

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL NHCOG MEETING by ZOOM of December 15, 2020

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Burlington, Ted Shafer
Canaan, Henry Todd	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Goshen, Bob Valentine	Hartland, Maggie Winslow
Harwinton, Michael Criss	Kent, Jean Speck
Litchfield, Denise Raap	Morris, Tom Weik
Norfolk, Matt Riiska	North Canaan, Charlie Perotti
Salisbury, Curtis Rand	Washington, Jim Brinton

Area Legislators in Attendance

Senator Craig Miner	Senator Henri Martin
Rep. John Piscopo	Rep. Maria Horn
Rep. Jay Case	Rep. David Wilson
Senator Kevin Witkos	

Others in Attendance:

JoAnn Ryan, Northwest CT Chamber of Commerce; Christina Emery, Chamber Government Relations Committee Chairman; Mike Muszynski, CCM; Janell Mullen, Jocelyn Ayer, and Rick Lynn, NHCOG staff; general public, and media representatives.

Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely by Zoom, was called to order by NHCOG Chairman Don Stein at 8:04 a.m.

Summary of NWC Chamber's 2018 Legislative Agenda. JoAnn Ryan and Christina Emery summarized the Chamber's Legislative Priorities for 2021. Copies of the Chamber's priorities will soon be available on the Chamber's website. Major priorities include 1) Support for pro-business policies, 2) promotion of coronavirus vaccine distribution, and 3) encouragement for out of state residents moving to CT.

Overview of NHCOG Legislative Priorities. Michael Criss, NHCOG Legislative Committee Chairman, summarized the written list of NHCOG Legislative Priorities for 2021 which were previously emailed to area legislators and are available on the COG's website.

Comments by Area Legislators on the Upcoming Session. Each legislator in attendance spoke about their outlook and priorities for the upcoming session.

Rep. Piscopo expressed concern about likely proposals for forced regionalization during the upcoming session. He also expressed skepticism about some of the proposals promising property tax relief. Rep. Wilson stated that some of the proposals by the Desegregate CT initiative are misguided, such as state over-ride of local zoning regulations. He mentioned two recent state financial accountability reports and stated he would email them to the COG for distribution to its membership.

Rep. Maria Horn commented that the legislature will be considering fewer bills this session than past sessions due to the need for remote participation because of Covid-19. She also stated that while the state financial outlook is not good, it is better than some earlier projections. Senator Witkos had to leave the meeting for another commitment and Tim Waldron from his office stated that the Senator will be serving on the Finance Committee and is available for consultation at any time.

Senator Martin commented on the State's budget crisis that is projected to have a deficit of \$900M this FY and a deficit of \$4.4 billion for the next biennium. He cautioned about using too much of the State's reserve fund of

\$3.1B to help balance the budget. Rep. Case stated he will be serving on the Aging Committee and anticipates a challenging year with remote participation in legislative matters. He expressed particular concern about limited opportunities for public comment on legislative proposals this session.

Senator Miner stated he will be serving on the Regulation Review Committee, the Appropriations Committee, and the Environment Committee. A major consideration this session will be spill regulations. Issues such as legacy oiling of driveways could potentially have a significant impact on homeowners depending on the regulations developed. He will be working on the MSW crisis in CT as a member of the Environment Committee. He also stated that consideration should be given to a tax on newcomers to the state with the recent real estate housing boom in order to improve the state revenue stream.

Question and Answer Period.

Bob Valentine stated that CT does not have a good track record in responding to economic downturns and asked how the legislature can balance the budget without raising taxes dramatically. He also asked if provisions for local official comments on proposed bills will be adequate. Rep. Horn stated that public comments by Zoom worked well for recent judiciary hearings and she is hopeful that it will work for the legislative session as well. Comments on proposed bills can still be submitted in writing for consideration.

Sen. Martin speculated that a state gas tax increase is likely to restore funding to the Special Transportation Fund. He expressed concern about cities like Hartford looking to surrounding towns to bail them out of financial difficulties, stating that towns need to fix themselves.

Sen. Miner suggested that the FHWA could be lobbied to see if federal funding for road improvements could be funded within available appropriations at 100% instead of 80% during the pandemic.

Barbara Henry inquired about CARES funding for towns and general comments followed. Mike Criss expressed concern about the Desegregate CT initiative and stated that we first need to make CT affordable with good jobs and improved accountability on state spending. While our region needs additional senior housing in particular, a 10% standard for affordable housing is unrealistic for rural towns without sewers and should be revised to 3-5%.

General discussion followed.

Adjournment.

Chairman Don Stein thanked all those in attendance at today's meeting and the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 a.m.