

MINUTES OF THE NHTCOG MEETING OF May 13, 2021

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway
Colebrook, Tom McKeon	Goshen, Bob Valentine
Hartland, Magi Winslow	Harwinton, Michael Criss
Kent, Jean Speck	Litchfield, Denise Raap
Morris, Tom Weik	New Hartford, Dan Jerram
North Canaan, Charlie Perotti	Roxbury, Barbara Henry
Salisbury, Curtis Rand	Sharon, Brent Colley
Washington, Jim Brinton	Warren, Tim Angevine
Winchester, Josh Kelly and Candy Perez	

Others in Attendance:

Hedy Ayers, Steve Silver, Eversource; Patrick Sullivan; John Simoncelli, Greenwoods Consulting; John Field, DEMHS Region 5; Mike Muszynski, CCM; Garrett Eucalitto, Mark Carlino, and Sara Radacsi, CTDOT; Ashley Reda, CIRMA; Priscilla Pavel; April Chaplin, Kennedy Center; Ellen Graham, Rick Lynn, Jocelyn Ayer, Janell Mullen, and Darlene Krukar, NHTCOG 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 Consulting began the public comment period with statistics pertaining to drug overdoses in the region. There have been 24 overdoses in the past month. John will be speaking on this issue in more detail during the June NHTCOG meeting.

Welcome to Josh Kelly, Winchester's new Town Manager. Candy Perez, Winchester Mayor, introduced Josh Kelly by outlining his prior experience with the Town of Bolton, Waterford, and Windsor. The search for a new Town Manager to replace Bob Geiger took over 6 months. Chairman Stein mentioned that Josh Kelly serves on the Board of COST. Josh addressed the group and stated that he is looking forward to working with all of the NHTCOG member-towns.

New and Emerging ConnDOT Initiatives, Garret Eucalitto. Garret Eucalitto, Deputy Commissioner, began his presentation by commenting that he considered comments made by NHTCOG members at a prior meeting and pursued several funding opportunities to benefit our rural towns. Examples include the Highway Use Fee Capital Program, which funds capital improvements such as bus shelters, signage, and lighting. He also mentioned a roll out of public transit on-demand services, which has not taken off in the state of Connecticut but has elsewhere. He mentioned that it is a part of the Governor's plans to make the Community Connectivity Grant Program a permanent program, which provides funding for crosswalks, greenways, and sidewalks.

Mark Carlino, CTDOT, was then introduced by Garret who began by mentioning that most traffic fatalities occur on municipal-owned roadways. The horizontal curb signing project and enhanced crosswalks are examples of some safety programs that CTDOT is prioritizing. He highlighted how NHTCOG was one of the first COGs to complete a Highway Transportation Safety Plan. CTDOT hopes to soon target funding to the initiatives recommended in that plan. The second program he touched upon was the rural transportation capital improvement program, which would be modeled after ConnDOT's successful LOTCIP program for urban areas. According to Mr. Carlino, the Governor hopes to work this into his budget beginning in 2023.

Barbara Henry, Roxbury, asked about when the Bridge Program funding would be awarded. Jim Brinton, Washington, echoed that same question. Rick Lynn stated that a Rural LOTCIP program would be most

welcome and has been advocated by the NHCOC for several years.

Federal Highway Administration Overview, Jennifer Carrier. Jennifer Carrier, PE, Connecticut Division of FHWA, began by sharing her screen to display the organization of the Federal Government in relation to the State of Connecticut. She mentioned that the role of FHWA is to administer funds to maintain Federal Highways and roads that lead onto those highways. She said CTDOT consults with COGs regarding long-range transportation plans.

Jennifer then displayed an Estimated Schedule of Activities and mentioned that the 2020 Census data will be examined by the FHWA and grouped for transportation purposes. She mentioned that denser areas in the NHCOC region include the Torrington Area Cluster as well as Litchfield's cluster. The prioritization of funding is based on these groupings.

She then talked about some funding sources for municipalities such as the RAISE Grant which focuses on rebuilding infrastructure with sustainability and equity. She noted that the minimum award size for this program is \$1M. She also mentioned the FAST Act which focuses on fixing surface transportation, the first of its kind in over decade.

Jennifer ended her presentation by mentioning a new infrastructure plan being discussed at the legislative level at this time, but also stated that she couldn't get too deep into detail until bills have been passed.

Barbara Henry asked about a bridge that was downgraded from "fair" to "poor" in the Town of Roxbury. She noted she may have to replace it in the very near future. She was wondering where she can find more information about Federal funding opportunities. Jennifer mentioned that in order for FHWA to fund the replacement of a bridge it has to be on the national bridge inventory and greater than 20 feet in length. Many of these replacement programs pass through CTDOT, who would be the best conduit for assisting with this endeavor.

It was then mentioned by Chairman Stein that Rick Lynn will be following up to disburse the materials with the various links to the programs that have been mentioned during the course of the transportation presentations.

Request for Approval of Resolution Endorsing NHCOC Unified Planning Work Program for FY22-23. Rick Lynn mentioned that each year CTDOT makes funding available to the COGs to assist them in transportation planning. The COGs must develop a work program that goes to CTDOT for their consideration and endorsement. He noted that CTDOT has endorsed the Work Plan that was included in the COG meeting packet with minimal changes.

Henry Todd moved to endorse the Unified Planning Work Plan for FY 22-23. Barbara Henry seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Highlights from the Northwest Hills Regional Housing Needs Assessment. Jocelyn Ayer mentioned the NHCOC's current involvement with ten (10) of its member-towns to assist with the development of affordable housing plans. She mentioned that there is a state statute (Section 8-30j) that requires all municipalities to develop an affordable housing plan by July 2022. The regional housing needs assessment provides town-by-town data that can be useful for municipal housing plans.

Jocelyn conducted a poll at the meeting with two questions related to housing to illustrate what type of information is contained in the Regional Housing Needs Assessment Report. She defined the concept of housing-cost burdened which means that a household reports spending more than 30% of its income on

housing costs and reported that 10,568 households in our 21 towns are housing cost burdened. She mentioned that the recent housing market has created even more barriers to homeownership due to high housing costs. The average change in median home sales prices in our 21-towns was an increase of \$115,000 over the last 5 years and the gap between the sales price that a renter household earning the median income for Litchfield County can afford and the median sales price in 2020 is extremely large. She also mentioned the noteworthy statistic that 46% of young adults ages 19-34 are living with their parents in Litchfield County. She also reported that the estimated number of additional units of affordable housing needed in the region is approximately 3,500 units.

Jocelyn finished her presentation by noting that the full Regional Housing Needs assessment report and other municipal housing plan resources are all available on the NHCOC website within the [housing plan section](#) and noted that a short film showing Affordable Housing in Northwest CT Small Towns and a recorded three-part webinar series are both available on the [NHCOC YouTube Channel](#).

Update on Fiber-to-Home Broadband Costs and Funding Possibilities. Kim Maxwell, Northwest ConneCT. Kim Maxwell noted that over the coming months many sources of federal funding will become available that can assist our towns with urgently needed fiber broadband network upgrades. He is currently focusing on how to get as much money to the towns in our region as possible for this purpose. He is also focusing on partnering with the existing internet technology companies in the area which could provide these upgrades more cost efficiently. He noted that Optimum-Altice has indicated that it is planning to upgrade its current broadband network in eight (8) towns in the region. According to Kim, Frontier is interested in potential upgrades to its existing broadband network as well and could serve the towns not already served by Optimum. He also mentioned the federal infrastructure bill making its way through Congress. It is estimated that CT could receive about \$200M as a result of that bill for broadband construction. He mentioned that it is not clear yet how those funds will be distributed.

Don Stein asked if Kim Maxwell wanted to address ARPA funding. Don mentioned that smaller towns like Norfolk and Warren will possibly get hundreds of thousands of dollars from this funding stream. This amount will not be enough to construct a broadband network but could be used for planning and preliminary engineering as has been done for Torrington, according to Kim Maxwell. Chairman Stein mentioned that they should think regionally about how to pool ARPA funding because a regionalized effort toward broadband could be significant. Jocelyn added that this is an important time to pursue public-private partnerships and to capitalize on these funding streams.

Bob Valentine, Goshen, mentioned that he is not sure he trusts that Optimum-Altice will really upgrade the existing network as they are promising. He mentioned that updates about how relief funding can be spent was provided to him yesterday. He stated that he will need to know how much ARPA funding might be needed for this initiative sooner rather than later so that he can consider budgeting for it.

Mike Criss, Harwinton, asked about what this means for towns that are served solely by Charter. He asked if broadband would be an option for his town. Kim Maxwell thinks the best move may be to collaboratively put the pressure on incumbent internet providers and partner with them to get access to federal broadband funding to help subsidize the costs of these upgrades in rural areas where the Return-On-Investment will not be there for strictly private investment in upgrades. He noted that Northwest ConneCT and NHCOC will be reaching out to towns soon to organize meetings on next steps.

Cyber Insurance for Municipalities. Ashley Reda, CIRMA. Ashley Reda, Senior Underwriter CIRMA, opened her presentation by showing a cyber threat map that was developed by Fortiguard. She discussed cyber liability and security for municipalities. She used the example of the recent Colonial Pipeline shut-down to exemplify why cyber security is essential. Over the years, cyber threats have only gotten more acute for

everyone. There is an uptick in the frequency of claims as well as an increase in the amount these attacks are costing towns. She mentioned how important it is for towns to have attorneys that can craft a cyber security policy and that are aware of statutory requirements associated with cyber security.

Denise Raap asked if funding can be put towards identifying the bad actors before there are actual cyber attacks. Ashley Reda mentioned there is a EZR Program that runs constant scans to see if there are bad actors that persistently try to compromise your network system. She suggested multi-factor identification and how imperative it is to stagger the backing-up of systems.

Committee Updates

- a) Regional Animal Facility. Mayor Elinor Carbone, Torrington, updated the group by mentioning that a request from Congresswoman Hayes to consider funding through the American Rescue Plan Legislation had taken place. The Regional Animal Facility project has been added to the Congresswoman's priority list as a mutual effort from Litchfield, Torrington, and Goshen. It will likely be late June or early July before there will be further updates. Mayor Carbone also mentioned that the project is currently out to bid and the bid openings will be on Friday morning.
- b) Recycling Advisory Committee. Curtis Rand, Chairman RAC, mentioned that thanks to the assistance of Rick Lynn, Clean Harbors is now under contract to conduct Collection Days for the next two years.. The next Household Hazardous Waste Day is May 22nd in Falls Village.
- c) Legislative Committee. Michael Criss, Chairman of the NHCOC Legislative Committee, mentioned that 2,022 bills have been presented this session. He is monitoring about 30 bills on behalf of the NHCOC. He is paying close attention to unfunded mandates that would negatively impact the towns within our region. He mentioned that SB-1024 has been amended and is currently being taken up by the Senate at the moment. The Gas Tax bill is still pending without a decision. He also added that the extended unemployment benefits as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are not encouraging people to get back to work.

Bob Valentine, Goshen, asked about hybrid meeting options for municipalities and if there were any updates. Don Stein added that they are waiting for an update since currently without further action from the Governor, that would suspend the right for towns to meet virtually. Don Stein immediately followed by mentioning that he just received an update from Betsy Gara of COST and that towns would be able to continue to meet virtually.

- d) DEMHS Region 5. John Field, DEMHS Region 5 Coordinator, began his update by echoing that there has been a lot of activity around reviewing the Executive Orders that were issued by the Governor during the Public Health Emergency. He also mentioned that vaccinations have hit a plateau in the state. There are currently two FEMA mobile units in the DEMHS 5 Region. John added that they are working with Griffin vans to assist further with vaccinations. He mentioned there have been some transitions for Long-Term Recovery efforts in the state and that they are now looking at economic needs for these efforts.

John Field finished his update by mentioning that we may see the ripple effect from the Colonial Pipeline situation with a jump in gas prices. He finished his update by mentioning potential nursing home strikes in the region on or about May 28th.

Administrative Items

a) Approval of Minutes for April 8, 2021.

b) Approval of Financial Statement for March 2021.

Administrative Items A & B were bundled together for the approval motion. Mike Criss moved, and Jim Brinton seconded the approval of the minutes of the April 8, 2021 meeting and approval of the March 2021

Financial Statement. The motion passed with one abstention.

Chairman Stein suggested to bundle the next four (4) administrative items for the next vote.

c) Endorsement of CT Process for Consultation and Cooperation with Local Officials in Non-Metropolitan Areas, d) Request for Approval of Updated MOUs for Continued Operation of Rural Independent Transportation Service, e) Approval of Authorizing Agreement between the NHCOC and Geer for State Matching Grant Program and f) ConnDOT Request for Endorsement of Amendment to Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan Related to Transportation Demand Management.

Mike Criss moved to approve and Curtis Rand seconded to approve Administrative Items C-F. The motion passed unanimously.

g) Recommendations of Nominating Committee for NHCOC Officers and Executive Committee for FY21-22. Mayor Elinor Carbone introduced this item by mentioning that there were efforts towards a continuum given the upcoming NHCOC leadership changes. There will be a vote at the June NHCOC meeting concerning the suggested slate of officers and Executive Committee members.

h) Request for Authorization to Seek Design and Build Bids for Expansion of COG Space. Rick Lynn provided information about this agenda item. Consideration of COG office expansion is being considered at this time since the Goshen Housing Trust is now in the process of purchasing and making improvements to the Goshen Marketplace. He mentioned that this would be an opportunity to expand the conference room as well as add two additional offices into the existing space. Dan Jerram, New Hartford, asked a few questions about the roles of staff as well as how the NHCOC will evolve over time. The motion to authorize a request for a bid was moved by Bob Valentine and seconded by Henry Todd. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Stein asked if there were any other items that members wanted to bring to his attention. Jean Speck, Kent, brought up the subject of passenger rail improvements as there has been some talk on this subject in other states. She was hoping the NHCOC could revisit this concept.

Bob Valentine moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:11 pm. Mike Criss seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Janell M. Mullen
NHCOC, Regional Planner