid. TAHD is the MDA lead for Region 5, and they have been contacted by the State DPH and might be a distribution center for PPE as early as next week. They continue to provide the addresses of the Covid positive individuals to the Chief Elected Officials in each municipality.

Jennifer Kertanis then introduced the Farmington Valley Health District, which represents 4 NHCOC towns and 10 towns in total. Currently, in the area, there are 100 cases and 2 deaths. All positive cases are staying home, self-isolating, and getting support such as grocery deliveries, etc. FVHD is contact tracing and requiring those who have been in close contact with COVID positive individuals to self-quarantine.

Jennifer added that testing in CT is “exceedingly” problematic. She stressed the need to stay home and socially isolate. She feels the health districts have been as proactive as possible in dealing with this health crisis. Both TAHD and FVHD have been in touch with the businesses staying open and providing guidance to citizens within their communities.

Concerns exist for long-term care facilities as there are known positive cases in those facilities. Infection control amongst this very vulnerable population is of utmost importance. The health districts are working to prioritize the limited PPE supplies.

Chairman Stein asked the area health district representatives about residents’ request for a food truck in his community. Jennifer Kertanis said it can be done in a safe way but it is critically important for all of those involved to respect social distancing, wear masks, and other proper protective gear. If having a food truck in the community is about socializing, she does not encourage it.

Barbara Henry then commented that Roxbury has a food truck. She said that it has worked out really well and is as contactless as possible. She feels it is a service to the community. Barbara Henry then followed up with a question asking if the data is coming through fast enough. Robert Rubbo mentioned that cases are being counted but this data has a very significant lag time for release. The data sometimes doesn’t show up

for over a week. Jennifer Kertanis mentioned that there is usually a lag of at least four (4) days from when the specimen is collected from an individual to when it is tested in a lab.

Jim Brinton added that the communication chain from the CDC to the area health district and back to the municipality was quite cumbersome. He also mentioned a food and prescription medicine delivery service set up in Washington that has been very effective.

Bob Valentine commented that a letter from the Torrington Area Health District to a member of the Goshen community merely suggested that a COVID positive patient self-isolate. Bob felt that this letter was too soft and not as direct as it should be. Robert Rubbo added that it is logistically difficult to police those who have been ordered to self-quarantine as the health districts do not have enforcement mechanisms. Robert stated that when TAHD is speaking with patients directly, they are much more forceful.

Jennifer Kertanis added that a recent “game-changer” into the situation is pre-symptomatic transmission. She feels disease prevention by self-quarantining is not enough if just targeted to the cases that we know about. She stated that we never had enough tests in CT from the beginning and that all should be isolating and social distancing especially given the state’s testing shortages.

Curtis Rand asked about anti-body testing. He was wondering about when and how they would become available especially for the healthcare workers. Robert Rubbo believes that a study has commenced around this concept.

Selection of Vendor for Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days in 2020 and 2021, Curtis Rand, Chairman, Recycling Advisory Committee.

Curtis Rand mentioned that we are not wholly sure about the timing of group gatherings given the COVID situation and that this might affect the timing of the region’s Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days. Curtis also mentioned that due to the escalating costs of these events we need to encourage that the residents utilize less of these products. Rick Lynn reported that four (4) vendors responded to the COG’s RFP and the Recycling Advisory Committee discussed the proposals and is recommending the selection of the low bidder, CARE Environmental. Barbara Henry motioned that CARE be contracted with as our preferred vendor. Henry Todd seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Selection of Consultant for Update of Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan for 9 Towns in the Region.

Janell Mullen summarized that three (3) responses to the RFP had been received by the NHCOC. After a thorough staff review and a meeting of the selection committee via Zoom, the group decided that Milone and MacBroom was the most qualified and Milone and MacBroom have had experience in the area with respect to updating Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans.

Dan Jerram and Michael Criss asked why all the NHCOC towns were not included at this time. Rick Lynn indicated that the plans were previously prepared one-year apart when the NHCOC was split into the Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials and the Northwest Council of Governments. Rick suggested merging the plans onto the same timeline at some point. Daniel Jerram did mention that Milone and MacBroom tends to have high bidding prices. Don Stein added that the prices all came in within a few hundred dollars of each other. Henry Todd moved the selection of Milone and MacBroom as recommended. Barbara Henry seconded the motion. Dan Jerram and Michael Criss abstained. The motion passed.

Supporting Residents and Small Businesses during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Jocelyn Ayer updated the Board about what is being done to support businesses and residents during this difficult time. She has been working with local Economic Development Commissions (EDCs) to share best practices and coordinate efforts as much as possible. She mentioned that Evan Dobos has been working to create a new COVID-19 responsive features within the [Discover Litchfield Hills website](#)/Civic Lift Platform. The website has been re-configured to inform residents about local resources during this time--what businesses remain open, are open for curbside pick-up, and how to find local business offerings. Jocelyn

asked member-towns to assist us in getting the word out to local businesses to make sure that local businesses are listing themselves on the DiscoverLitchfieldHills.com. She intends the site to be a regional resource as a “one stop shop” for local services and businesses during the COVID crisis. She will send a follow-up email to the chief-elected officials.

Tom Weik asked about materials that can be disseminated to the small businesses at this time as he does not have all of the emails of local business owners. Jocelyn mentioned that she will send a flyer that he can distribute to his businesses.

Jocelyn then gave an update on the Northwest Connecticut [Regional Food Hub](#). The Food Hub is starting a new drive-thru farm share pick-up service to continue to support farms during this time when sales channels are limited. The Hub hopes to start this service at the end of April as a pilot program in Kent, Washington, and Litchfield. She will send out more information for the purpose of expanding the service into other area towns. Also, she is working with the Kent Food Bank who will be able to provide some farm shares to those who cannot afford them during this difficult time.

Unemployment Resources for Residents and Employers that have Immediate Job Openings.

Cathy Awwad of the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board (WIB) gave an update on unemployment services in the region. She remarked that her organization is assisting the Department of Labor by providing answers to commonly asked questions about filing for unemployment. 14,000 calls were answered for information in one day. Unemployment claims are abundant and the processing of claims will take a long time. Cathy mentioned that 5-6 weeks to get an unemployment check is a long time. She also mentioned that there are quite a few jobs available at this time and is working with getting those opportunities posted onto the Discover Litchfield Hills “Jobs Hub” page as well as on the WIB’s website. Cathy also mentioned the opportunity to get some individuals into new career pathways will need to be considered.

John Field, DEMHS Region 5 Coordinator Update on the COVID-19 response.

The State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) has had a full virtual activation. He mentioned that DEMHS is following the state response framework as much as possible. The Governor holds daily command calls to provide updates and bi-weekly municipal calls.

John mentioned that there are numerous initiatives underway and many moving parts in response to the COVID crisis. The National Guard has been engaged. Under the Public Assistance Act, there will be FEMA reimbursement opportunities as authorized by the President. At an applicant briefing, 189 participants showed interest in this funding within DEMHS Region 5. John emphasized keeping track of time, supplies, and efforts for reimbursement purposes.

From a regional level, the Emergency Support Plan has been activated and is working very well. John mentioned that calls take place daily regarding each Emergency Support Function (ESF). For example, the COG’s assisting ESF-1 have done a phenomenal job to coordinate transportation resources.

John said that PPE continues to be an issue on the forefront. The state has ordered a supply, but we are in competition for these items which are in short supply. They are prioritizing healthcare workers as having the highest priority for the PPE. Once the product is received, they do not want any of it sitting around. DEMHS will work with DPH to get supplies circulating.

John then discussed the “surge” concept. Finding and creating space in hospitals is an essential part of emergency relief. Field hospitals have and will be set up to be sure that hospital overflow can be supported. A big factor is staffing of the first responders. DEMHS is monitoring the staffing as well as making sure there are plans laid for the continuity of operations. Another priority of emergency relief is testing for first responders along with quarantine/isolation for first responders who have vulnerable family members at home.

Homeless decompression is another issue that DEHMS is trying to address. The homeless population is vulnerable, and with this issue comes many other issues. Hotels were opened in Waterbury and Danbury in an attempt to decompress the homeless population in the region. John applauded the efforts going on at the local level. Don Stein thanked John for the update and continuous information flow.

Update on Food Pantry and Shelter Services, FISH/ Friends in Service to Humanity.

Deirdre DiCara shared what is happening with the homeless and the hungry in the Northwest Corner. The FISH facility is located in Torrington, but she noted that the resource serves residents from every town in the region.

She mentioned that under normal circumstances, 35 homeless live in the shelter and there is space for 5 veterans. She mentioned that age 60+ homeless people were moved to a Marriot in Waterbury. The high-risk population was moved out of the dormitory style living as well. The dormitory for the remaining homeless population has been spaced out as much as possible with respect to social distancing.

Challenges with feeding the homeless has drastically grown in the midst of this crisis. The CT Food Bank, which is in Wallingford, is relied upon. It is really struggling. She has been told that she will be reimbursed for the funding of the security at the hotel and other unforeseen costs, but that is not in the budget for the FISH non-profit. She did note that she has applied for the SBA loan.

Update from David Rich of Supportive Housing Works.

David Rich mentioned that he would like to speak with the member-towns in more detail at another time about their needs relative to the homeless. He noted that homelessness is a regional problem that primarily shows up in larger towns, where there are services. David's colleague, Jessica Kubicki, Director of Programs at Supportive Housing Works commented on the decompression strategy. With the support of the Department of Housing, the initial step for the homeless population into motels was those greater than 60 years in age.

Shelters will now need to adequately address the CDC guidelines. This decompression strategy also alleviates the congregation that can occur in the small spaces of homeless shelters. Moving forward, they will continue to decompress the housing intended for the homeless. As more people are in need of shelter, they will be moved into the hotel to keep the community safe.

Administrative Items

a. Approval of Minutes for Meeting of March 12, 2020 (see Attachment A).

b. Approval of Financial Statement for February 2019 (see Attachment B).

Chairman Stein bundled Item A and B together.

Curtis Rand moved both items and Barbara Henry seconded. Both items passed unanimously.

c) Appointment of Nominating Committee for NHCOC Officers and Executive Committee for FY 2020-2021. Don Stein appointed Bob Geiger as the Chair with Curtis Rand and Gordon Ridgway also serving as members.

They will report out at the next meeting regarding their recommendations.

Chairman Stein then suggested that the members be polled in a written survey regarding the following questions: 1) What has each member-town done with regards to Town Hall restrictions?, 2) What is each town's approach to the tax deferral option?, and 3) What is each Town doing with respect to their budget?

Barbara Henry then requested a question be added about Emergency Management Directors: are they employees or contractors?

Rick Lynn stated that COG staff would follow-up with the requested survey.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment

There was no other business raised and the meeting was adjourned at 11:55 am.