

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF March 11, 2021

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
Salisbury, Curtis Rand	Washington, Jim Brinton

Others in Attendance:

Donna Hamzy Carroccia, CCM Advocacy Manager; Hedy Ayers & Steve Silver, Eversource; John Simoncelli, Greenwoods; Mary McCarthy and Theresa Schwartz, UCONN T2; Robert Kenny, DEMHS Region 1; Nick Zuba & Emily Basham, CT Green Bank; Rep. David Wilson, Jennine Rep. Jahana Hayes, Priscilla Pavel, Peter Ludwig, Rick Lynn, Jocelyn Ayer, Janell Mullen, and Darlene Krukar, NHCOG staff; Media Representatives

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment. Chairman Stein called the meeting to order at 10:02 am. John Simoncelli of Greenwoods Counseling briefed the NHCOG members on the uptick in overdoses in the region. Hedy Ayers, Eversource, stated that EOCs could include vaccine centers as critical facilities. She also mentioned utility service resources, such as payment plan options, for residents during this COVID pandemic period.

CCM Consensus Items on DesegregateCT Initiative. Donna Hamzy, CCM Advocacy Director discussed the Conference of Connecticut Municipalities (CCM) working group's position on several items within Senate Bill 1024. Donna gave a comprehensive overview of CCM's positions on [DesegregateCT](#) advocates' items, which include the following:

Change the term commercial corridor to main street corridor - many small towns do not have large commercial zones within their communities and/or they are not close to public transit or have the option of enhancing walkability. These communities only really have TOD friendly developable land around main streets where much of the walkable development is viable.

Remove the cap on consulting fees - small towns do not have professional staff to review project designs and assess the impacts and mid-sized communities who may have staff on hand, need further investigation done on things like environmental impacts, etc.

Remove of the word "character" - CCM replaced the word character with **"physical site characteristics and architectural context."** There was consensus that the word "character," while just a word, has historical racially segregating context in the state. The language that replaced "character" still allows the town to ensure aesthetic conformity within development, including preservation of historical characteristics, without referring to this as preserving "character."

Traffic standard changes related to developmental impact - Currently level of service traffic is used, this proposes to shift the state to a vehicle miles traveled and vehicle trips generated. The rationale given for this change by Desegregate CT during discussions was that the current standard perpetuates the need for road expansion and sprawl because it focuses on the estimated amount of traffic created by the development to ensure the ease of traffic flow, hence encouraging road expansion. The vehicle miles traveled or vehicle trips generated standard identifies the anticipated traffic impacts of a development and provides for potential mitigation strategies to reduce such traffic as part of the project. Such mitigation strategies offered by the bill are for example - allowing towns to require sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, bike racks, bus stop

shelters, reducing required parking, etc. It was also the will of the working group to encourage DOT to adopt such traffic standard changes, to ensure that municipalities with intersecting state roads could uniformly apply these new standards throughout their community.

Minimum parking standards – The group advocated for a minimum standard with a maximum allowable parking standard for dwelling units, and multi-family, mixed use developments. The standard is a minimum, that may not exceed parking in excess of one parking space for each studio or one-bedroom dwelling unit and two parking spaces for each dwelling unit with two or more bedrooms.

Regulation of Signs - While not something discussed during the working group meetings, this section **removes the word “advertising” from CGS 8-2**. This proposal is one that has been in CCM’s program for a couple of years now provided there are many towns that have sign ordinances that are now unenforceable. A suggested legislative remedy by municipal attorneys is to simply remove the word “advertising” in 8-2. This would essentially allow the statute to be read and interpreted as the town can regulate any sign.

Suit against a municipality not in compliance - The working group agreed to **add the word, “aggrieved”** to the section related to parties bringing suit on a municipality they claim is not in compliance with zoning laws in the state. This section previously suggested that “any” person could bring suit against a municipality alleging such municipality is not compliant with the zoning laws of the state. The working group felt that this language was too broad and agreed that the person bringing suit should at least need to prove standing before the court to bring such action.

Accessory dwelling units (ADU) – The working group agreed on the allowance for at least one ADU, as-of-right, on each single-family lot.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) –This section seeks to bring housing, as of right, with four or more units to 50% of the lot area within 1/2 mile of a fixed transit station. The language in this section, based on working group agreement, encourages TOD while also providing considerations for towns where there are multiple train stations and in some cases stations that span across town lines into neighboring communities.

Training for Commission members- CCM is not advocating for adding a training element as a requirement for Commission members.

Chairman Stein asked if part of this initiative would take the local control of the Planning and Zoning Commissions out of the equation. He stated that was a major concern of many towns at the meeting.

Donna Hamzy stated that the approach of CCM was to work with DesegregateCT advocates to reach consensus.

Barbara Henry added that many members of regional towns already attend training that the NHCOCG, led by Jocelyn Ayer, provides. Donna Hamzy stated that she did not know that this was happening already in our region. Barbara asked how far along the bill is. Donna replied that the bill is heard on Monday, March 15th.

Michael Criss added that he is disappointed that CCM is advocating for many elements within the DeSegregateCT Bill (aka SB 1042). He doesn’t feel comfortable with this “one size fits all approach” and feels that many of the proposals are not appropriate for our communities. He noted that we don’t have mass transit, city sewer or city water. Mike strongly urged CCM to support bills that allow municipalities to hold on to local control. He also mentioned he opposes encouraging accessory dwelling units to be allowed on every lot as of right.

In response, Donna Hamzy asked where the loss of local control is perceived in this Bill? She mentioned that she was asking this question in order to educate herself and not to be antagonist, but she wanted to better understand the situation.

Michael Criss responded by noting that requiring training for local municipalities would be an unfunded mandate. Criss added that forcing towns to adapt their zoning regulations with specific language prescribed by the state is not preferred and represents a significant loss of local control.

Dan Jerram added that MS-4 regulations were just the beginning of the loss of local control. He added that New Hartford is supporting much of the drinking water supply for the City of Hartford. He added that complying with the MS-4 regulations are expensive and the work involved is onerous. He believes municipal aid and educational funding needs to be restored within our small towns within the state. He added that data shows that there is no demand for new construction within our corner of CT. He added that many pieces of this puzzle do not work financially for the small towns within the NHCOC region.

Donna added CCM has suggested that stormwater authorities can get established within local towns to offset the cost of MS-4. Dan Jerram responded that he is not in favor of raising local taxes to address state and federal issues.

Gordon Ridgway added that a long-term consideration is that the state of Connecticut is so varied. Housing needs and strategies will vary from town to town. In Litchfield County, many adult-age children are still living with their parents and there is a need for more housing options in the region.

Overview of CT Greenbank Programs with Focus on New SolarMAP Program. Emily Basham, Senior Manager of Development at [CT Green Bank](#), began her presentation by giving an overview of her organization, CT Green Bank. It is the nation's first Green Bank, and was established by state legislation in 2011 to confront climate change and encourage a greener economy. CT Green Bank partners with municipalities to offer financing for clean energy projects such as solar incentive programs and solar power purchase agreements (PPA).

Emily mentioned that CT Green Bank partners with [Sustainable CT](#) in order to increase the impact of green initiatives. She stated that CT Green Bank provides funding through Sustainable CT's match fund to support municipalities' efforts towards sustainability.

Emily then described the program which assists municipalities with solar projects on town-owned property. CT Green Bank can assist towns with securing solar incentives as well as securing a construction partner. Their organization through a PPA provides the financing for these projects. In essence, CT Green Bank owns the solar facility, but the town gets access to electricity that is generated at a lower price. CT Green Bank is responsible for operations and maintenance for the duration of the life of the solar PV system. The first round of this program was deployed last year. All projects within the state are bundled and bid at once so that they can achieve really competitive pricing. Sharon, Washington, and Kent are currently considering being a part of Round 2 of the PPA Program.

Emily's colleague, Nick Zuba of CT Green Bank, followed by giving an overview of the [C-Pace financing program](#), which is open to all towns in Connecticut if their legislative body has opted into the program, and from there the Chief Elected Official can sign a municipal agreement with CT Green Bank. The goal of the program is to make privately owned buildings and new construction projects more energy efficient, which helps to reduce the costs incurred by property owners. Some green upgrades could include better lighting choices, heating, and alternative energy sources. The way this project works is that Green Bank CT finances the project up-front and then the investment cost gets paid back over time during tax collection. Eventually, CT Green Bank will take over its own billing rather than through the tax collection mechanism. Currently, this program has financed more than 332 projects and has financed more than \$185 million dollars in these various projects. Nick displayed a map of CT that indicated what towns in the Northwest

Corner have not yet opted into the program.

Barbara Henry asked about how non-profits, such as churches, pay into this program during the tax collection period given that they don't pay property taxes in municipalities. She also mentioned that Roxbury opted into the program years ago and was curious if their enrollment in the program went away? Nick assured her that Roxbury is still in the program.

Bob Valentine asked a clarifying question about the legislative body. He added that the vast majority of the municipalities in the NHCOC region are statutory municipalities. Nick added that the statute specifies that opting into the program has to be done through the legislative body.

Use of CGA Bill Tracking to Monitor Bills of Municipal Interest. Janell Mullen, NHCOC Regional Planner, gave an overview of how municipalities can track legislative bills via the Connecticut General Assembly website (cga.ct.gov). One can select what bills they wish to track by searching by its catalogued number or keyword, compile a list of tracked bills, and then opt-in to email updates. Janell shared her screen to display what a legislative report that gets emailed looks like. Jean Speck mentioned that she has been using this online tool for many years.

Update by UCONN T2 Center- New Registration System for Signing up for Training and New Traffic Signal Technician Certificate. Theresa Schwartz, T2 Center, wanted to share some updates about how their organization is assisting the Connecticut transportation community. The T2 Center provides services for traffic engineers, public works specialists, and other various transportation related positions. They offer training in transportation signals, leadership, technical assistance, as well as offer other special programs such as safety training.

Mary McCarthy, also of the T2 Center, shared her screen to display the recently updated [T2 UConn Website](#) which houses the training opportunities. She walked through the various events that the T2 Center is hosting in the upcoming months and advised all municipal leaders to sign-up for an account through their interactive website.

Barbara Henry asked about getting a traffic counter soon. Mary mentioned that they will email her for this equipment loan.

Committee Updates

- a) Legislative Committee. Michael Criss, Chairman of the NHCOC Legislative Committee provided a thorough update by running through a list of bills he is currently tracking on behalf of the NHCOC. Mike highlighted a few topics within House Bills that he feels are important. He mentioned DesegregateCT, three education bills (one including SB-886), minimum budget requirements, blighted properties, rental allowances for BOE employees, and the municipal tax bill. Michael added that many aspects of the bills that take away local control are areas of concern. Many bills will be heard on Monday, March 15.

Rep. David Wilson added that all municipalities should be paying attention to the Senate Bill 1024 especially with respect to the unintended consequences that may result from it. He also wanted to mention SB-956 & SB 949.

- b) DEMHS Region 5. Bob Kenny, Region 1 Coordinator is filling in for John Field during his medical leave. Bob started by mentioning that we are still under the operation COVID-19 pandemic response, having just passed the one year mark of the pandemic. This is the longest running emergency response in the State of Connecticut. He added that we will start to see an expansion of

the vaccination response within the state in the coming weeks. DEMHS is working with FEMA to develop a fixed vaccination site in the city of Bridgeport. There is also a request for two (2) mobile vaccination sites. The state has yet to identify those sites. DEMHS is also working with CTDOT regarding getting the transportation services needed to get people to vaccination sites. They are also simultaneously working on long-term recovery.

Dan Jerram asked if the request for reimbursement (preliminary application) due to Storm Isias is due tomorrow. Bob affirmed that it is and that he is aware that not all towns are reporting damage from that storm in which case there would be no need for a town to submit an application. Don Stein stated that Barkhamsted is one of those towns that did not experience damage.

Administrative Items.

a) Approval of Minutes for February 14, 2021.

b) Approval of Financial Statement for January 2021.

These two motions were bundled together and polled electronically. Charlie Perotti moved and Denise Raap seconded the approval of both items. The motion passed unanimously.

c) Approval of Equipment Cooperative Rental Rates for 2021. Rick Lynn stated that the proposed rates have been endorsed by the NH Road Supervisor Association and have not changed from last year. Dan Jerram moved and Henry Todd seconded the motion to approve. The motion passed unanimously.

Town by Town Update.

Dan Jerram mentioned a letter that he received from Congressman Larson regarding the “rescue plan” money that may come from the state.

Don Stein added there was a lengthy discussion on this topic during the Governor’s phone call yesterday. It is his understanding that the ground rules for how this funding can be spent are not clear at the moment. He did note that schools will be receiving their own allocation.

Bob Geiger added that he is not accounting for any of this anticipated money in next year’s budget. Denise Raap stated she is also taking this approach.

Bob Valentine asked if they could take a few moments to talk about the Regional Animal Control Facility. Rick Lynn provided background information on this proposed facility which has been a regional priority for many years. The project went out to bid last year, but the prices that came back were about double of what was anticipated. The City of Torrington wants to go out to bid again, but the project needs about \$16,000.00 in additional design fees to move forward. Rick stated that the NHCOG has a positive budget balance from certain line items not being fully expended, like the regional election monitor position, and the \$16,000 fee can be accommodated within the adopted COG budget.

Chairman Stein asked if the other member towns felt that this was a regional initiative.

Bob added that two towns would be involved with the construction and three towns plan to be using it at the outset. Denise Raap added that Litchfield would not be involved in the construction of the building but would be open to paying a lease so that they could use the facility.

Mayor Carbone added that they are proceeding as if this is a regional asset.

Dan Jerram agreed with the Mayor’s assessment that this is a regional initiative. He mentioned that over time more and more towns might be using the facility. He is willing to support the re-allocation of COG funds.

Barbara Henry added that Roxbury recently lost its partnership with New Fairfield regarding the animal control facility. She could look to work with Torrington in the future.

Jim Brinton added that it might be a possible resource of other communities down the road.

Bob Valentine motioned to add the item to the agenda. Dan Jerram seconded the motion to add the topic of NHCOC funding in the amount of \$16,000 to assist the Regional Animal Control Facility effort. The motion to add this item to the agenda passed unanimously.

Tom Weik motioned and Dan Jerram seconded a motion for the NHCOC to support funding in the amount of \$16,000.00 toward the regional animal control facility. The motion passed unanimously.

Denise Raap asked about what other towns might be doing with respect to Memorial Day parades given the COVID-19 pandemic. General discussion followed.

Bob Valentine moved to adjourn the meeting. Henry Todd seconded. The motion to adjourn the meeting passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Janell M. Mullen
NHCOC, Regional Planner