

MINUTES OF THE NHCOC MEETING OF October 14, 2021  
Meeting held remotely via Zoom

Members or Representatives in Attendance:

Barkhamsted, Don Stein	Burlington, Ted Shafer
Canaan, Henry Todd	Colebrook, Tom McKeon
Cornwall, Gordon Ridgway	Hartland, Magi Winslow
Kent, Jean Speck	Litchfield, Denise Raap
Morris, Tom Weik	New Hartford, Dan Jerram
Norfolk, Matt Riiska	North Canaan, Charles Perotti
Roxbury, Barbara Henry	Salisbury, Curtis Rand
Sharon, Brent Colley	Torrington, Elinor Carbone
Warren, Tim Angevine	Winchester, Josh Kelly

Others in Attendance Remotely:

Andrea Rynn, Sharon Hospital; Robert Rubbo, Torrington Area Health District; John Field, DEMHS Region 5; Dr. Mark Hirko, Sharon Hospital; Kevin Witkos, Senator; Maria Horn, Representative; Rob Phillips, Jocelyn Ayer, and Darlene Krukar, NHCOC staff; Media Representatives and members from the public.

Public Comment: The following community members provided public comment expressing their concerns about and opposition to Sharon Hospital's plans to close its labor & delivery unit. Lydia Kruge Moore, co-founder of Save Sharon Hospital; Dr. Howard Mortman, Obstetrician; Dr. David Kurish, Internist and Cardiologist; Joshua Hahn, Assistant Head of the Hotchkiss School; Rachel Tuberville, New Milford resident; Nick Moore, Sharon resident; Victor Germack, Salisbury resident; Kathleen Friedman, Sharon resident; Jill Drew, Sharon resident; and Leslie Moore, Sharon resident. In the interest of time other members of the public were invited to submit their public comment through the Chat feature in Zoom. These comments are listed at the end of these minutes.

Sharon Hospital Community Update. Dr. Mark Hirko, Sharon Hospital. Dr. Hirko gave a PowerPoint presentation on Sharon Hospital. He stated that small hospitals are closing across the United States and Sharon Hospital is at risk of closing. Medicine is not hospital-based any longer. They have done internal reviews of the services that Sharon Hospital offers. They will be investing in primary care, cancer care, heart & vascular, and neuroscience and looking to grow behavioral health services. They will be working on enhancing telemedicine, outpatient care, and elective surgery. The phase out of labor & delivery has nothing to do with the quality of care but the fact that the hospital is losing money because the rate of births is so low.

Curtis Rand stated that Sharon Hospital is a vital part of the community and he doesn't know why they want to send residents away for having their children. Gordon Ridgway agreed that the hospital is important to our area. If you take birthing away from Sharon Hospital the residents will attend the other hospital for the rest of their lives. Barbara Henry stated that ambulance calls will become longer and therefore you will lose some of the volunteers if you close part of Sharon Hospital. Henry Todd stated that he would like to see a full financial report for the hospital, and he is also worried about the ambulance staff. He has a lot of questions and no answers. Jean Speck stated that she understands the trials that the hospital is facing but would like to see Sharon Maternity stay open. Charlie Perrotti backs the other selectmen. Maria Horn stated that the study done doesn't include the pandemic growth that our area has seen. We need more information and transparency. There is a meeting on November 5<sup>th</sup> and there is another meeting on November 9<sup>th</sup> to further discuss this issue.

Recognition of Honorable Years of Public Service as Chief Elected Officials of their Respective Municipalities; Bob Valentine-Goshen, Barbara Henry-Roxbury, Tim Angevine-Warren, Tom McKeon-Colebrook. Don Stein stated that it has been a pleasure working with the selectmen that are retiring and that they will be missed. Don invited them to attend the December meeting for a formal celebration. Jocelyn stated that the Selectman will be given a NHCOCG "living the dream" mug. Other selectmen stated how important they have been to the COG and stated they will be missed. Barbara, Tom and Tim all stated how much they enjoyed working with the other members of the COG over the years.

Report of the Executive Director, Rob Phillips, NHCOCG. The Annual report for the Regional Service Grant (RSG) grant was included in the packet. The RSG grant is a major part of the funding for the COG. Staff is salaried and their hours are designated to the grants that we have. He stated that Darlene is retiring at the end of the year and a job position has been posted and Jocelyn is also leaving us at the end of the year as well. Jocelyn stated that she will be directing a new Litchfield County Center for Housing Opportunity and will still be working with the area towns, but in a different capacity. Selectman took this opportunity to thank Darlene and Jocelyn for their time and dedication to the COG.

COVID-19 Update. Robert Rubbo, Torrington Area Health District. Rob Rubbo stated that on a weekly basis they send out a sheet with the positively rate. The good news is that the area is doing really well and most towns in the northwest corner are no longer in the red zone. They also have the percentage rate of the vaccinated. The number of 12-17 year old vaccinated is anywhere from 45% to 60% which is good. This means that the schools have less students to have to contact with contact tracing. The State of Connecticut releases a report every Thursday. About 30% of cases of covid are with fully vaccinated people but many of them get a very mild case. Every person who is admitted to the hospital is given a covid test and it picks up people who are asymptomatic. Only the Pfizer vaccine has been approved for the booster shot for people over 65 years old. Pfizer has submitted for approval for a vaccine for children 5 to 12 years old and it will be invaluable to the schools if it gets approved. It is hopeful that it will be available by the end of the year.

DEMHS Update and Status of Region 5 Long Term Recovery Steering Committee. John Field, DEMHS Region 5. John Field has a contact at DECD for the American Rescue Plan Act Funds. Currently on the public assistance on the covid responds the state stands at approximately 180 million. Storm Henri did not reach the threshold for FEMA assistance and storm Ida data is still being collected. So if you have any damage to submit please get it into the portal so that Litchfield County can get some assistance for paying for the storm. DEMHS Region 5 is receiving an additional \$60,000 for the 2019 HSGP program.

Recap of Economic Development Summit Held on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. Jocelyn Ayer, NHCOCG. Jocelyn stated that we held our 5<sup>th</sup> annual Economic Development Summit at the Five Points Art Center on September 23<sup>rd</sup> and over 100 people attended. Jocelyn thanked the Mayor of Torrington for supporting the event and they provided us with a tent which was helpful since it rained. The event is held to let everyone know what we are doing to implement our Regional Economic Development Strategy and let towns know how they can participate. The DECD Commissioner, David Lehman came and spoke and then stayed and listened to our other speakers. We did hire a new consultant for broadband outreach, Kitty Keifer and Jocelyn asked CEOs to look for emails from her to set up a meeting with each town. Don Stein stated that Jocelyn put in a lot of time on this event and thanked her for her efforts.

Recap on Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day held on October 9<sup>th</sup>. Rob Phillips, NHCOCG. Rob Phillips stated that we had a successful event with about 450 vehicles attending. He thanked the towns for their help in organizing the event and the volunteers Naomi Boccio, Cindy Barrett, Paul Collins, Lucy Hussman, Jim Hilton, and Darlene Krukar who worked the event. He stated that Clean Harbors was fantastic and they left the site very clean. He announced the dates for the next two collections day. Falls

Village on June 4, 2022 and Torrington on October 8, 2022.

Endorsement for a Recreation Greenway Trail Grant Application for Phase 4 to CT DEEP for the Town of Litchfield. Friends of Litchfield Community Greenway, Berta Mette. Denise Raap the Friends of Litchfield Community Greenway has been very active in obtaining grants and they are finishing up Phase 3 of the greenway and are looking for the funds to work on the section between Litchfield and Bantam which will get people off the busy Route 202 corridor. This will allow our students to get between Litchfield and Wamogo since they share a lot of classes. On a motion made by Tim Angevine and second by Henry Todd the motion to endorse was approved.

#### Administrative Items

- a. Approval of Minutes for Meeting of September 9, 2021. On a motion made by Charlie Perrotti and seconded by Tim Angevine the minutes of the September 9<sup>th</sup> meeting were unanimously approved.
- b. Approval of Financial Statement for August 2021. On a motion by Henry Todd seconded by Curtis Rand the financial statement for August was unanimously approved.

Municipal Forum: information Sharing Round Table. Don Stein stated that we are hopeful to having the December meeting in our new conference room. Curtis Rand thanked Barbara Henry for her time. Barbara stated that Roxbury's elementary school made number one in Newsweek this week. Don Stein stated that Region 7 was in the top 4 in the state. Gordon Ridgway stated that the COG is a stronger force than any of the towns individually and the Sharon Hospital discussion is a prime example of that.

Other Business as Raised by Members and Adjournment. There was no other business raised. The meeting was adjourned at 11:46 am

Respectfully submitted  
Darlene Krukar

#### **Public Comments received at 10/14/2021 NHCOC Meeting via Chat**

00:32:45 Kendra Lacroix: FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD: I am Kendra Lacroix of Amenia, NY. I have had two children at the birthing suites in Sharon, not to mention countless ER visits between my husband, children and grandparents. Closure of these vital services is not an option. It would be devastating for the community with limited access as it is, and against state public health policy.

00:33:41 Jocelyn Ayer: If you want to make a public comment you can make it here and it will be part of the record

00:34:40 Jeff Kivitz: FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD: My name is Jeff Kivitz and I am a Sharon, CT resident. I am strongly opposed to Nuvance's plan to close maternity at Sharon Hospital AND to cut the availability of other emergency surgery services. These are essential services and are a public good. I am also offended by the disingenuous data and opacity with which Nuvance is pursuing its plan. We are counting on our local and state representatives and OHS to stop Nuvance. These decisions are largely irreversible and will have a long term impact on the health of our community and its citizens. Thank you.

00:35:32 Eliza Rosler: FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD: My name is Eliza Rosler and I am a resident of North Canaan. I grew up here and moved back in March 2020. In February 2021, I delivered my son at Sharon Hospital. My ability to deliver there and to find local prenatal care in Sharon was fundamental to my family's decision to move to the area. The continuation of a full-service hospital in the area is fundamental to my family's decision to stay in the area. I've also encourage friends to move to the area because of Sharon's maternity ward. The closure would be a failure to the community. Thank you

00:38:44 Kait Leonard (she/hers): FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD: I am Kait Leonard of Lakeville, CT. I birthed my first child in April 2021 in the birthing suites at Sharon Hospital. My pregnancy was riddled

with complications and knowing the tenured doctors were only a 10 minute drive away was vital to lowering my stress and anxiety levels during pregnancy. Closing the birthing suits and limiting OR services will be detrimental to not only families in the community, but the community as a whole as a slippery slope begins to form with closing services at the hospital.

00:44:55 Amy Scheim: FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD: My name is Amy Scheim and I am a resident of Millerton, NY. I moved to the area in January 2020, and Dr. Mortman delivered my daughter in July of 2021. Part of my and my husband's interest in moving to the area was because of Sharon Hospital, we knew we could start our family with the resources of the hospital nearby. The experience and value of maternity and delivery at Sharon is invaluable and unlike any other. Removing labor and delivery and eliminating this service to the community is a self fulfilling prophecy - to remove this is to remove incentive for families to set roots in the area and invest in the community in a multitude of ways. I second the comment by Nick Moore that this asset is something that Nuvance needs to market, as other families will make the choice to deliver at Sharon and invest in Sharon, as my family has done.

00:50:00 Kathleen Friedman: With respect, Dr Hirko is now giving much the same presentation given on Sept 29. Nuvance does not address the points raised this morning—including those of Sharon Hospital's own doctors. This is not a conversation.

00:52:54 Deborah Moore: My name is Deborah Moore, from Sharon.

There is a long and storied history of medicine and patient care in our community and hospital. The region has always done its best to address the needs of the community.

A pandemic is not a time for health care administrators' to violate the people's trust and promote fear by threatening the closure of vital services.

That is unethical and dishonorable.

While Nuvance leadership pockets \$7million in compensation they claim \$38M of loss in Sharon Hospital. I find their justification to be disingenuous at best.

Serving "almost" everyone is not enough. And computer screens cannot deliver babies.

A hospital is a 24/7 operation.

Nuvance must pause their actions and COG call in AG Tong and OHS director Victoria Veltri to oversea this crisis.

00:52:56 Lorna Edmundson: Thoughtful plans for improvement, but I see no response to the urgent, basic, human need for birthing babies. For so many of the other services you describe, it wouldn't matter if you had to drive an hour away. It DOES matter for birthing. Why not invest in promoting maternity services if they are underutilized?

00:53:10 Rebecca Grande: Hello, my name is Rebecca Grande. I live in Wingdale, NY and I oppose the closure of the Maternity Unit and other vital services at Sharon Hospital. on August 18th, 2021 I suffered a complete placenta abruption and was in preterm labor. Myself and my son are only alive today because of my close proximity to the hospital and the amazing skills of Dr. Mortman and his team. I was rushed into an emergency c-section, delivering my son 6 weeks early. Time was if the essence that day. I knew that the moment I woke up bleeding internally deciding to drive myself to the hospital because I was home alone and knew I couldn't wait for an ambulance and the team at Sharon hospital the moment I arrived jumping into action. On that day if I had traveled to a hospital farther away or was transferred via ambulance from Sharon Hospital I would have certainly began to hemorrhage in my car or in the ambulance, bled internally, resulting in the lose my of own life and/or the life of my son.

00:53:14 Rebecca Grande: Every day I look at my son as a miracle. We are both still alive. I will forever be grateful for Dr. Mortman and his team. It is very scary to think this just happened eight weeks ago. It's very scary to think that friends who are just finding out they are pregnant will have to travel. Putting their lives and the lives of their unborn children at risk. Rural communities deserve the peace of

mind in knowing they are close enough to a medical facility if an emergency, such as mine, we're to occur. I believe the lives of mothers and babies are worth far more than any amount of money gained by closing these essential community services.

00:55:09 Jenn Hatch: FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD: My name is Jennifer Hatch of Lakeville, CT. I had my first child in August 2021 in the birthing suites at Sharon Hospital, and it was a wonderful experience. The doctors and nursing staff are remarkable, and they went above and beyond to give me the best experience possible. I am a member of the Hotchkiss Community, and as a younger member of the faculty, I am looking forward to growing my family here. Having a fully operational hospital in Sharon is critical for me to stay in the area. This area can only thrive with the resources of Sharon Hospital - otherwise, we cannot expect to attract younger people looking to grow a family.

01:03:48 Rob Bettigole: FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD: I am Rob Bettigole, resident of Lakeville since 1997. I served on the Governing Board of Sharon Hospital from 2007 to 2012, including serving as Vice Chairman. From the testimony of others, the need for high quality, close by emergency care (including ob/gyn) for our community is clear. What is not clear is a detailed financial picture of Sharon Hospital. Based on past experience, I expect that a significant portion of the loss that Nuvance Health reports for Sharon Hospital is actually an allocation of Nuvance's substantial overhead, as disclosed on their Federal 990. I urge our representatives at the local and state to require full disclosure of the detailed financials relating specifically to Sharon hospital to allow a full assessment of reasonable alternatives to secure the future of Sharon Hospital as we all desire.

01:06:53 Karline Moeller's iPhone: FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD: My name is Karline Moeller and I gave birth at Sharon Hospital in June 2021. It was an incredible experience for many reasons, but specifically because of the amazing and highly skilled doctors, staff and nurses of the maternity ward. Having a local, fully operational hospital in close proximity was crucial in my pregnancy and it remains a crucial factor in my husband and my decision to stay in the area and raise our family here. The labor and delivery unit is a vital part of our community's safety and security, and it is imperative that we keep the unit open, for current families in the area and to attract more families in the future. I too agree with Nick Moore and Amy Scheim, Nuvance should take this opportunity to market this incredible resource.

My family has chosen to raise our family here, and our experience was so wonderful that we have discussed a second child. It would be probable that if the Labor and Delivery unit were to close, that we would return to New York City. We c

01:11:29 Meredith Murphy: My name is Cory Murphy and I am a new father and I was raised in and live in Lakeville, CT. I oppose the cuts and changes proposed by Nuvance.

I think there is a stigma around doctor's offices and hospitals, kids are afraid of them. Some adults too, possibly my wife too until her experience giving birth to our first son in April this year. Maybe it's the white coats, bright lights, the thoughts of scalpels and needles, rooms without windows. Either way, I never had that feeling growing up here. If you ask most kids who are from a town like Sharon, Lakeville, Salisbury, Cornwall, Falls Village and so on, they probably aren't either, and chances are those kids were also born at Sharon Hospital. We have a growing population, overbooked OBGYN offices, and I would say in the past two years the Sharon maternity ward has been overflowing with babies. What an honor it was to meet those nurses, and see some who have known me or my family since I was a boy.

01:11:37 Meredith Murphy: We gave birth to our boy in the same hospital my mother gave birth to my brother in. That is special, that is what makes Sharon so special. It's part of our life and community, it's tradition, it's part of our family and many others. It's peace of mind. We cant thank everyone enough for the experience we had, labor, surgery and a beautiful healthy boy. It would be shameful to close down such a special place.

01:15:17 andrea.rynn@nuvancehealth.org: Thank you for your time, comments and questions.

01:15:55 Jill Drew: To all the members of COG, thank you for taking the time to listening to the

voices of our community regarding Sharon Hospital.

01:16:16 Mark Hirko: Thank You everyone for allowing us to present our plan and look forward to continuing this engagement

01:16:58 Mark Hirko: I'll be signing off at present

01:17:02 Mark Hirko: thankYou!

01:17:48 Lydia Kruge Moore: Thank you very much for listening to our testimonies today. We very much appreciate your time, consideration, and assistance.

01:20:11 foxrosler: My name is Eileen Fox and I have lived in the northwest corner since 1985. When old Sharon hospital became a for profit hospital I was appointed to the State mandated Sharon Hospital advisory committee and served for 11 years. I attended the ribbon cutting for the opening of the birthing center. Full circle, my daughter, one of the recent transplants from NYC, gave birth to a baby boy in February at Sharon Hospital. Her family is part of the NEW dynamic and NEW demographic of the northwest corner. The Birthing Center must stay open.

01:22:13 Meredith Murphy: My name is Meredith Murphy, I live in Lakeville, CT and I oppose Nuvance's proposed cuts and plan to close Sharon Hospital's Labor & Delivery unit. I gave birth to our first son this past April at Sharon Hospital. The nurses and doctors who cared for me were above and beyond amazing, and helped me through an otherwise complicated and scary experience. We want to continue to grow our family here, but the thought of giving birth at some unknown faraway hospital brings all the fear from my first experience right back. I only want to give birth at Sharon Hospital. I know my many local mom (and future mom) friends feel the same way. We are all devastated at the thought that this amazing unit might close. And as our children grow, we want to be able to count on our local hospital to be at the ready should we ever have an emergency, as it was for my husband during his childhood. We worry that these cuts will lead to further cuts and our entire community will suffer.

01:24:07 Deborah Moore: Thank you to the COG and all the elected officials for being so generous with your time and energy. Be well.

01:46:11 Emily McGoldrick: FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD: My name is Emily McGoldrick and I live in Sharon. I have birth to my daughter at Sharon Hospital on August 1st, 2021. She arrived 2.5 weeks early after my water broke at home. Because the hospital was only 10 minutes away and had doctors and nurses who provided exceptional care, I arrived and delivered my baby safely in a few hours. This was the delivery I had hoped for and had faith Sharon Hospital would provide. My husband and I chose to become pregnant while living full time in Sharon over the past year specifically because we would be able to deliver at this facility, instead of a larger, overcrowded hospital in New York City. (1/2)

01:47:50 lesliemoore: Thank you to the COG and to Maria Horn for your time and energy; and for listening to the concerns written and voiced here. We are depending on you.

01:48:00 Emily McGoldrick: I am confident there are other couples and birthing people who would make this decision if Nuvance put any time and effort into promoting the stellar department instead of doing their best to make it a foregone conclusion that there is not enough demand in the area to reach their revenue goals. Nuvance should be clear about what budget gap they need to fill to keep Sharon Hospital Labor and Deliver open and let the community respond (2/2)