

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF June 10, 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	Torrington, Elinor Carbone
Washington, Jim Brinton	Warren, Tim Angevine
Winchester, Josh Kelly	

Others in Attendance:

Mike Muszynski, CCM; Hedy Ayers & Steve Silver, Eversource; John Simoncelli, Greenwoods Counseling; Henry Paszczuk, DEMHS Region 5; Maria Coutant-Skinner, McCall Center; Priscilla Pavel, Nancy Heaton, Paul Gibb, Julia Scharnberg, NWCT Community Foundation; Steph Burr, NWCT Arts Council; Kathryn Faraci & Sara Radasci, CTDOT; 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 10:04 am. Steph Burr, Executive Director of the NWCT Arts Council took a moment to ask member-towns for their support by providing for 1% of their municipal budget for funding to support the arts.

Sara Radasci, CTDOT, followed by sharing her screen with a letter that commemorates Rick Lynn's, NHCOG Executive Director, service to the region. He will be retiring at the end of this month.

Hedy Ayers, Eversource, took a moment to wish Rick Lynn well in his retirement and thank him for his dedication to the region.

Welcome to Robert Phillips, NHCOG Executive Director and Allie Smith, NHCOG SustainableCT Intern. Don Stein asked if Rob was on the call. He was not at the time. Allie Smith, NHCOG SustainableCT Intern introduced herself and mentioned she was here to serve the towns over the course of the summer.

Town by Town Issues and Updates by NHCOG Members.

Chairman Stein of Barkhamsted began the town-by-town updated by mentioning how much the dam project has improved the traffic flow and that their town budget was recently approved.

Henry Todd, Canaan (Falls Village), followed by mentioning their town budget improvement as well. He also mentioned that a few businesses have opened in town.

Bob Valentine, Goshen, mentioned that they had to raise their mill rate this year after holding it steady for many years. The Town Hall is open to the public with masks recommended for those who have not been vaccinated. Commissions will soon be resuming in-person meetings.

Magi Winslow, Hartland, mentioned that the re-evaluation had just been completed and it was evident that home prices have certainly gone up.

Mike Criss, Harwinton, noted that the mill rate has increased for this year's budget due to an increase in the Board of Education's budget. The Town is conducting hybrid meetings and Town Hall is opening to the public.

Denise Raap, Litchfield, mentioned that the town had just received the bronze status for SustainableCT certification. The town was also recently mentioned in the Smithsonian Magazine as one of "[The 15 Best Small Towns to Visit in 2021](#)". They are doing a field audit with CTDOT to identify dangerous areas along state roadways. She also mentioned that she is happy to report that the Litchfield Hills Road Race will take place this Sunday.

Tom Weik, Morris, mentioned the budget approval as well as a purchase of a new truck for the Department of Public Works.

Dan Jerram, New Hartford, mentioned they were engaged in the lengthy STEAP grant process. He noted that a small local fire company had merged with another, and that this change would soon go to a vote.

Matt Riiska, Norfolk, stated that the town is about to begin construction on its new firehouse. They are also beginning a solar project at the town dump. The Norfolk Farmer's Market is opening this weekend.

Charlie Perotti, No. Canaan, mentioned that CTDOT is doing a summer paving/sidewalk project in the middle of town. The mill rate did increase this year due to Region 1 Board of Education cost increases.

Barbara Henry, Roxbury, mentioned that the collection rate for taxes is 99.5%. The firemen are not having their popular "Pick & Fiddle" fundraiser for the second year in a row. She also mentioned that this year will be an election year as she will not be running again as the Chief Elected Official in town.

Curtis Rand, Salisbury, mentioned they are trying a food waste pilot program. The program has been well received by residents and will be hosted by the transfer station. Litigation involving the recently approved Holley Block project just crossed his desk.

Tim Angevine, Warren, mentioned that the mill rate did go down a little bit. The Town Hall is open and meetings are being conducted in a hybrid manner. He also mentioned that Jocelyn is working with the town on their Affordable Housing Plan.

Elinor Carbone, Torrington, mentioned that they had been waiting on some items in order to finalize the budget. The summer concert series has resumed. Mayor Carbone congratulated Litchfield on their recognition in the Smithsonian. She queried the NHCOC members on where they will fall regarding the Cannabis Bill and subsequent land-use decisions.

Candy Perez, Winchester, mentioned that all is well as things begin to open up. She noted that The American Mural Project is giving tours.

Ted Shafer, Burlington, mentioned that they are looking into enacting a bear ordinance. Black bears continue to be a problem in town. A part-time park ranger has been added to their police department to see how he can manage the parks this summer. He is getting a lot of requests to hold community events now that things are opening up and just wanted to manage the public health aspects of these events as best as he can.

Jean Speck, Kent, noted that their hybrid meetings did have some hiccups. They hope to do those better in

the future. She mentioned that the streetscape project is moving forward. The first phase included temporary easements from landowners. Of all twenty-one (21) property owners, one held out. As a result, the kick-off of the project was delayed. She mentioned that CTDOT has set up a local contact/project manager which has really helped to move the project forward. She closed by adding that the Kent testing site was disassembled on May 27th.

Update on American Rescue Plan Act, Uses of Local Funding, and Municipal Procedures. Michael Muszynski, CCM began his update with a thanks to Rick Lynn. He then began by speaking about American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding and interim rule. He noted that more clarity and guidance were requested the last time that he had presented to the group. Mike noted that entitlement cities have received their funding at this time. OPM has disseminated an allocation document on their website which indicates how much each town will be receiving.

Mike continued by explaining how these rescue funds will be delivered in two different tranches, and that the state has no control over how the local funding is utilized. What is to be received now doesn't include the Boards of Education allocations. Towns can choose to allocate a portion to education if they wish to at this time.

The interim rule establishes eligible uses and ineligible uses (eg pension funds). The Treasury encourages towns to look at funding areas that were impacted as a result of COVID. Towns must identify how their choices of spending were determined.

Forum on Opioid and Addiction Services in the Region. John Simoncelli, Executive Director of Greenwoods Counseling, began his presentation by welcoming Maria Coutant-Skinner, CEO McCall Center for Behavioral Health and Help, Inc. She began by outlining the work of the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force. Maria mentioned that there is a system in place to identify a "spike alert", which means an uptick of overdoses in the region. Every sector of every community must work towards the goals of the harm reduction. She mentioned that the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force is comprised of volunteers, aside from one paid coordinator. Maria highlighted the stressors of the pandemic on everyone's mental health.

John Simoncelli, Executive Director of Greenwoods Counseling, followed by sharing some statistics with the group. In 2020, there were 1,375 accidental overdose deaths in CT; every year this number has been increasing. John mentioned that over time the drugs being used have changed. Currently, fentanyl abuse is very harmful and its use is increasing.

John showed a map indicating the overdoses in the region: fatal vs reported vs not reported. He hopes to increase the number of reported overdoses as he thinks they are under-reported. He did mention that first-responders have gotten better at reporting drug-related overdoses. John stated that according to a report that he receives from the state on a monthly basis, Litchfield County has the second highest rates of drug overdoses for several years in a row. John stated that accepting this statistic as the status quo is not acceptable. He ended his presentation by asking for seed money from member-towns to help organize our resources around additional positions, including a regional social services and housing coordinator.

Julia Scharnberg, Vice President of Community Engagement of the NWCT Community Foundation, followed John's presentation by explaining the thinking behind the need for the position of a regional housing and social services coordinator. She stressed that a regional initiative to support mental health and social services would be a big step towards supporting the solutions to combat the opioid crisis. It would be helpful for the region to have a central office to contact and to help fill the gaps of social services within our region.

Barbara Henry asked why grant funding cannot pay for this position or if grant opportunities are out there to fund such a position. She emphasized that this person has not yet been identified, yet the need for the position has been identified. Jocelyn Ayer jumped in by stating that if the NHCOC is open to hosting this position, it could be available sooner rather than later to serve the member-towns. Don Stein mentioned that the Executive Committee should meet on this and discuss the situation.

Don Stein again mentioned that the Executive Committee will meet and discuss this situation with the New Executive Director of the NHCOC in the near future. John Simoncelli mentioned that he would be able to make himself available if he will be needed at this meeting.

Overview of COVID-19 Assistance for Community Health (COACH) Program. Manny Barreto, McCall Center. Chairman Stein mentioned that Manny Berreto is not available at this time and he moved onto the next agenda item.

DEMHS Update

- a. Henry Paszczuk jumped in on behalf of John Field, of DEMHS Region 5 to mention that COVID efforts are being scaled back at this time.
- b. Paul Gibb followed by giving a brief update on the Status of the DPW Mutual Aid Initiative. He mentioned that survey questions about equipment inventory have gone out to the 43 towns in the DEMHS Region. Six (6) municipalities in the NHCOC have yet to respond at this time. Paul will send the questions back out to the DPW Director in each town with a copy to the Chief Elected Officials. He stated that it is important for DEMHS Region 5 to have an understanding of what equipment is out there. This is a part of the work of the Task Force which was formed to address post-storm recovery.

Legislative Committee Update. Michael Criss, Chairman of the NHCOC Legislative Committee, mentioned there will be an update from CCM and COST after this NHCOC meeting today, and due to the fact that he was short on time, he would be very brief. He noted that “the Zoning Bill” has been amended with some opt-out provisions. The Broadband Bill has not been moved forward in our rural areas. We are waiting on how legislation will rule on virtual vs. hybrid meetings.

Request by ConnDOT for Amendments to Statewide Transportation Improvement Program for Bridge Replacement over Brook on Rt 109 in Morris, Replacement of Traffic Control Signals at Various Locations, and Kent Streetscape Project. Rick Lynn stated that a simple endorsement will be appreciated. Henry Todd moved, and Charlie Perotti seconded to endorse the ConnDOT projects. The motion passed unanimously.

Administrative Items.

- a) Approval of Minutes for February May 13, 2021.
- b) Approval of Financial Statement for April 2021.

These two administrative items were bundled together and polled electronically. Charlie Perotti moved and Henry Todd seconded the approval of both items. The motion passed unanimously, while one voting member abstained.

- c) Approval of the NHCOC Budget for FY 2021-2022. Rick Lynn mentioned that he was pleased to present a balanced budget. Employees saw salary increases and one other line item that had increased was due to the anticipated cost of cyber security. Henry Todd moved and Charlie Perotti seconded the approval of the NHCOC Budget. The motion passed unanimously, while one voting member abstained.

d) Request for Endorsement of FY 2021-2022 “Work Plan Summary and Budget” for Regional Service Grant. Bob Valentine moved and Henry Todd seconded the Work Plan Summary and Budget for RSG Funds. The motion passed unanimously, while one voting member abstained.

e) Election of the NHCOC Officers and Executive Committee
Mayor Elinor Carbone introduced the proposed slate of officers. Which include:
Don Stein, Chair; Bob Valentine, Vice-Chair; Charlie Perotti, Secretary; Mike Criss, Treasurer as well as Henry Todd and Matt Riiska as Members of the Executive Committee. Bob Valentine moved and Henry Todd seconded the Slate of Officers for FY 2021-2022. The motion passed unanimously, while one voting member abstained.

f) Return to In-Person COG Meetings and Mask Policy. A discussion ensued around returning to in-person meetings in July. All members agreed. It was suggested that those who are not vaccinated will wear a mask in order to attend in person.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment. Jennine Lupo, of Rep. Hayes Office gave a brief update that included the information that five (5) transportation projects will be included as a part of projects moving forward. Chairman Stein adjourned the meeting at 10:59 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Janell M. Mullen
NHCOC, Regional Planner