

MINUTES OF THE NHCOC MEETING OF February 10, 2021

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

**Barkhamsted, Don Stein**

**Canaan, Henry Todd**

**Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway**

**Hartland, Magi Winslow**

**Kent, Jean Speck**

**Morris, Tom Weik**

**Norfolk, Matt Riiska**

**Salisbury, Curtis Rand**

**Washington, Jim Brinton**

**Burlington, Ted Shafer**

**Colebrook, Tom McKeon**

**Goshen, Bob Valentine**

**Harwinton, Michael Criss**

**Litchfield, Denise Raap**

**New Hartford, Dan Jerram**

**North Canaan, Charlie Perotti**

**Warren, Tim Angevine**

Others in Attendance:

CT DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes; Mike Muszynski, CCM; Steve Silver, Paul Raia, Jack Arsego & Hedy Ayers, Eversource; John Field, DEMHS Region 5; Rick Lynn, Jocelyn Ayer, Janell Mullen, and Darlene Krukar, NHCOC staff; Anne Greene, Ellen Graham, Donna Hayes; Media Representatives

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment. Don Stein called the meeting to order at 10:30 am. Betsy Paynter, Small Business Resource Navigator for the NWCT EDC updated the member towns on the small business stories which are featured on the [DiscoverLitchfieldHills.com](http://DiscoverLitchfieldHills.com) website. These stories showcase small businesses in the region and is intended to help support them during the COVID19 pandemic. If CEO's have ideas for a small business in their town that could be showcased, they can contact Betsy at [betsy@discoverlitchfieldhills.com](mailto:betsy@discoverlitchfieldhills.com).

Summary of Recommendations of the CT Coalition for Sustainable Materials Management. Katie Dykes, Commissioner, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Practices began her presentation and then was briefly interrupted by a "Zoombombing" incident. The meeting was shut down by the host and then everyone logged off and logged back on. Chairman Stein resumed the meeting at 10:47 am and suggested the host force mute everyone. This action would require everyone to "raise their hand" in order to be recognized to speak. Commissioner Dykes resumed her presentation by showing and commenting on slides developed for the CCSMM initiative by DEEP. The slides focused on extended producer responsibility, food scraps/organics collection and diversion, unit based pricing, increased recycling, and funding for sustainable materials management. More detail on each of these initiatives is available at the [portal.ct.gov/DEEP-CCSMM](http://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-CCSMM). The overall goal is to identify and implement effective waste reduction strategies and solutions to address Connecticut's waste disposal crisis. Commissioner Dykes mentioned that a regional approach through the COGs could be an effective means of implementing appropriate strategies. She also mentioned the modernizing of the Bottle Bill" might be legislation that is considered this session along with other potential initiatives.

Chairman Stein asked what progress can be anticipated this legislative session on waste reduction initiatives. Commissioner Dykes stated that some of the enabling steps are doable in this session, especially if towns are speaking to the importance of these efforts.

Tom Weik asked about the DEEP's position on virtual net metering cap in association with solar power. Commissioner Dykes mentioned that she is working with the Energy Committee and will communicate any further positions that DEEP takes.

Bob Valentine asked if she would share her PowerPoint presentation. She stated that it is on the DEEP website and she will provide the link.

Jean Speck noted that the bill proposed regarding gas cylinders left out tires. She mentioned that she will include that in her testimony and asked if Commissioner Dykes thought the Committee might add it back in. Commissioner Dykes stated that it would be important to include that concern in any testimony.

Tim Angevine asked about the expansion of the Bottle Bill. He asked what percentage of the bottles currently get redeemed. Commissioner Dykes said it is at about 50%.

Gordon Ridgway asked about the staffing for State Parks over the summer. He noted that the heavy use puts a lot of pressure on many areas, particularly along the Housatonic River. Commissioner Dykes said that during COVID, parks usage was up by 50%. She said that the "Passport to Parks Program" is a positive source of funding for the parks. She added that DEEP relies on seasonal staff and the Department is currently in the hiring process for seasonal positions.

Don Stein asked about broadband fiber optic moving forward with the Legislature. Commissioner Dykes said that this is a very exciting time for that initiative, and it is included in the Governor's budget. The Commissioner then explained the nexus between broadband and a reduction in greenhouse gases.

Eversource Emergency Response Update. Jack Arsego, Manager for CT Community Relations, began the presentation about emergency preparedness initiatives that Eversource is working on. Arsego introduced Paul Raia, Director of Electric Systems Operations. One of the new things is an online web portal for municipalities to use during storms. Mr. Arsego shared his screen to show a temporary solution that is being used by municipalities to share and obtain information. He stated that a more robust portal for municipalities will be developed. One of the central features is to indicate blocked roads. Mr. Arsego stated that eventually the temporary solution will be phased out and municipalities will be able to see outages on a more detailed scale. This portal is intended to facilitate two-way communication between Eversource and municipalities. Another thing that is being developed are monthly meetings with Eversource and town officials regarding emergency preparedness.

Paul Raia, Director of Electric Systems Operation, stated that he is the manager of all outage tickets. He added that during storms, he will now stand up an organization that oversees blocked roads within the state. This organization will use an outage management system that identifies "Priority Two"/blocked road areas and will be responsible for coordinating effective response.

Rick Lynn asked if Eversource could adopt a policy to provide at least one truck per town to work with the town crews during storm events. Mr. Arsego replied by stating that they will provide a "Make Safe Crew" upon request. Mr. Raia added that when they are in storm restoration mode, their first priority is the safety of their employees. He stated that it is important Eversource controls its crews for safety reasons.

Don Stein added that it seems that Eversource liaisons sole purpose is to pass information along to Eversource's crews. Mr. Arsego added that the municipal hub that is being developed may help with the communication flow and prioritization.

Launch of New Website Features to Support Your Town's Small Businesses. Evan Dobos, Founder of CivicLift, began his presentation with a shared screen showcasing the updates to the [DiscoverLitchfieldHills.com](https://www.discoverlitchfieldhills.com) website including a new Business Directory for the region which can be searched by town and business category. Jocelyn Ayer added that this website has been updated with the

goal of supporting small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic by helping the region's residents find new local businesses to support. Evan also mentioned that they are using social media marketing to promote the small business stories showcased on the website. The next component of the website that Evan displayed was the Jobs Hub page. This list of available jobs in the region is getting updated every two (2) weeks. The website also has an upgraded "places" map and events page which brings events in from the Arts Council website and the individual town websites that are built on the CivicLift platform (nine towns in the NHCOC have this type of website). Evan described the successful outcomes of a series of social media marketing campaigns ads that CivicLift has deployed to drive more visitor and resident traffic to the DiscoverLitchfieldHills.com website.

### **Committee Updates**

Legislative Committee. Michael Criss, Chairman of the NHCOC Legislative Committee. Michael began by mentioning that coordination with CCM and COST has been helpful. He mentioned that the initiatives of [DeSegregateCT](#) has been a substantial part of the discussion leading up to this legislative session. He added that a challenge in the NHCOC area involving affordable housing is our access to public infrastructure like water and sewer. He mentioned the Governor's Budget was recently finalized. Michael noted that a key consideration this session is education, as usual. He noted that is important that the ECS funding remain at the same level along with cost-sharing for special education. He also mentioned other legislative topics that he has been monitoring, including but not limited to, the legal use of cannabis, codifying the prevailing wage, recycling redemptions, and fiber optic broadband initiatives. He encouraged any NHCOC members that have any questions to reach out to him.

DEMHS Update and Status of Region 5 Long Term Recovery Steering Committee. John Field, DEMHS Region 5 Coordinator, provided the update that Tropical Storm Isias has been approved for federal funding. He continues to monitor the PURA and Eversource case that is going on. He mentioned that he continues to keep track of COVID reimbursements through FEMA. With the new administration in Washington, it was announced that 100% of the costs are supposed to be reimbursed. Health Districts should be able to file for reimbursement through the municipality in which they are located. John mentioned a survey that has been circulating that focuses on transportation in DEMHS Region 5 and he encouraged municipal leaders to fill them out. He mentioned work being done around Emergency Support Function-15 (Public Information Messaging) which has been encouraging the public not to be nervous about the vaccine.

Mike Criss asked about the local health districts' reimbursement during this time. John said that the new administration has stated that the administration of vaccines will be fully reimbursed.

### Administrative Items.

- a) Approval of Minutes for December 10, 2020.
- b) Approval of Financial Statement for November 2020.
- c) Recommendation for NHCOC Local Dues for FY 21-22.

All three (3) of these administrative items were bundled together. They were moved by Henry Todd and seconded by Bob Valentine. The motions passed unanimously.

d) Staff Transition Planning. Don Stein announced that the COG's Executive Director, Rick Lynn, will be retiring in June. He added that a job description will be prepared, and the Executive Committee will serve as the Selection Committee and will be undertaking an open and competitive selection process. It is hoped that there can be some overlap provided so that the newly hired Executive Director can be brought on board by June to facilitate a smooth transition. Rick stated that it has been a blessing and an honor to work for the NHCOC and its predecessor the Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials for the past 33 years. Gordon Ridgway thanked Rick for his service to the COG and the Town of Cornwall over the years.

### Town by Town Update.

Matt Riiska asked if other municipalities have partnered with Champion Salt. Their salt deliveries to Norfolk have been lacking and the town will be starting a contract with Morton Salt next week.

No other town provided an update.

The meeting adjourned at 12:39 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Janell M. Mullen  
NHCOC, Regional Planner