

# WCEDD Meeting Minutes

January 13 at 1:00 pm | Web Conference

## Members

- Rudy Marconi, Chair Town of Ridgefield
- Lynn Vanderslice, Vice Chair Town of Wilton
- Hal Kurfehs Coldwell Banker Commercial
- Lisa Scails Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut
- Andrea Rynn Western CT Health Network
- David Souder Stamford UConn
- Helen Brickfield Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce
- Jackie Lightfield Norwalk 2.0
- Jennie Ripps The Owl's Brew
- Jessica Vonashek City of Norwalk
- Marie Allen SWCT Agency on Aging
- PJ Prunty Danbury Chamber of Commerce
- Tom Long The Workplace
- Tracey Alston Eversource
- Janice Town of Bethel
- Zayed Rodrigues Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Jason Patlis with the Norwalk Aquarium presented their EDA Grant Application.

Francis Pickering, Mike Towle, and Betsy Paynter were in attendance with WestCOG.

## Meeting Call to Order

Meeting called to order by Rudy Marconi at 1:03

## Public Participation

No public participation.

## Welcome First Selectwoman Lynne Vanderslice as Vice Chair

Thank you to Westport's First Selectman, Jim Marpe for serving as the WCEDD Vice Chair since its inception.

Lynne Vanderslice is the First Selectwoman of Wilton, CT and the current WCEDD Vice Chair

Rudy Marconi welcomes Lynne Vanderslice to the WCEDD council. Lynne greets the WCEDD

## Action Item Review

Rudy discussed last meetings action items.

1. Culture Map Request. WestCOG plans to perform this task within the CEDS update process or with Sustainable CT Fellows.
2. ARPA Fund Information. Details covered in the grants section below.

## Welcome the New board of WCEDD members

Introductions of all members, what organizations and sectors they support

Rudy and Betsy welcomed the new board of WCEDD members, Betsy provided a quick overview of who is on the board, names, titles, and organizations.

## November 2021 Meeting Minutes - APPROVED

Hal Kurfehs motioned for approval of the minutes as is. Motion was seconded by Jackie Lightfield. The minutes were unanimously approved. New WCEDD Council Members abstained.

## Maritime Aquarium ARPA Tourism Project - APPROVED

Jason Patlis, Executive Director from the Norwalk Aquarium, provided a description of their EDA project/application under EDA's ARPA Tourism Grant. The project has three components: 1. build a new exhibit tied to the local saltmarsh. 2. Virtual educational programming to bring students in. 3. Outreach and Public Engagement to bring the public in. The project is aligned with EDA requirements (Economic Resilience, Equity, Workforce Development, Technology) and WestCOG's CEDS (Goal 6-2 A Positive Regional Identity).

Rudy Marconi asks who the visitors of the aquarium are 60% CT and 40% out of state.

Rudy Marconi asks this project draws additional activity into the region. Visitors are drawn into the SONO downtown. Also, the aquarium would be developing additional partnerships with neighboring agencies.

Lynn Vanderslice asks what the long-term job growth tied to this project. There will be staff increases through the Aquarium directly.

Jackie Lightfield makes a motion to approve the Norwalk Aquarium's project application for the EDA Tourism Grant application as presented. Tracey Alston seconds the motion. The project is approved unanimously. Jessica Vonashek abstains.

## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Betsy Paynter provided an overview of the CEDS update process.

Tom Long requests that Health Care and the Cannabis Industry to be considered as Sectors during the update. **Betsy will follow up with Tom Long to get contacts.**

Hal Kurfehs recommends using the previous model to handle moderation of focus group meeting

Jackie Lightfield recommended that the fin-tech industry along the Rt 7 Corridor is considered for the focus groups, not just the Stamford region. **Betsy will follow up with Jackie for recommended business contacts.**

Lisa Scails recommends that focus groups use standardized formats and questions. A lot of thought went into the questions being asked of the focus groups in the original drafting of the CEDS.

Lisa Scails recommends the update considers the definition they use for the "arts."

Lisa Scails recommends WestCOG creates a flyer or handout for her network to distribute to the Arts Ecosystem. And to consider capping the number of members as this is an active group.

Lisa Scails recommends the CEDS update process to utilize existing datasets available and tie it into the update.

Jennie Repps asks about the type of contacts requested for the focus groups. An owner or a finance person would be good. Decision makers or those who know the impacts on the industry from the economic environment.

Hal Kurfehs recommends focus groups to range between 10-12. With no more than 15.

## Grants Update

Francis spoke on grant funding regarding the region. Mark Boughton is tasked to oversee 5.4 billion in transportation investment projects. This is an opportunity for infrastructure projects in the region. There may be an additional 1.6 billion dollars for communities to apply for in competitive dollars.

Rudy Marconi asks if ARPA funds can be used as matching funds? Francis points it this is not yet signed into law yet.

FEMA requested projects from CT and 300+ projects were submitted. FEMA is working through this mass list of projects to assign projects to recommended funding streams.

The DECD uses a list of distressed municipalities to determine eligible applicants. This method is problematic as it disqualifies all the municipalities of WestCOG, which has distressed population, but cannot be recognized due to the disparity between household income within municipalities within the region. WestCOG will request other methods are used to determine eligibility.

Regional Broadband Study was put out. A selection committee must be appointed. If interested, please reach out to Francis.

WestCOG is putting a grant in for an agriculture viability study. We applied before under RPIP and will be applying again for a regional viability grant.

## Next Generation Regional Sector Partnership

Francis Pickering provided an update. Advance CT is funding these partnerships. Bringing C suite personnel interested in building a regional identity through collaboration. Meetings have begun but principal focus is on transportation, talent, infrastructure, and developing a sense of place, that is regionally and nationally desirable.

PJ Prunty is working with the NWCT Workforce Board on a Health Care Sector Partnership in the northern CT with very similar targets.

## Other Business

Francis Pickering shares the CEDS will be incorporating a component on resilience.

Rudy Marconi, share he is observing a reduced number of applicants for job opening in the municipal sector. Andrea Rynn shares this is also occurring in the health care sector. Tom Long shares that now 1 in 7 jobs posted offer remote work. Tracey Alston shares that workers are seeking more flexibility in their work places.

## **Upcoming Meetings**

April 14, 2022 @ 1pm

## **Adjournment**

Lisa Scails motions to adjourn. Hal Kurfehs seconds. Meeting adjourned at 2:05