

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF DECEMBER 10, 2020

Members or Representatives 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	Morris, Tom Weik
New Hartford, Dan Jerram	Norfolk, Matt Riiska
North Canaan, Charlie Perotti	Roxbury, Barbara Henry
Torrington, Elinor Carbone	Washington, Jim Brinton
Warren, Tim Angevine	

Others in Attendance:

Aaron Budris, NVCOG; Betsy Gara, COST; Sara Radacsi, CTDOT; April Chaplin, Kennedy Center; Emily Olson; Zach McKeown, CCM; John Simoncelli, Greenwoods Counseling & Referrals; Ellen Graham; Darlene Brady; 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 10:04 am. John Simoncelli of [Greenwoods Counseling & Referrals](#) talked about the services his organization provides to Litchfield County. He mentioned that the pandemic has illuminated many struggles and stresses in the region. He encouraged the member-towns to think about a county-wide approach to tackle the mental health issues of our communities.

Outlook for Legislative Session. Betsy Gara, COST Executive Director, opened by stating that the legislative session will open on January 6th. The agenda for COST is very focused given the virtual format of the legislative session. She read the NHCOG's Legislative Priorities Memo and feels that COST is very much aligned with these priorities. She added that it will be interesting to see how some progressive ideas play out during this session. One of the top priorities for COST is economic recovery. She thinks it is essential that towns have predictable revenue streams. She touched upon property tax reforms, which will be a challenge for the state to approach. She also brought up "one touch-make ready" as a good approach to addressing broadband challenges in the area. Betsy also mentioned the affordable housing proposals such as Senator Anwar's Bill and [DeSegregate Connecticut's](#) initiative. She mentioned the prescriptive nature of some of the proposals and how this approach will be hard for rural towns due to various issues—she highlighted sewer and water capacity as a barrier to multi-family housing in small towns. Betsy suggested building upon what has been working such as Incentive Housing Zones. She mentioned that the state has not adequately funded these existing approaches. She also mentioned the proposals for mandated training for land-use commissions. At this point, there is general support for the proposal which requires four (4) hours of training for the members of boards. The state will be releasing its Affordable Housing Tool-kit in mid-December to showcase to towns the best practices that have been seen across the state. Betsy also touched upon regional school district's preference for a 3-5 year rolling average for assessment. She closed by summarizing various approaches to solid waste management such as Pay as you Throw and Extended Producer Responsibility.

Bob Valentine mentioned that the state needs to revisit the 10% provision of 8-30G. He does not think this threshold is practicable in small, rural towns. Betsy Gara mentioned that she agrees with his comment. The state should maybe relook at what it is considering as "affordable housing" by state definition.

Mike Criss added that larger lots are useful to protect watershed areas. He also added that the "one size

fits all” approach doesn’t fit our small towns. Betsy Gara suggested that if we can provide legislators with specific examples of our positions that could be of help.

Don Stein added that there are about 1,700 housing units in Barkhamsted. He doesn’t think it is practical for the town to establish a goal of building 170 new units to achieve a 10% housing affordability goal. He doesn’t believe the demand is there.

Bob Geiger commented that Torrington and Winsted have succeeded in meeting and exceeding the 10% threshold for affordable housing.

Dan Jerram mentioned that the state has the data on building permits. There have been about 8 new housing units in New Hartford during the last decade. He feels there is no demand for new construction. He thinks it is important that the state look at that data.

Denise Raap stressed that not having mass transit makes this area inaccessible for some.

Rick Lynn asked Betsy how the virtual format will affect the nature of the legislative session. Betsy Gara mentioned that it will be difficult for municipal officials to testify since the hearings jump from topic to topic. She added that submitting written comments can still be done and is important to the legislative process.

Zach McKeown, of [Connecticut Conference of Municipalities](#), added that big subject issues during this legislative session may include: Desegregate CT, legalizing marijuana, and sports betting. CCM will be sending out their legislative agenda next week. He emphasized that CCM priorities follow the direction of their membership.

Brian O’Connor of CCM followed by mentioning that the underlying costs of various proposals have not been fully hashed out. He thinks that will be an important consideration for towns on many of the proposals this legislative session. He is hoping there will be a notification system for the legislative public hearings so that officials can actively participate.

Chairman Don Stein commented that the extensive amount of regional collaboration in the Northwest Hills is not always recognized by the state.

Report of NHCOC’s Legislative Committee. Mike Criss, Chair of the Legislative Committee, mentioned that he will be tracking bills and getting information to the member-towns. He mentioned a few concerns with the draft of CCM’s legislative agenda since it does not recognize the service sharing that is already occurring in the Northwest Hills region. He added that additional initiatives towards regionalization and shared services should be based on voluntary municipal participation. He encouraged all COG members to attend the NHCOC Meeting with Area Legislators scheduled for Tuesday, December 15th at 8 am via Zoom.

Rick Lynn mentioned that the only change to the earlier draft of the NHCOC Legislative Priorities for 2021 is support for “one touch, make ready”. Chairman Stein explained that this legislation would enable vendors stringing fiber optics on poles to move non-hazardous wires from other vendors on the poles. Henry Todd added that this is supported by NWConneCT and will save hundreds of thousands of dollars and a significant amount of time.

Henry Todd moved to endorse the NHCOC’s Legislative Agenda. Denise Raap seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Request for Endorsement of “Naugatuck River Greenway Trail Thomaston to Torrington Routing Feasibility Study. Rista Malanca, the co-chair of the Naugatuck River Greenway Trail Steering Committee, opened the presentation by stating that the 44 mile Naugatuck River Greenway will move through three (3) Towns in the NHCOC region—Harwinton, Torrington, and Litchfield. Rista noted that a challenging part of the study was connecting Torrington to the Thomaston section of the Greenway. Aaron Budris, who coordinated this study for the NVCOG with funding from OPM, stated that BSC Group was hired as a consultant to study the routing of the trail. Aaron noted that there was initially a lot of opposition to the proposed trail by an OHV (off-highway vehicle) group that was concerned about adverse impact to their motorized use of the trail. Their concerns were considered in detail by the study committee and, at the end of the process, there was general consensus about the preferred routing of the trail. Aaron then summarized and presented a slide deck of the proposed route through Harwinton and Litchfield. Mike Criss moved, and Dan Jerram seconded a resolution that was included in the COG agenda packet to endorse the Naugatuck River Greenway Trail Routing Feasibility Study. The motion passed unanimously.

DEMHS Update and Status of Region 5 Long Term Recovery Committee. John Field, DEMHS Region 5 Coordinator, began his update by mentioning that many new Executive Orders (EO) have come out of the Governor’s office. One recent EO addressed the distribution of the vaccines. The Governor is still holding his bi-weekly municipal conference calls. There is an initiative to increase testing in the Northwest corner of Connecticut. John mentioned a potential new pop-up testing site in Kent and priority testing for first responders. He mentioned that vaccine planning will be on-going. The first to be vaccinated in Category 1A are healthcare workers who are exposed to COVID on a regular basis. Unfortunately, there are not enough vaccines to cover everybody immediately, so a priority list has been established. The first vaccines will arrive in the state on December 14th. He added that Region 5 continues to work on long-term recovery and an unmet needs form has been developed. The EDA funding for COGs involvement with long-term recovery planning was denied. He mentioned that major discussions about how to move forward in 2021 are taking place. He also noted that food received in-state from federal programs has drastically been reduced. John concluded by mentioning that we are still waiting on federal sign-off for Storm Isias reimbursement.

Don Stein added that more information and the tentative schedule for vaccination is forthcoming.

Denise Raap mentioned that workplaces were being polled to better understand the proportion of the population interested in getting the vaccine. She mentioned that messaging around the vaccine will be very important. John Field added that the messaging around testing is equally important.

Bob Valentine asked John Field to put into perspective what is coming our way regarding vaccines and actual numbers. He wants to be able to field questions that he is getting. John Field stated that Pfizer will be the first product received. 31,000 doses are expected to arrive into the state during the first week of its release. He added that there are a lot of challenges due to the two-shot requirement, the refrigeration component of its storage, and other factors. Bob asked about when municipal EMS staff might be able to receive a vaccine. John added that they are a part of Group 1A. DEMHS has been working with the Department of Public Health and local health districts to identify “first-responders” and to better define the term.

Barbara Henry asked about public works employees. John Field mentioned that they would be in Group 1B, which is the second group of those getting inoculated. Henry asked about the police. Field said those responding to calls would be in Group 1A. John Field added that he would try to find a flow chart of the vaccination scheduling to send out to the group. Barbara finished by asking where one could go to get tested as all of the testing centers seem to be packed. John agreed that they are all packed at this time.

Jean Speck added that there will be a testing site in Kent weekly on Mondays from 3-7 pm.

Update on Town Affordable Housing Plans. Jocelyn Ayer began her presentation by mentioning that the NHTCOG is currently working with nine (9) towns on Affordable Housing Plans which have been funded by planning grants through the Department of Housing (DOH). As Betsy Gara mentioned in her legislative update, all towns will need an affordable housing plan by July 2022. Ayer mentioned that the [Partnership for Strong Communities](#) has updated their housing data profiles and the NHTCOG is working with the towns to analyze this data for use in municipal housing plans. She noted that as a part of this effort we have collected waiting list information from the towns that are a part of the [Regional Housing Council](#) to better understand the demand for affordable housing. As of October 2020, there were 508 households on these waiting lists. She also mentioned the Fair Share Housing Assessment which establishes a baseline need of 3,400 units of affordable housing for the NHTCOG region and then introduces a methodology for allocating these units to specific towns based on their comparative capacity to accommodate them. She also mentioned the [Opportunity Map](#) that DOH may use to make funding decisions and the funding needs pipeline for affordable housing projects in our region which can be used to advocate for adequate state funding resources to address housing needs.. If other towns are interested in assistance with their housing plans they can contact Jocelyn.

Administrative Items.

- a) Approval of Minutes for November 12, 2020. Bob Valentine moved to approve the minutes of November 12, 2020 as written. Henry Todd seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
- b) Approval of Financial Statement for October 2020. Bob Valentine moved and Henry Todd seconded the approval. The motion passed unanimously.
- c) Acceptance of the Audit for FY 2019-2020. Bob Valentine moved and Dan Jerram seconded the motion. Rick Lynn added there was a savings as a result of lower medical insurance and travel costs in FY 2019-20. The motion passed unanimously.

Town by Town Update.

The Chair suggested that since it was past 12 pm he would not move through town-by-town updates. Mike Criss moved to adjourn the meeting. Henry Todd seconded the motion to adjourn.

Jean Speck added that COVID testing information from Kent would be disbursed through the NHTCOG.

Bob Valentine added that he would be happy to assist member-towns regarding successful hybrid town meetings.

Ted Shafer added that he would be happy to talk with any member-town about the Sustainable CT program.

Dan Jerram added that the sale of the water company to Aquarion is moving forward.

Bob Valentine added that Bob Geiger will be stepping down from his position as town manager soon. All members expressed their appreciation to Bob for his cooperation and guidance.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment. Chairman Stein adjourned the meeting at 12:14 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Janell M. Mullen, NHTCOG, Regional Planner