

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: April 22, 2020
TO: CT Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations
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SUBJECT: ACIR Reopening and Recovery Memo for Towns and Cities in CT

At the April 3, 2020 ACIR videoconference, we heard of steps to look for solutions that towns and cities are arriving at to deal with the current COVID-19 public health emergency. Volunteers will be working within three areas to gather and digest these solutions for review and placement on the ACIR website and for consideration after review on the Governor's COVID-19 statewide website.

Recovering from the COVID-19 emergency will require a collective effort from State, municipalities and private entities. These will need to be ongoing partnerships to address issues in the immediate reopening phase, in the recovery phase and in the long-term – which may take months, if not years.

An effective long-term reopening and recovery strategy should not focus on redeveloping operations to its previous condition, but rather take the opportunity to provide improved services for residents and businesses.

Long-term recovery planning provides an opportunity to consider a holistic approach towards more cost effective, innovative and streamlined operations that before may not have either been feasible in the past.

Two specific areas for follow up emerged out of the April 3 videoconference:

- Ways to mobilize resources to help with current or potential vacancies in key positions in city and town government and;
- Considerations on moving from the COVID-19 emergency mobilization phase to reopening and recovery from the COVID-19 emergency in town and city service to the public.

The first item on vacancies was covered in a conference call on April 9, 2020 and the observations of that group will be shared in a separate memo for consideration by the ACIR. To discuss ways of moving to the reopening and recovery phases for towns and cities a videoconference was held on April 8, 2020.

This memo is made of these sections and two attachments:

- Reopening and recovery issues
- Attachment 1: Background List of Actions to Provide General Government Support to Residents of The State
- Attachment 2: ICMA webinar on Moving Beyond the Current Crisis: A Plan for Reopening Our Cities

Reopening and Recovery Issues

Timing and detailed phasing of reopening large-scale face to face local government services will be based on public health advice through the Governor's task force and will require several efforts at the local level. The following are some suggested areas to consider in the area of reopening and recovery of town and city services.

The likely elements in a **reopening** are:

- **Reopening and Phasing Plan.** Declaration by the Governor on the timing and phasing of reopening based on scientific guidance. Need a phasing plan for service re-establishment based on a plan of service.
- **COVID-19 Testing.** High frequency COVID-19 testing for appropriate management of quarantine.
- **Contact tracing** for those found to be positive for COVID-019 for appropriate management.
- **Safe public service locations** for the public and for employees using appropriate tools in the workplace. CT DECD safe workforce rules were issued April 7, 2020: <https://bit.ly/34zLdmp> .

Beyond the reopening there will need to be several steps:

- Expediting funds from several sources to local governments
- Streamline processes and modernize provision of local public services
- General government supports to residents of the state

Expediting Existing Funds to Local Government

Cash flow issues for towns and cities to operate during reopening will emerge and be important to address for some time. Measures that could assist include making the ECS make October payment in August. Tax Anticipation Notes market capacity and regulations must be reviewed to assure a nationwide market is available.

Town Survey on Delays. There is a need to create an urgent process to speed up existing grant funds to towns and cities. It is our understanding that there will shortly be a survey of towns and cities on procedural delays on grants and approvals in the pipeline. This information is critical to disclose where the opportunities for a rapid response in getting funds out into the State exist.

Grant Writing Capacity at the Town and City Level. Towns and cities will need grant writers and administrators to take advantage of Federal, and perhaps State and private sector grant programs. If existing staff is overwhelmed with current responsibilities, will be hard to generate grant requests on a timely basis. This may be an opportunity to bring back retired public administrators to assist or provide funds for consultants.

Some specific areas requiring attention include:

- Identify grants, or resources, already funded and in some stage of solicitation and/or approval. One specific example: Get Volkswagen Settlement disbursed.
- Streamline grant awards, approvals, and payments. Getting CT grant forms and applications online and being able to submit electronically.
- Streamline required processes for bidding and grant administration
- Require towns and cities to commit to quick local approvals and prioritization and completion within a year.
- Waive, or reduce grant match requirements of pending grants.
- Reallocate to projects ready to go such as a backlog of Virtual Net Metering projects awaiting approval due to caps, also community solar projects are stalled.
- Consider a minimum grant per community to assure some impact with balance based on a formula.

Specific grant programs suggestions are as follows:

- LOCIP: Allow towns to reallocate projects which can be done quickly by vote of Council or Selectmen (instead of Town Meeting). Towns must use of lose and balances over \$100,000 by June 30, 2021 deadline
- CDBG Small Cities: CT DOH must award grants by June 30 to allow summer construction in 2020.
- Crumbling Foundations backlog. Approve additional funding to allow private sector construction to address backlog and applications pending.
- Pegpetia grants were just awarded. Assure quick approval and implementation of them.
- Libraries grants. Waive, or reduce the local match requirement.
- Town Aid Roads: Require timely expenditure and when appropriate use of Town Aid Roads: Require timely expenditure of funds and when appropriate use of private sector vendors instead of paying for Town forces.
- Local bridge program. Expedite approval of local and federal grants.

- LOTCIP. Require Councils of Governments to use consistent review process and get state priority on approvals.
- Community Connectivity Grants. Expedite encroachment permits.
- Municipal projects: Require towns to use expedited process.
- RPIP grants: CT OPM to distribute funding for COG and collaborative projects focused on recovery and long-term local government efficiency projects
- Get STEAP grants awarded. Funds are available but no application process has been announced. There are options: Consider allowing a percentage of prior applications to be funded, with updates in scopes or develop a one-time funding process for all or the remainder of funds such as using TAR, or LOCIP formulas or a simple per capita grant to eligible communities.
- Remove barriers to Indefinite quantity contracts. Expand range of areas eligible for use and reduce restrictions in state law and rule.

Consider utilizing available state and federal funding to make grants available to municipalities in six targeted areas:

- **Technology:** Expand broad band access, document management and electronic town hall function, address digital divide and remote learning not covered by other Federal grants.
- **Energy Efficiency in buildings:** Accelerate school and town building energy facilities, and equipment efficiency funding and use in conjunction with utilities programs.
- **Environment:** Stormwater management including treatment systems, sustainability projects including micro grids and de-icing alternatives
- **Economic Development:** Fund CT Main Street program as a regional grant to help with small business outreach and micro loans for marketing and web and ecommerce updates. Loans for groups like NE Economic Alliance for micro business loans. Ask towns to look a small business needs for small capital projects, parking, wayfinding signage, and Solar LED crosswalks. Fire code improvement, special marketing events and accessibility grants.
- **Housing:** Support attainable housing projects.
- **Recreation:** Expand and enhance ready to go recreation projects which promote social distancing and exercise such as trails and bikeways. Promote electronic trail maps.

Streamline Processes and Modernize Provision of Local Public Services

The COVID-19 emergency is an opportunity to make progress and not just recover from the current emergency. One element to consider would be a grand bargain with local employees on use of technology in local and regional services. The goal would be to have lower overhead with more available funding going to direct resident facing services. The coming state and local employee retirement wave coming in the next 36

months and the tight supply in some occupational categories suggest advanced IT as one of the action steps.

A core two-pronged effort would be to accelerate use of advanced IT to facilitate better resident facing services as well as enhanced back office services in HR, finance etc. and hold harmless for current employees: redeploy, retrain, upskill for accelerating technology.

Grand bargain with local employees (Management and Unions) on technology upgrades addressing training and job retention.

Accelerate use of advanced IT to facilitate better resident facing services as well as enhanced back office services in HR, finance etc. and hold harmless for current employees: redeploy, retrain, upskill for accelerating technology.

The overall goal would be to have less overhead and more funding for direct resident facing services. There is an additional challenge of a public sector retirement wave in the next 36 months and a tightening labor market after that in some occupational categories.

Some other specific areas to consider include:

- Indefinite quantity contracts: Expand range of areas eligible for use and reduce restrictions.
- Consider modernizing Prevailing wage process to simplify paper processes to reduce overhead and therefore broaden to more vendors. Increase threshold for renovations.
- Consider improvements to CHRO process to speed awards and improve compliance. Also consider a better job matching system for identifying sub-contractors. Consider a one year opt out program where contracts under \$500,000 could require the main contractor to pay 1% of contract into a CHRO training program to build skills and create startups.

Targeting New State and Federal Funds and temporary changes

- Create a task force to of State/Federal/local folks to identify new resources and provide details and technical assistance in application process. Consider hiring a grant management firm to assist in the process.
- Work collaboratively to help write and/or tweak grants to meet pressing state needs. Consider beefing up Washington Lobby strength to get money for CT needs with less administrative burden. Maybe push for Block grants versus Categorical grants to allow for flexibility. Grants like CDBG could be increased but the temporary funds could be for up to moderate income impact without the 51% low income impact requirement.

Long-Term Recovery Efforts.

CT DEMHS Emergency Support Function (ESF) 14 is tasked with long term recovery efforts. The goal is for there to be a broad discussion of potential initiatives that we should be acting on to boost recovery and understand where the first two tranches of Federal Stimulus may leave gaps that we should be advocating for in the next Federal Stimulus package or where the State may play a role.

Attachment 1:

Background List of Actions to Provide General Government Support to Residents of The State

The basic framework of the groups is outlined below, with the participating agencies:

Maximize access to federal programs (OTG, DECD, DOL)

- Emergency paid leave
- Forgivable small business loans
- Employee retention credit
- **Potential next step: design outreach and marketing campaign. Possible Governor delegation press conference**

Unemployment benefits (OTG, OPM, DOL)

- Executive Order on experience rating
- Executive Order on Shared Work at 80%
- **Potential next step: Discuss what is possible by EO vs. legislation, and prioritization given other initiatives at CT DOL**

Workers Compensation: Add eligibility for (OTG, OPM, CID, DOL, DAS, WCC)

- Workers in high-risk occupations who get COVID-19
- Workers who are verifiably exposed at work
- Need to limit medical costs
- **Potential next step: Stakeholders take off-line. Not sure what, if any, unintended consequences there are here (financial, precedential, or otherwise)**

- Utilities (DEEP)

- Working on waiving of interest and fees
- EEF: protecting contractors and investing in energy efficiency
- Building the offshore wind ecosystem
- DEEP additional ideas
- **Potential next step: DEEP and Stakeholders take off-line to continue to implement.**

- Evictions, foreclosures, bank garnishments, etc. (OTG, OPM, DOB, DAS)

- CT is an outlier in not imposing a duty to mitigate on commercial landlords whose tenants break their lease
- State agencies have stopped collection efforts and are not issuing new garnishments, levies, etc.
- Working on EO language for further protections (including for commercial clients)

- Mortgages: DOB working on an announcement with banks, credit unions on how they will help customers with non-federally backed mortgages.
- **Potential next step: OTG driven working group to come up with recommendations for best practices**
- SNAP and Medicaid are key social safety net programs. Review the following: (OTG, OPM, DSS, OHS)
 - Application process, backlog, how to get money out faster, recertification, presumptive eligibility for Medicaid
 - How long does someone have to wait after becoming unemployed to become eligible?
 - Any changes to program structure to make program more generous
 - SNAP and school lunch, waiver for hot food, eligibility for and work search requirements for single adults
 - **Potential next step: DSS driven working group to come up with recommendations for best practices/implementation**
- Encourage individuals to update incomes so that they can qualify for more benefits: (OTG, AHCT, DSS, DOH)
 - Access Health
 - SNAP
 - HCV/Section 8
 - **Potential next step: DSS/DOH driven working group to come up with recommendations for best practices/implementation**
- Municipal: allow towns the ability to delay property taxes for affected individuals/businesses (OTG, OPM)
 - **Potential next step: Discuss implications, including precedent and potential unintended consequences, at the state level**
- Workforce development: accelerate investment in workforce while many workers are at home (GWC, SDE, OHE, DOL, DECD)
 - Adult ed / remedial education
 - Enrichment / college credit for high schoolers
 - Training for K-12 teachers, particularly in high-need subjects or national board certification
 - Training for state employees for high-need skills
 - Training by Fortune 500 companies

Attachment 2: Moving Beyond the Current Crisis: A Plan for Reopening Our Cities

On April 8, 2020 the International City County Management Association hosted a webinar entitled: **Moving Beyond the Current Crisis: A Plan for Reopening Our Cities** by Richard Florida. The presentation link may be found at:

<https://crcogfoundation->

my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/lwray_crcog_org/Ea_qCYLPyWVKq72SSBNK0v4Bn0XcXcEfatt0oIJdLLg8yQ?e=f4DMat

Here are a few summary points related to the Richard Florida presentation. He suggested we consider three phases in the COVID-19 response for cities and towns:

- **Mobilization** (lockdowns, medical and economic)
- **Reopening** (Prepare to reopen safely and securely)
- **Recovering** (position economies for longer-run recovery)

Richard Florida then went on to cover steps were presented for city and town managers to take in the reopening and recovery phases:

- Pandemic-proof airports
- Prepare transport infrastructure
- Ready open and public spaces
- Prepare large-scale civic assets
- Enlist and ready anchor institutions
- Assess your economy
- Ensure main street survives
- Mobilize the arts and the creative economy
- Upgrade jobs for frontline service workers
- Protect less-advantaged communities

These steps may serve as a partial checklist of activities going forward for towns and cities as we move through the public health emergency.

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