

APPROVED 4/16/2015 MINUTES

WESTERN CONNECTICUT

COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Meeting at Darien Town Hall, 2 Renshaw Road, Darien, CT

MEMBERS ATTENDING

Bethel..... First Selectman Matthew Knickerbocker, Chairman
Bridgewater..... First Selectman Curtis Read
Brookfield..... First Selectman William Tinsley
Danbury..... Mayor Mark Boughton
Darien.....First Selectman Jayme Stevenson, Vice Chairman

Greenwich.....First Selectman Peter Tesei
New Canaan.... Absent
New Fairfield....First Selectman Susan Chapman, Secretary
New Milford.....Mayor Patricia Murphy
Newtown..... First Selectman Patricia Llodra

Norwalk.....Mayor Harry Rilling
Redding.....First Selectman Julia Pemberton
Ridgefield.....First Selectman Rudy Marconi
Sherman.....First Selectman Clay Cope

Stamford.....Mayor David Martin
Weston.....Absent
Westport.....First Selectman James Marpe
Wilton.....Absent

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

State Representative Gail Lavielle representing Wilton, Norwalk and Westport, State Representative Terrie Wood representing Darien and Norwalk, Stamford Chief of Staff Michael Pollard, Darien Selectman Susan Marks, Darien Town Administrator Karl Kilduff, Linda O'Leary of the Darien Selectman's Office.

Also Roxane Fromson of CT DOT, Municipal Services Manager for the Capitol Region Council of Governments Jennifer March-Wackers, Executive Director of the Northwest Hills Council of Governments Richard Lynn, Norwalk Transit District Chief Executive Officer Kim Morton, and HARTransit Service Development Director Richard Schreiner.

Other attendees were Laurie Williamson of Darien, Kevin Webb of the Darien Times, David Deven and John Amavillous of Darien TV 79, Joanne Ferrern of Norwalk, Jo-Anne Horvath of the Norwalk Citizen, Tracey Alston of Eversource, Margaret Wirtenberg of Weston, Jim Cameron of Darien, and from the WestCOG staff Francis Pickering, David Hannon, Sue Prosi, Patricia Payne, Alex Karman, Carl Zimmerman, and Jonathan Chew.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 12:30 PM by Chairman Matt Knickerbocker and a quorum was determined to be present. Jayme Stevenson welcomed the Council to Darien and distributed literature about the Town.

**REGIONAL PURCHASING AND SERVICES THRU
THE CAPITOL REGION COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**

First Selectman Knickerbocker welcomed Ms. Jennifer March-Wackers, the Municipal Services Manager for the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG). Ms. March-Wackers then made a presentation as to the various purchasing and service sharing initiatives available thru CRCOG's Capitol Region Purchasing Council, the goals of which are reduced costs and enhanced services.

Ms. March-Wackers distributed Purchasing Council literature. In so doing she commented on the effectiveness of group purchases and energy contracts, economies of scale in shared software, data storage and virtualizing computer infrastructure.

She remarked that municipalities are able to access Purchasing Council services for differing reasons, not necessarily to take part in all programs. As for state versus regional focus, she stated that the 38 CRCOG municipalities have long maintained an open door policy to other parts of the state for obtaining mutually advantageous economies of scale. Current participation is their own 38 municipalities and another 59 around the state, total 97.

A question and answer period followed the presentation, with discussion of mid-term entry to electricity rate contracts, cost differentials due to a remote goods receiving location, and possible overlaps with CCM programs.

This discussion confirmed that for the six current Purchasing Council members from the WestCOG area, Bridgewater, Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Newtown and Redding, annual dues total to \$10,420. And that the Purchasing Council group rate for an entire COG area would be \$500 per municipality or a lesser \$9,000 for all eighteen.

This would be a substantial service expansion with less overall cost to area municipalities. After additional discussion Ms. March-Wackers was thanked for her informative visit.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Comments were made by Margaret Wirtenberg and Tracy Alston.

Comment was then made by Representative Gail Lavielle, with Representative Terrie Wood contributing to the discussion. She provided an update on WestCOG Legislative Agenda priorities, including New Canaan and Danbury Branch Line improvement plans and affordable housing.

Most of the presentation and the discussion following then focused on proposed car tax and regional tax sharing bills. Rep. Lavielle reported that legislative development with SB1 encompassing these items is a fast moving process, with some provisions moving into other draft bills. It was agreed that SB1131 and SB1136 will be tracked by staff with frequent updates to members.

MINUTES FROM 3/19/2015

After review and on a motion made by Curtis Read and seconded by Susan Chapman, the minutes of the meeting of 3/19/2015 were unanimously approved, with abstentions by David Martin, Matt Knickerbocker, Jim Marpe and Julia Pemberton.

CMAQ GRANT APPLICATIONS

The background for this agenda item was provided by Sue Prosi. She overviewed the CTDOT solicitation for applications thru MPOs to be funded by the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program (CMAQ), stating that this specialized federal grant source funds only those transportation projects that emphasize the maintenance or improvement of air quality.

She further stated that CTDOT requires that CMAQ applications and priorities be approved by the two MPO boards within WestCOG, as well as by the larger WestCOG board itself, these actions prior to the application due date of April 30, 2015. Each MPO is entitled to submit up to three prioritized projects with project costs not to exceed \$3,000,000 federal share, she said.

Ms. Prosi then presented projects and priorities recommended by the South Western Region MPO's CMAQ Working Group as supported by its Transportation Technical Advisory Group, with formal MPO endorsement scheduled for later this date. A summary of the three applications was presented:

- **Priority 1: Stamford Signal System Upgrade** and Synchronization \$3,000,000 CMAQ, \$1,000,000 Municipal, \$4,000,000 Total.
- **Priority 2: Norwalk Signal System Upgrade** Phase 3, \$3,000,000 CMAQ, \$48,000 Municipal, \$3,048,000 Total.
- **Priority 3: Greenwich Signal Optimization** and Intersection Improvements for the Glenville Street - Glenville Road Corridor, \$2,000,000 CMAQ Total.

Dave Hannon then presented the two Housatonic Valley MPO projects and priorities as endorsed at an MPO meeting in Danbury earlier this date:

- **Priority 1: New Milford Signal Control** for combined Routes 67 and 202 (Bridge Street), \$1,300,000 CMAQ Total.
- **Priority 2: HARTransit, Commuter Bus Service** for western Danbury, \$239,323 CMAQ Total.

There was discussion. The mayors of Stamford, Norwalk and New Milford spoke to the merits of their projects.

A request was then made for WestCOG to endorse the CMAQ applications and priorities as presented. Then on a motion made by Jayme Stevenson and seconded by David Martin, the five CMAQ applications and two sets of subregional priorities were unanimously endorsed.

AUTHORIZATION FOR THREE AUDITS

Raising an internal administrative matter, Francis Pickering requested authorization to proceed with three Letters of Engagement with the audit firm of Henry, Raymond & Thompson (HR&T). He noted that this firm had been auditor for both HVCEO and SWRPA up to the date of merger.

As the merger become effective at the midpoint of each previous organization's fiscal year audit cycle, three six month audits will soon be required by the state, he said. Accordingly, WestCOG has received HR&T proposals and prices for the following three six month audits:

- Six Month Audit for HVCEO for 7/1/2014 - 12/31/2014 at \$12,000

- Six Month Audit for SWRPA for 7/1/2014 - 12/31/2014 at \$13,000
- Six Month Audit for WestCOG for 1/1/2015 - 6/30/2015 at \$15,000

The request to authorize the audits and approve their funding was then discussed. Patty Payne provided background on some of the questions raised. Then on a motion made by Susan Chapman and seconded by Curtis Read, authorization for staff to proceed with the Letters of Engagement with HR&T was unanimously approved.

REVISIONS TO EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

Francis Pickering reviewed this issue, having identified two difficulties within the new WestCOG Employee Handbook. The first concern is the text stating the "Federal Family Medical Leave Act only covers organizations with fifty or more employees." This is incorrect.

The other issue is that the Employee Handbook is inconsistent in the treatment of paid time off. While part-time staff may carry vacation time past June 30 into a new fiscal year, full-time employees lose all accrued time on July 1. This presents a barrier for full-time employees seeking to take vacations during the summer.

Specific language to remedy these problems was then presented. There were questions and then discussion of the proposed changes.

Then on a motion made by Clay Cope and seconded by Pat Llodra, the two revisions to the Employee Handbook were unanimously approved.

NORTHWEST HILLS COG TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Francis Pickering continued the discussion of this item from the March meeting, when it was noted that the adjacent Northwest Hills Council of Governments wished to explore subcontracting with WestCOG to prepare its Northwest Hills Regional Transportation Plan.

Such cooperation would enable all of western Connecticut to approach transportation in a coordinated manner, he said. A proposed work plan attached to the agenda was reviewed.

The Executive Director of the Northwest Hills Council of Governments, Richard Lynn, then spoke to the proposed interregional cooperation and how the contracted services proposal had developed.

There was a considerable discussion of this proposal, some members stating that as WestCOG is in its formative stages there are higher priorities for use of staff time. There was additional discussion.

There was then a motion made by Curtis Read and seconded by Pat Llodra to authorize staff to proceed to the draft contract stage with the Northwest Hills COG for preparation of a regional transportation plan, subject to WestCOG oriented staff tasks retaining priority in use of staff time.

With 15 members present 8 were in favor and 7 opposed, so the motion carried. Those opposed were David Martin, Jayme Stevenson, Harry Rilling, Jim Marpe, Mark Boughton, Susan Chapman and Clay Cope.

CONSOLIDATION OF TWO OFFICES

Rudy Marconi spoke to this issue, informing members of office space opportunities including 4,000 square feet in the Branchville Section of Ridgefield, a central location in the new COG area and with nearby passenger rail service.

There was then discussion of the scheduling of office consolidation in relation to other coordination priorities such as staff work integration and web site creation. It was agreed that the Executive Committee will recommend priorities for these matters.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Francis Pickering provided a legislative update. The discussion continued from the public participation section earlier on the tax proposals. After considerable additional discussion, members agreed with Rep. Gail Lavielle's recommendation to file multiple letters of testimony, rather than one WestCOG letter, to maximize impact upon busy legislators.

To coordinate the central arguments in testimonies, it was agreed that Jayme Stevenson and Francis Pickering will prepare a text of common elements to forward to COG members for their use in structuring their remarks.

QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT

Patty Payne presented the 1/1/2015 - 3/31/2015 quarterly financial report, filling in for Treasurer Gail Weinstein who was unable to attend.

There was a discussion, including questions concerning the burden fringe and overhead rate, decisions as to investment of surplus, and format for cash flow statements.

NEXT MEETING

The Chairman noted that the next WestCOG meeting is scheduled to be held in Newtown on May 21, 2015. Jayme Stevenson advised that as CT DOT Commissioner Redeker may attend that meeting, a more central location would be preferred.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, on a motion made by Clay Cope and seconded by Susan Chapman the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 PM.