

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF September 10, 2020

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Canaan, Henry Todd
Colebrook, Tom McKeon	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Goshen, Bob Valentine	Hartland, Magi Winslow
Harwinton, Michael Criss	Kent, Jean Speck
Litchfield, Denise Raap	Morris, Tom Weik
Norfolk, Matt Riiska	Salisbury, Curtis Rand
Torrington, Elinor Carbone	Washington, Jim Brinton
Warren, Tim Angevine	Winchester, Bob Geiger

Others in Attendance:

Steve Silver and Hedy Ayers, Eversource; Sara Radacsi, Garrett Eucalitto, Kimberly Lesay, Patrick Zapatka, and Kathryn Faraci, CTDOT; Wiley Wood; Kathryn Cannie; Kathryn Dube, COST; April Chaplin, Kennedy Center; Gertrude O'Sullivan; Anne Green; Rufus DeRham, Warner Theatre; Rick Lynn, Jocelyn Ayer, Janell Mullen, and Darlene Krukar, NHCOG staff; Media Representatives

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment. The meeting was called to order by Chairman, Don Stein at 10:02 am. Steve Silver of Eversource opened the public comment period by thanking the member towns for their patience during the recent storm that caused widespread damage in the region.

Introduction of Garrett Eucalitto, Deputy Commissioner, ConnDOT. In January, Garrett Eucalitto became the Deputy Commissioner. He has been visiting with the COGs across the state to provide a CTDOT update, specifically about the operations during the COVID pandemic and the impacts it has had on public transportation. At the start of the pandemic, traffic counts across the state dropped significantly. Many road projects have continued to be implemented. All public information meetings regarding projects have been virtual, which has been beneficial. Despite the reduced traffic on the roadway, fatalities are on track to hit a record level this year. Through the CARES package, the Federal Government did provide \$488M for public transportation relief which has helped to keep the transit districts funded so that they can continue operations. Bus ridership is at 75% pre-pandemic levels. Ridership on rail is minimal even intrastate rail is at very low volumes. Mask are required on public transportation. The Special Transportation Fund is operating at a loss with major reductions due to a decrease in gas tax, general sales tax, and new and used car taxes. Other than CARES funding for transit, CTDOT has not received other federal funding. The department will likely need to make difficult choices in the future. CTDOT is in the process of preparing its next 5-Year Capital Plan.

Magi Winslow followed up the Deputy Commissioner's presentation by asking about the use of salt on state roads. She mentioned it is a significant local problem particularly the pollution it causes to private wells. Kim Lesay spoke briefly about salt usage on state roads. She has been working with DPH and also the environmental compliance department to make sure that problem areas get addressed.

Chairman Stein mentioned that pre-treatment takes place well before storms actually hit. He was wondering why since this adds to the problem of excess salt. Kim Lesay responded that the goal of pre-treatment is to keep roads from icing up and that the timing depends on weather forecasts.

Regional Transportation Planning. Overview of Community Connectivity Grant Program (CCPG). Patrick Zapatka mentioned that the [Community Connectivity Grant Program](#)'s third round of funding was just released at the end of August. The CCGP provides construction funding for targeted small-scale

infrastructure improvements to enhance accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians. The primary goal is increased safety. \$5M was received for Round 3 and the selection process will be competitive. In order to be considered, municipalities that were previously awarded a grant under the program must have progressed with their projects past the point of submission of Final Design and issued a Notice to Proceed. Also, the proposal must facilitate social and economic opportunities to underserved communities, known to CTDOT as equity in transportation. Patrick mentioned that a brochure was included in the agenda packet.

Denise Rapp noted that Litchfield has an open project under this program and asked about her eligibility to apply for this third round of funding. Patrick noted that he did not think that project had gotten to the Final Design step, but he will verify.

Update on the Status of LOTCIP and Rural Collector Program Projects. Rick Lynn mentioned that in addition to Town Aid Road funding, two other sources of funding for local road improvement include LOTCIP for urban areas and the Rural Collector Program for rural areas. Six of the NHCOC member towns are eligible for LOTCIP while all the member towns are eligible for the Rural Collector Program. The agenda packet included a status report of the projects underway under both of these programs. Rick mentioned that the NHCOC has been advocating for the establishment of a rural LOTCIP program, that would be less onerous for towns to implement than the current Rural Collector Program. The COG is now accepting pre-applications for new Rural Collector projects.

Bob Valentine stated that his recent experience with the Rural Collector program was not good and he finds the program to be unnecessarily expensive, bureaucratic, and time-consuming. It is not a program he will pursue again without major changes to the program.

Introduction of Tim DiCarlo, Regional Election Officer for Team 5. Tim DiCarlo introduced himself as the temporary assistant to the Secretary of State's Office in the region to help prepare member-towns for the upcoming General Election. He serves the City of Waterbury as their full-time Registrar. He stated that the Secretary of State's office received \$5.5 M to oversee the 2020 elections. Secretary Merrill created 5 positions to oversee the elections. Litchfield County falls into Service Area 5. DiCarlo's role is to make sure that all towns have the proper supplies, provide answers for Towns when questions come up, and to best prepare towns for the elections. He mentioned that the primary in August was relatively smooth.

Chairman Stein asked Tim if he would be available for assistance on election day given that he is a full-time Registrar elsewhere. Tim is paired with Heather Augeri if anything needs to be done on the day of the election. Magi Winslow mentioned that Hartland moved the Primary Election to the school, but then was left with the trouble of sanitizing the school and having the town budget pay for it. She asked about the option for reimbursement for the town's expense. Tim said that it would not be possible for the Primary, but he will ask about reimbursement during the General Election. Magi Winslow then asked about why the communications from Denise Merrill make note of Russian interference. Tim mentioned that this was intended to be non-partisan but based on evidence about what has happened in the state. Jean Speck asked about the online tool for voters which would make sure that absentee ballots have been received. The Secretary of State, according to Tim, is currently working on needed revisions. He mentioned that it will be up and running in the next few weeks. This online tool is supposed to show voters if their mailed ballot has arrived. Chairman Stein asked how this would be publicized. Tim believes that the Town Clerks Association will be doing the outreach.

Overview of Municipal OPEB. Considerations by Public Agency Retirement Services (PARS). Kathryn Cannie gave an overview of Other than Pension Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB). Kathryn mentioned that agencies realized that long-term healthcare coverage was showing up as an unfunded liability on

retiree's financial statements. Municipalities and others decided that something needed to be done, such as pre-funding OPEB in order to set aside assets so that they immediately would off-set the liability. Trusts of OPEB funds can then be established to achieve a higher rate of return.

Chairman Stein mentioned that many small towns in the area do not have OPEB. He said that if towns are interested, they could reach out to Kathryn.

DEMHS Update and Status of Region 5 Long Term Recovery Committee. John Field, DEMHS 5 Coordinator, began by mentioning that Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDAs) are being reviewed by FEMA for Storms Isaias and Laura. The thresholds might not have been met for Laura in Litchfield County, but they were met for Isaias. John mentioned that cooperating with FEMA can be cumbersome at times. On the topic of COVID response, Gov. Lamont provided an extension of the Emergency Declaration until February 9, 2020. John also mentioned the school openings that are just occurring. He mentioned that this is a day-by-day situation that is being monitored by DEMHS. Points of Distribution (PODs) for PPE have been discontinued. DEMHS will fill emergency orders if commodities are needed at this time. The state is looking to increase its testing and contact tracing. Travel advisories in and out of the state remain in place. The Regional Coordination Center continues to look at the food distribution systems in partnership with the Department of Agriculture as well as congregate housing. On the long-term recovery front, Mary Glassman will serve as the Chair of the Long-Term Recovery (LTR) State Committee. Drought planning and school safety planning, such as fire drills, has also been a topic of discussion in addition to COVID-19.

Marty Connor, Chair of Emergency Service Function (ESF) 14-Long-Term Recovery, mentioned the regular meetings of the ESF-14 Steering Committee. He mentioned the breadth of members and the organization of the subcommittees. Rick Lynn added that the COGs are applying for funding in hopes of being able to increase capacity in order to help address unmet needs.

Chairman Stein asked John Field about FEMA reimbursement related to the storm. He mentioned that Barkhamsted was unsuccessful after spending a lot of time providing information related to the town's COVID response to FEMA. Many other towns have seen similar results. John Field mentioned that he would like to know if and when this may be happening with PDAs.

Magi Winslow asked about the Emergency Declaration date which was extended to February 9, 2021 by the Governor versus the Executive Orders regarding the opening of bars that may expire on November 9, 2020.

Bob Valentine added that the Town of Goshen received a rejection yesterday regarding COVID response reimbursement. It was communicated that sneeze guards would not be included in the reimbursable items.

Status of Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day for October 10<sup>th</sup>. Curtis Rand, the Chairman of Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC), mentioned that at the recent RAC meeting it was decided that the event should be held on October 10<sup>th</sup> in Torrington as planned. There is a demand in the region and few alternatives exist. Considerable thought was put into new protocols for the event given the COVID pandemic. Rick Lynn added that the vendor is receptive to changes to the contract and new rules will include additional safeguards for the volunteers and attendees. Tickets will be distributed to ensure that town residents are registering to participate. The RAC has requested that the NHCOC endorse moving forward with the HHW Collection Day. Bob Valentine made the motion. Henry Todd seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

Bob Valentine followed the vote by asking about the proper disposal of smoke detectors and if we could regionally coordinate a collection. Curtis Rand mentioned a call with DEEP regarding improved solid waste management.

NHCOG Action on Applications Received for Funding under ConnDOT's 5310 Program. Rick Lynn mentioned that CTDOT's 5310 Program is one of the major funding sources for transportation providers to acquire new vehicles. Four (4) applications were received this year from the Sullivan Senior Center, LARC, Winsted Senior Center, and GEER. The NHCOG also submitted applications for a van and operating assistance for the RITS program. A draft letter of support for all applications was provided in the agenda packet and approval of the letter is requested. Henry Todd moved to approve the letter of support in favor of all applications. Bob Valentine seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Overview and Request for Endorsement CEDS Consultant Contracts. Jocelyn Ayer referenced the memo in the meeting packet which detailed the request. Several funding sources support the implementation of our region's economic development strategy including EDA Partnership Planning Funding, EDA CARES Act funding, and Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board funding. She asked for endorsement from the Board to continue the work with the current consultants on broadband outreach, the NWCT Food Hub, the visitor guide, and the region's events, destinations, and jobs hub website. The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment funding will be focused on creating short videos showcasing young workers in the region. With the CARES Act funding from EDA, we are able to continue to invest in our CEDS initiatives in a more robust way. including direct outreach to small businesses, partnering with the NWCT Chamber, Arts Council, and the Entrepreneurial Center. Jocelyn anticipates a visitor guide will be printed in 2021. There were three motions made as follows: 1) To endorse the consultant agreements that will be funded through the EDA Partnership Planning grant as approved by the NWC EDC Board. 2) To approve the contract with the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board for \$10,000 in CEDS implementation funding as endorsed by the NWCT EDC. 3) To endorse the consultant selection process and consultant agreements as outlined in the memo dated August 27, 2020 that will be funded through the EDA CARES Act grant as approved by the NWCT EDC Board. Henry Todd made these motions. Tim Angevine seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Don Stein asked to add an item to the agenda under item (e). A Letter of Support for the Warner Theatre. Bob Valentine moved to add Item (e) to the agenda. Curtis Rand seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

#### Administrative Items

a) Approval of Minutes for July 9, 2020. Bob Valentine moved to approve the minutes of July 9, 2020, as written. Henry Todd seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b) Approval of Financial Statement for June and July 2020. Jim Brinton moved to approve the Financial Statements; Curtis Rand seconded its approval. Rick Lynn added that a balance of about \$42,000 will go into the COG's rainy-day fund from the FY 2019-20 budget. He also mentioned that \$120,000 more than what was conservatively anticipated in Regional Service Grant funding for FY 20-21 has been awarded to the NHCOG's The July Financial Statement reflects those additional funds being used to pay for a portion the new street sweeper for the Public Works Equipment Cooperative as well as the local match for the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan update. After Rick's explanation, the June and July financial statements were unanimously approved.

c) Approval of MOU for COG Collaboration on the 2020 Homeland Security Grant Program. Bob Geiger moved the approval of the MOU. Bob Valentine seconded it. Rick Lynn explained that it is a standard approval that allows the NHCOG to continue its cooperative agreement with WestCOG and Naugatuck Valley COG on the Homeland Security Grant Program for Region 5. The motion passed unanimously.

d) Approval of the Regional Service Grant Resolution.

Curtis Rand moved to approve the resolution. Bob Geiger seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

e) Letter of Support for the Warner Theatre during these difficult times. Rufus DeRham, Director of the Warner Theatre was introduced. Rufus mentioned that a cooperative with other major performance

venues has formed in reaction to COVID. He mentioned that he didn't think that the Warner Theatre would be able to provide performances until possibly Fall 2021. He mentioned the dire situation of the arts venue, which in turn, affects the recovery of the City of Torrington. The letter is asking for relief funding in the form of a grant or a loan.

Jean Speck moved to support the letter. Bob Valentine seconded the motion to endorse the letter of support. The motion passed unanimously.

#### Town by Town Update.

Chairman Stein began by mentioning that the Town Hall is still closed to the public. By the end of December, they will make a decision about re-opening to the public. He also mentioned a troubling situation regarding bear baiting, which is occurring right on the town line with Hartland. Henry Todd mentioned that there is an ordinance in the Town of Canaan that prohibits feeding bears. Magi Winslow of Hartland followed the update by adding that this particular person has been very troublesome in the town. She has gotten assistance from DEEP. Citations have been issued and fines have accumulated, and Magi is running out of options unless the Town decides to put a lien on his property. A meeting on September 23<sup>rd</sup> will address the outstanding fines and citations. Additionally, she added that buildings in Hartland are still closed to the public. The next Board of Selectmen meeting will be in the parking lot by request. The youth soccer program will start next week.

Henry Todd mentioned that the Town Hall is still closed to the public and meetings are being held outside.

Jean Speck of Kent mentioned that the public is pushing the Kent Town Hall to open, but there are still concerns as she follows the data and listens to the Governor. The CT Siting Council is in the process of considering a cell tower proposal in town.

Michael Criss of Harwinton mentioned that people are allowed in by appointment. They provide phone numbers of town staff at the front door of the Town Hall. He mentioned involvement in recent football related decisions.

Bob Valentine of Goshen mentioned that the Town Hall has been open since July 1. They provide hand sanitizers and masks. They have been able to conduct business. He wanted members to consider having the NHCOC write a letter to the Governor to ask for suspension of the in-person requirement for Town Meetings and a statutory change to enable this over the long term. He thinks COST and CMM will likely also push this request forward as well.

Henry Todd moved the request to prepare a letter on behalf of the NHCOC in support of the suspension of in-person meetings statutorily, especially for Town Meetings, Jean Speck seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Denise Raap of Litchfield followed by adding the Town Hall is still closed. There is an outdoor Town Meeting scheduled for the end of October. She mentioned an in-person Board of Selectmen Meeting scheduled for next week would be a hybrid virtual meeting. She mentioned she has noticed an increase in involvement given the virtual platform.

Tom Weik, Morris, mentioned that he is looking to convert a room in Town Hall into a "Zoom Room" since it seems like public participation has increased in town. He mentioned South Farms as a popular destination for outdoor events in town.

Matt Riiska, Norfolk, mentioned that recently a Letter of Intent for solar on their land fill was signed. He also mentioned the proposal for a 19-unit development.

Curtis Rand, Salisbury, added that the Town Hall continues to be closed to the public, despite some push back.

Tim Angevine, Warren, mentioned they are looking to fill a Tax Collector position. The Town Hall is still closed.

Jim Brinton, Washington, mentioned that he is getting a little bit of push back for keeping the Town Hall closed. His biggest concern is the issues that may arise with schools opening.

Bob Geiger, Winchester mentioned that the town is doing hybrid-Zoom meetings. The Hartford Hospital project is well underway, and they hope to open in January. They also have a current 10-acre solar project that did see some local resistance.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment. Chairman Stein adjourned the meeting at 11:55 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Janell M. Mullen  
NHCOC, Regional Planner