

MINUTES OF THE NHCOC ZOOM MEETING OF NOVEMBER 12, 2020

Members in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Burlington, Ted Shafer
Canaan, Henry Todd	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Goshen, Bob Valentine	Hartland, Magi Winslow
Harwinton, Michael Criss	Kent, Jean Speck
Litchfield, Denise Raap	New Hartford, Dan Jerram
Morris, Tom Weik	Norfolk, Matt Riiska
North Canaan, Charlie Perotti	Roxbury, Barbara Henry
Torrington, Elinor Carbone	Washington, Jim Brinton
Warren, Tim Angevine	Winchester, Bob Geiger

Others in Attendance:

Hedy Ayers and Steve Silver, Eversource; David Murphy, Milone & MacBroom; Rep. Maria Horn; Betsy Paynter; Sara Radacsi, CTDOT; April Chaplin, Kennedy Center; Gertrude O'Sullivan; Ellen Graham; Betsy Gara, COST; Darlene Brady; Rick Lynn, Jocelyn Ayer, Janell Mullen, and Darlene Krukar, NHCOC staff; Media Representatives

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Don Stein at 10:04 am. Hedy Ayers of Eversource gave an update on the COVID-19 payment program. The enrollment period has been extended to Feb 9th. Chairman Stein asked Steve and Hedy when Eversource management and operational personnel would be available to sit with the members of the NHCOC for a discussion of past issues with storms. The Chairman added that he was not sure why the PURA proceedings should interfere with scheduling such a meeting. Hedy responded that they would see if such a meeting can be scheduled in December or January. Dan Jerram asked if fees or interest rates can be applied during the 24-month term of the payment plans. Hedy mentioned that information is available on the website and that credit and billing agents can address individuals' questions about the program.

Update on Preparation of the NHCOC's Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan. Janell Mullen began the brief presentation regarding the regional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan update. She encouraged member towns to send interested individuals her way as there is a survey and an interactive Story Map so that interested individuals can provide feedback. David Murphy began with an overview of what has taken place in preparing for the rewrite thus far. The kick-off meeting was in July, Milone & MacBroom met one-on-one with the local coordinators, a workshop covering natural hazard risks took place in September, and a public meeting was held on November 5th. David mentioned that a mitigation workshop is scheduled on November 24th at 10 am. This workshop will cover mitigation actions. Most members responded to let David know they would be available at that date and time. There will be two (2) more public meetings to garner input for this project. David asked that member towns let him know if they submitted a letter to DEMHS regarding an intent to file an application this application cycle. Barbara Henry asked about the due date of the letter of intent, which was due at the end of October. Mike Criss mentioned that Harwinton is involved in submitting two BRIC grant applications this year. Janell added that she will keep an eye out for upcoming deadlines of application submittals for next year and will send out reminders for member-towns. Rick Lynn asked about the project deadline for the Natural Hazard Mitigation Update. Janell said she would get back to him on that.

Introduction of new Small Business Outreach Consultant. Jocelyn Ayer introduced Betsy Paynter by stating that she will be reaching out to assist small businesses in the NHCOC region over the next year and a half as a part of the CARES Act funding. Betsy mentioned that she has reached out initially to many of the First

Selectmen as well as business contacts. She is growing a database of updated contact information for small businesses in the area as a part of the outreach. Her background is in marketing and business development. She has been assisting small businesses through her work over the last 10 years and currently works part-time for the CT Small Business Development Center. At this time, Betsy is encouraging local businesses to market themselves online and noted the webinar on this topic happening next week. Chairman Stein added that they had a positive meeting with Betsy and the Barkhamsted Economic Development Commission. Jocelyn Ayer added that Betsy is coordinating with other CEDS consultants, such as Evan Dobos who is working on the Civic Lift website DiscoverLitchfieldHills.com. Betsy reminded members that Small Business Saturday is worth promoting during this time. Barbara Henry added that her businesses certainly could use some help right now.

Review and Discussion of Draft NHCOG Legislative Priorities for the 2021 Legislative Session. Mike Criss, Legislative Committee Chairman, mentioned that the committee recently met and drafted a list of legislative priorities for consideration by the NHCOG which was included in the agenda packet. Mike suggested that members contact Rick Lynn or him if they have items to add or any concerns. He added that the Legislative Committee is working with CCM and COST on these items. He noted that many of the proposed bills cover land-use and development concerns and right now the COG's Priority List does not include the proposals submitted under the [DesegregateCT](#) initiative. Chairman Stein asked Rep. Maria Horn about the timing of the legislators' committee assignments. Rep. Horn thought that it should be right around Thanksgiving given the critical issues at hand. Tim Angevine asked further about the omission of DesegregateCT. Mike responded by saying The Legislative Committee is waiting to see what is specifically proposed and how it is worded before developing any position statement. He believes it is important to retain the decision making authority of local land-use commissions. Rep. Maria Horn added that housing is a critical issue of concern throughout the state which is driving the DesegregateCT initiative. Betsy Gara, Council of Small Towns (COST), added that the proposal by DesegregateCT dictates land-use provisions state-wide regarding topics such as accessory apartments, cottage clusters, "middle housing" and encourages them to become "by right" uses. Betsy suggested, to echo Mike's comments, that towns should retain their local authority over land-use. She added that the central mission of the initiative is to overcome racial issues. Gordon Ridgway added that finding middle ground on this issue might be more constructive than just outwardly opposing the legislation. Gordon stressed that there is not a "one size fits all" solution to land-use and housing issues throughout the state. Rick Lynn added that the Legislative Committee will be looking for an endorsement of the priorities at the December Meeting. Curtis Rand added that he agrees with Gordon and suggests that the wording should include State proposed incentives to build affordable housing. Bob Valentine also agreed with that approach, suggesting that the NHCOG should acknowledge that here is a need for housing options, but the State should support local municipalities with incentives and/or funding for local housing corporations.

DEMHS Update and Status of Region 5 Long Term Recovery Committee. John Field, DEMHS Region 5 Coordinator, began his update on surge planning now that the case rates are climbing in the State. The Governor plans to have weekly municipal conference calls rather than bi-weekly. He mentioned that there is an initiative to increase testing especially in the Northwest Corner, which he referred to as a "testing desert". There is currently testing in Torrington at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital. John added that vaccination planning is also underway. The administration is identifying the "critical workforce" who would receive the vaccine first. The effective vaccine that is currently being testing is a two-step process and is cryogenic so there will need to be a lot of planning and logistic support involved with administering this vaccine. The "[Farms to Family Food Box](#)" Program is underway. The next phase involves local food pantries getting food. Food distributions programs are transitioning to winter operations. John Field added that non-COVID items include Web EOC training during Fridays at lunchtime. Drought planning is also underway. CT has a deficit of 12 inches of rain. As far as long-term recovery, he mentioned a meeting next week and that a standardized form is being developed to track unmet needs.

Bob Valentine asked about the number of hospitalizations. John Field said that the death rate does not seem as high as it was in the spring. Bob emphasized the need to plan on the municipal level.

Jean Speck added that she recently had a call with Nuvance and DPH who mentioned they were aware of the lack of testing in the region. The health organizations will try to set-up more testing sites. Jean added that the lines at Walgreens are long. She is starting to have a conversation about bringing testing to Kent. She stated her concern about systemic collapse of First Responders in the area given that the organizations are so small to begin with. She mentioned that all towns in the region are at a similar narrow margin and may need to depend on mutual aid if there is a small cluster outbreak of COVID-19. Jean finished by asking about the "vulnerable population" concept and how she can begin identifying those who fall into that category as she wishes to plan ahead for the time when there is a vaccination.

Gordon Ridgway thanked John Field for meeting with the local EMDs. He was curious about flexibility of statutory requirements if the numbers get worse and if there is some attrition on the local level.

Regional Transportation Planning.

a. Request for COG endorsement of Rural Collector Program Application: Reconstruction of West Chippens Hill Road, Burlington. Ted Shafer mentioned that this is one of the original roads in Burlington and the last time that anything major was done to the road was in the 1980s. Cardinal Engineering prepared the estimates for the work to be completed. Henry Todd moved to endorse the application. Bob Valentine seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Request for COG Endorsement of Rural Collector Program Application: Campville Road Reconstruction. Denise Raap stated the current condition of the road is substandard and creating safety concerns. Bob Valentine moved. Tom Weik seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

c. Request by ConnDOT for Endorsement of Proposed Amendment to Statewide Transportation Improvement Program Pertaining to 1) Replacement of Traffic Control Signals at Various Locations and Installation of a New Traffic Control Signal in Harwinton and 2) Adjustment of Funding Allocation to Rural Transit Assistance Program. Rick mentioned that he spoke with Mike Criss about the new signal in Harwinton and Mike does support the new traffic signal. Mike Criss moved. Henry Todd seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Administrative Items.

a) Approval of Minutes for October 8, 2020.

b) Approval of Financial Statement for Sept 2020.

c) Proposal for the Meeting Scheduled for 2021.

Mike Criss motioned to move all three items. Bob Valentine seconded them. Motion passed unanimously.

Town by Town Update.

Winchester- Bob Geiger added that the Town Hall will now be closed to the public due to the spike in positive Covid cases. The Senior Center remains closed, but schools are still open in town.

Washington- Jim Brinton stated that the main concern is that there are five (5) school campuses in Town. All but one of the schools have had a case. There are two cases in Washington at the moment.

Warren- Tim Angevine stated that Town Hall remains open to the public by appointment. He mentioned that many in Town do feel that the testing in the region is inadequate.

Torrington- Mayor Carbone mentioned that she is paying close attention to the number of beds available at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital. In positive news, the referendum for the High School did pass. She is re-

thinking how to bring holiday celebrations to Torrington this year. The Blue House Group is working with businesses in the City to re-identify how small businesses can rethink the business opportunities that they have. She is concerned about the homeless.

Salisbury- Curtis Rand mentioned land-use issues in Town including a proposed affordable housing project.

Roxbury- Barbara Henry asked other towns about what they are doing for the holidays. She also asked about how Commissions are handling Zoom meetings with regard to assigning accounts or purchasing licenses. Bob Valentine suggested that she shouldn't need more than two (2) accounts. Others chimed in about access and setting up meetings.

North Canaan- Charlie Perotti mentioned that the COVID cases have settled down in Town now. The pop-up testing clinic was very successful. There will be another testing site set up the day before Thanksgiving. According to Torrington Area Health, there are about six (6) cases in Town. A parade of lights will take place on November 29th, which will be strictly a drive-thru event.

Norfolk- Matt Riiska said that Public Works has taken extra precautions given the uptick in COVID cases. He stated that Norfolk has three (3) Zoom accounts and that works out well. He added that the Foundation for Norfolk Living is working on a big project for affordable housing, which is supported by Inland Wetlands and the Planning and Zoning Commission.

New Hartford- Dan Jerram is re-evaluating the functions of the Town Hall due to the uptick in COVID. He is concerned for the small newly opened small businesses. The "Light New Hartford" celebration will likely be cancelled in person and will be a virtual event. He is wrapping up a four (4)-year process of a water and sewer agreement with Aquarion. He is hoping for a January referendum.

Morris- Tom Weik mentioned that the election process went very well in Town, with an 89% voter turnout. They did receive a STEAP Grant to replace a retaining wall at the transfer station. Jocelyn will be hosting an affordable housing committee meeting this evening.

Litchfield- Denise Raap noted there have been 10 COVID cases in the last 10 days. She said she is dealing with speeding drivers in town and pedestrian vs. vehicular accidents in Town. The borough warden does not want gatherings on the Green for the tree lighting. There will be a small business Saturday promoting local shopping in the small businesses. An affordable housing project with eight (8) units is underway.

Kent- Jean Speck added that the Town Hall remains closed to the public. The details of the tree lighting are TBD. The Local Chamber of Commerce is doing a marketing push to shop local over the holidays.

Harwinton- Mike Criss mentioned that they received a STEAP Grant to refurbish the Veteran's Memorial. The two municipal buildings (library and the Town Hall) have been retrofitted with ADA accessible doors. He mentioned getting the Affordable Housing Plan subcommittee together for an upcoming meeting with the NHCOC. He mentioned that this year they will be doing a drive-thru lighting event for the holidays.

Hartland- Magi Winslow mentioned the Town Hall is closed to the public. Accessing land records for title searchers is the most difficult factor with a closed Town Hall. The schools are still fully functional. Holiday singing might need to take place virtually. They have three (3) Zoom accounts for the Town's various Boards and Commissions.

Goshen- Bob Valentine mentioned re-evaluating the fact that the Town Hall is open to the public. He did

share a positive experience with Charlotte Hungerford Hospital regarding the efficiency of getting a test. Goshen will be having a virtual/hybrid Town Meeting on Monday. They have invested in technology so that they have the ability to have this hybrid meeting. Bob has developed protocol for this hybrid meeting so that electors are the ones that are allowed in virtually so that they can take the poll (vote) at the meeting. Individuals that would like to come to the meeting without the right to vote will be able to phone in.

Cornwall- The solar-powered tree will be illuminated at Cornwall Bridge. Local businesses will also be encouraged to increase their illumination this year. There will be a virtual talent show the day after Thanksgiving to benefit the food pantry.

Canaan- Henry Todd noted that the affordable housing application before the P&Z passed with the help of Janell Mullen moderating. A gas station with a mini-mart will be opening in Town soon. The old Town Hall is being cleaned up. There is quite a bit of interest to use the building. Canaan has its first active COVID case in Town. It was the last Town in CT to have a case. Most Town Hall transactions are handled outside.

Burlington- Ted Shafer mentioned that Burlington had an uptick in cases within the age group of 40-56. It is now under control, but he expressed the importance of being vigilant. The Town Hall and library remains open by appointment. He did note there were some new business proposals in Town. He has yet to make a decision about the holiday gatherings.

Barkhamsted- The Town Hall will now be closed on Fridays. Town Hall will allow the public into the foyer, but not the offices of staff. He mentioned there have been about 10 cases in the past few weeks. He felt that a lot of the cases were workplace related. The Barkhamsted Housing Trust closed on a 99 acre parcel of property which is progressing towards redevelopment and affordable housing.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment.

Jocelyn Ayer added that Ben Paletsky sent around an announcement regarding a webinar at noon on Monday, Nov 16th – a case study of how Block Island has addressed and financed its need for fiber-to-the-home broadband

Chairman Stein moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:10 pm. Bob Valentine seconded it. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Janell M. Mullen
NHCOC, Regional Planner