

MINUTES OF THE NHCOG MEETING OF July 7, 2021

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Burlington, Ted Shafer
Canaan, Henry Todd	Colebrook, Tom McKeon
Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway	Harwinton, Michael Criss
Kent, Jean Speck	Litchfield, Denise Raap
Morris, Tom Weik (virtually)	Norfolk, Matt Riiska
Roxbury, Barbara Henry (virtually)	Sharon, Brent Colley (virtually)
Torrington, Elinor Carbone	Warren, Tim Angevine

Others in Attendance:

April Chaplin, Kennedy Center; John Field; DEMHS Region 5 Coordinator; Gertrude O'Sullivan; Craig Nelson, Executive Director of Northwest CT Transit District; Julie Scharnberg, NW CT Foundation of Community Health, John Piscopo, State Rep 76th District; John Simoncelli, Greenwoods Counseling & Referrals; Jocelyn Ayer, Janell Mullen, and Darlene Krukar- NHCOG staff.

Call to Order and Opportunity for Public Comment. Upon determining a quorum, Chairman Stein called the meeting to order at 10:07 am. Barbara Henry, Tom Weik, Brent Colley and Rob Phillips attended virtually via Webex.

Dave Beers of DEEP Forestry Division used the public comment opportunity to speak about America the Beautiful (ATB) Grants. He mentioned that he is open to visiting member-towns' forests to prepare a forest report. Gordon Ridgway asked him about the gypsy moth situation that has hit Sharon and Cornwall very hard. There is a lot of concern around tree mortality where the trees are stressed. Dave reassured him that the trees will re-leaf this year. The problem would be a second defoliation next year. A big reason why this happened is due to a fungus that kills the moth larvae. Due to the dry weather, the fungus level was below normal.

State Rep. John Piscopo of the 76th District encouraged the town leaders to go after the federal grants that have been made available.

Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans Update. David Murphy, SLR Consulting provided an update on the progress of the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans that are close to completion for all 21 towns within the NHCOG district. The document has two parts-the regional piece and the annex for each individual town. The NHCOG plans will be submitted to the state (FEMA) in July. David highlighted that the state has [Hazard Mitigation Grant Program](#) (HMGP) money and that the application period is currently taking place. David mentioned that energy reliability and resilience is a top priority for our region based on public input. The action tasks related to the state include FEMA map updates. David emphasized the importance of towns reviewing their updated FEMA maps closely since once those maps are finalized it is very hard to make changes. He also suggested that towns coordinate with SHPO regarding historic properties. He also spoke of towns with repetitive loss properties and how it is important for them to work with DEEP to get the properties off the list if they have been improved or mitigated. He also stated that towns' Flood Regulations tend to be out of date. It is important for towns to update their regulations to reflect Building Code updates. David also mentioned [SustainableCT](#) and how to use the NHMP to further advance a town's standing with the program.

East Main Corridor Study. Michael Kluchman, BSC Group gave an overview of the finalized study, which has

been recently adopted by the City of Torrington's Planning and Zoning Commission. Michael provided a brief background of the regional corridor and how it has grown and changed over time. The overall goals of the project were to improve traffic flow, improve safety and connectivity for pedestrians, and encourage development. For the purposes of the study, the corridor was broken into 4 segments: downtown gateway, neighborhood commercial, transitional, and big box commercial. Michael highlighted the GIS functionality of the project and how that tool was used for public input during the study. Michael reviewed the overall recommendations were categorized into the following themes for possible implementation: placemaking, access management, congestion, pedestrian safety, connectivity, and transit.

Northwest CT Transit District Update. Craig Nelson, Executive Director of NWCTD began his presentation by mentioning a new program called Dial-a-Ride. Craig mentioned that 17 of the 21 member-towns are covered by the transit district. Rural Independent Transportation Services (RITS) program is funded through the NHCOC which assists the elderly and handicapped with transportation to medical appointments for a reduced rate or by donation. The program has been very full, and they are looking into getting additional vehicles to support it. CTDOT has set aside funding for an additional bus.

Craig mentioned that the operating expenses go through CTDOT. Craig also mentioned the importance of submitting the Municipal Grant Program (MGP) forms to the NHCOC for filing with CTDOT. Craig ended his presentation by commenting on the American Rescue Plan funding point that towns can utilize funds for senior transportation "transit". Chairman Stein asked if Craig could send an email to the member-towns regarding these funding points.

Denise Raap asked if NWCTD is still having trouble finding drivers as was the case in past months. Craig said that it has gotten a bit better. By August, he anticipates more drivers than there are buses. Denise added that she would prefer not to charge at all for the Candy Striper service. Craig noted that the majority of the funding comes through CTDOT and federal funding. Craig emphasized the need for these services in the region.

Mayor Carbone mentioned that the need for senior transportation is growing especially along with transportation to jobs in the region. Discussion with CTDOT has been conducted regarding a transportation facility. She added that a commitment from all municipalities is really very helpful.

DEMHS Update. John Field, Region 5 Coordinator. John Field commented that it was nice to see everyone in person. He began his presentation about the COVID-19 pandemic and mentioned that testing and vaccination efforts have been largely demobilized. Regional coordination meetings are still occurring, but now take place monthly. A survey will be going out to towns and their emergency management directors (EMDs) regarding the pandemic and the response to the public health emergency.

John added that the long-term recovery efforts continue. The DEMHS Region 5 committee continues to meet and currently the discussion has centered around getting people to return to work. PPE supplies are being distributed to various departments in case it is needed again. A large portion is going to correctional facilities. FEMA is looking at a \$77M cost to the state regarding COVID response. That estimate is on the low side and doesn't not include the federal rescue act funds.

He also noted that Emergency Management Performance Grant applications are open with a July deadline. The Homeland Security grant funding for 2021 is also open. A considerable amount of money for projects has been requested.

John mentioned that the state has identified Microsoft Teams as a valuable system for meeting virtually. Each DEMHS Region is being given a license. State of CT has also bought licensing for cyber security

training. School systems need to submit their drill logs to the state by July 15th in order to get state funding for projects.

John Field ended his presentation by mentioned that Storm Elsa is coming and that we are bound to get a lot of rain in the upcoming days. 6-8 inches have been predicted. There will potentially be flash floods in the region. Due to the fact that the grounds are saturated, trees may come down with a little bit of wind.

Legislative Update and Municipal Implications for Member-towns. Michael Criss, Legislative Committee Chairman mentioned that the legislation session ended and there have been a lot of wrap-ups given by various organization including COST, CCM, and CCAPA. He mentioned that a lot of the affordable housing bills were watered down and then passed. There are opt-outs for municipalities regarding some elements of bills that passed. He also mentioned that there is a lack of public infrastructure that is an impediment to the development of affordable housing. Mike also mentioned the Implementer Bill. He added that the FOIA guidelines regarding meetings (remote, hybrid, or in person) have been detailed.

John Piscopo added that the Special Session next week will convene to possibly extend Executive Orders for 60-90 days.

Mike Criss added that statutory towns pass resolutions at Town Meetings regarding spending. The state is not providing additional guidance to the communities on this one. Mike added that in his opinion these matters should not be discussed at Town Meetings, but amongst the Board of Selectmen. He added that it will be helpful for member-towns to share information regarding how they proceed.

Don Stein added that in the Implementer Bill there was mention of solid waste management. He added that there is nothing in there to prevent MIRA from its imminent shut-down.

Gordon Ridgway added that it is great to be in the Northeast because a lot of work has been done in region by the state surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Municipal Response to Cannabis Legislation. Mayor Elinor Carbone brought up SB-1201 to discuss a potential municipal response to this bill regarding the legality of recreational cannabis in the state. She mentioned that the police department must respond to these new laws as well as various departments within municipalities. She mentioned that other towns are enacting short-term moratoriums on cannabis related facilities and retail outlets. Planning and Zoning Commissions will need to make decisions around these changes. Mayor Carbone's approach is baby steps for the City of Torrington.

Mike Criss added that the Town of Prospect adopted a resolution that prohibits the recreational use of cannabis in the municipality. Mayor Carbone mentioned that the public can overturn the town ordinance by referendum. Mike Criss asked about the difficulty of collecting taxes from cannabis retailers and then depositing the tax revenue into FDIC backed bank accounts provided that the federal government hasn't legalized recreational cannabis.

Proposal for Regional Housing and Social Services Coordinator. Julie Scharnberg began her presentation by reading a letter that was addressed to the NHCOC from Lori Fedewa, Director of the CT Office of Rural Health regarding the funding for a staff person in the Northwest Hills region. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it grew apparent that social service organizations and emergency management communications needs to be enhanced within the region. This letter stated that a consultant would be funded through a CDC grant for a pilot program for a two (2) year period. Julie noted that it is a difficult region to serve and thinks that there is real value to having a central coordinator. This position was identified as being best suited within the NHCOC office. She mentioned that during COVID-19 so many needs were at play at the

same time including food insecurity housing insecurity, and mental health and addiction services.

Don Stein asked who the consultant would be reporting to. The thought would be to have a cross-sector advisory group that monitors the position. The CT Office of Rural Health would play a role provided its involvement with the pilot funding.

Henry Todd spoke up saying that it is a great idea.

Jean Speck also felt that we are just now seeing the tip of the iceberg of what will come out of the global pandemic. Jean mentioned that her social services director would find this position helpful to supplement and support the local work that they are currently doing.

Gordon Ridgway mentioned that Cornwall has a group that is working together regarding social services, mental health services, and emergency services. He added that this is great news since there is such a need in the area and that there are so many compounding issues.

Julie added that the grant amount is \$240,000.00.

Mike Criss asked what the elected officials could expect as far as deliverables resulting from this position. He asked what the true function of the position entails. He also asked about what would happen after the two (2) years of funding expires.

Julie stated that the NHCOCG would not be growing their staff yet offering up office space for this individual. Access to municipal leaders would be an important component of this position. The City of New London created such a position for their city. The amount of prevention that has resulted from this position is staggering. The Norfolk ambulance is getting a lot of mental health calls from teenagers in the region. If these issues are taken out of the hands of emergency response, it would be very helpful for the municipalities in the region. A clinical background would be extremely helpful.

Gordon Ridgway moved to support this position. Jean Speck seconded the motion which authorized the process to proceed.

A discussion ensued. Don Stein clarified that a board would need to be convened to assist with the hiring process.

Denise Raap asked about the towns that do not have the social services staff. Julie added that the point would be to coordinate the existing services within the region. For example, in towns that don't have a social services director there is a person that addresses these issues. The idea is for the towns to have regional point-person to help connect residents to existing services.

A roll call was conducted for the vote. There were two abstentions from the Town of Harwinton, Mike Criss and Morris, Tom Weik. All others present were in favor.

a) Approval of Minutes for February May 13, 2021. Henry Todd moved the approval of the minutes and Matt Riiska seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

b) Approval of Financial Statement for April 2021. Mike Criss approved. Henry Todd seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

c) Expansion of the NHCOCG Office

Chairman Stein reviewed the \$120,000 expansion of the office space and the conference room of the NHCOCG office. Denise Raap questions the discrepancy between the cost per square footage between the

two options. Mike Criss explained that it is based on the build-out.

Henry Todd moved to support Option B. Mayor Carbone seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

d)Resolution confirming NWCT Arts Council as region's arts service organization.

The board passed the following resolution "The NHCOG Board confirms that the NWCT Arts Council is the arts service organization for our region." The motion passed unanimously.

Town by Town Issues and Updates by COG Members.

Tim Angevine, Warren, mentioned recent storms efforts and applauded DPW. Mayor Carbone stated that the regional animal control facility did move forward in the process. Jean Speck mentioned having discussions with Nuvance around rural primary care provided a health facility recently closed. She also asked about having a focused conversation around American Recovery Plan Act in the upcoming month since there is no scheduled NHCOG meeting in August.

Jocelyn Ayer updated the group about the upcoming July 29th Fifth Thursday at 7 pm at South Farms in Morris. She also mentioned they are in Year 2 of implementing the CEDS strategies within the region. Consultant, Betsy Paynter is available in the region to assist towns where they need support in economic recovery post COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting adjourned at 12:13 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Janell M. Mullen
NHCOG, Regional Planner