

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Friday, September 10, 2021

An audio recording is available at:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/ACIR/Meetings/2021/2021-09-10_ACIR_Audio.mp32

Members present: Kyle Abercrombie, Debra Borrero (*alt. for G. Florio*), Maureen Brummett, Sen. Stephen Cassano, John Elsesser, John Filchak, Betsy Gara, Leah Grenier (*alt. for K. Demsey*), Rick Hart, Martin Heft, Marcia Leclerc, Brian O'Connor (*alt. for R. Thomas*), James O'Leary, Francis Pickering, Lon Seidman, Brendan Sharkey (Chair), Dave Steuber (*alt. for L. Bronin*), Bob Valentine, Lyle Wray (Vice-Chair)

Members absent: James Albis, Carl Amento, Sam Gold, Brian Greenleaf, Neil O'Leary

Member vacancies: Municipal official: Town of 20,000 – 60,000 population

Other participants: Sheila McKay, Steve Mednick, Meghan Portfolio, Rich Roberts, Margaret Wirtenberg

OPM staff: Matt Pafford, Bruce Wittchen

1. Call to order and overview of telemeeting procedures

Commission chair Sharkey noted that CT_N is covering this meeting and introduced himself, Commission vice-chair Wray, and staff member Bruce Wittchen. He also described meeting procedures.

2. Approval of the minutes of the 8/6/2021 meeting.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the [minutes of the August 6, 2021 meeting](#) and the motion was approved unanimously.

3. ACIR reports

- a. Session mandate report (due 11/15/2021)
- b. Mandate compendium supplement (due 1/15/2022)

Bruce Wittchen provided an update on his ongoing review of 2021 legislation for these reports and noted the group's previous interest in reconsidering its approach to mandate reporting. He recommended the group give that more thought after completing the other work it is currently doing but welcomed any suggestions.

4. Study of remote meeting access/voting required by Sec. 154 of [JSS PA 21-2 \(due 2/1/2022\)](#)

- a) Report on 9/3/2021 organizational meeting and next steps

Commission chair Sharkey said the group held an organizational meeting last Friday and he provided an overview of the state's current allowances for local meetings and the assignment given to the ACIR in Sec. 154 of [JSS PA 21-2](#). He said the attendees group discussed desired outcomes and wants the chairs of the legislative committees of cognizance and the Office of the Governor to speak at the next meeting. The group wants to learn what the bill proponents are looking for and what to emphasize in this work. They also discussed breaking down the subject matter into separate channels to be pursued in separate meetings.

Commission chair Sharkey said he will prepare a work plan for the effort. He said the goal is to complete the meeting process by the end of the year so that the month of January is available for completing the report. There was no further discussion.

5. CT Local Government of the Future Initiative

- a. New report on Home Rule (see [draft home rule definition](#))

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned that the group had met 8/31 and reviewed the draft home rule definition prepared by municipal attorney Steve Mednick. He added that they lost one of the two people expected to speak about municipal finance issues of home rule, but the finance director of Waterbury was there to represent the [Government Finance Officers Assoc.](#) (GFOA). He added that the next meeting might focus on education.

Commission member O'Leary said he wanted to raise the same concern he had expressed at that meeting: that the ACIR is only nibbling around the edges of what he believes a Local Government of the Future (LGF) initiative should look like. He said the focus should be on the big issues of property taxes and education.

Commission chair Sharkey said the ACIR is on the subject of home rule because of widespread misperceptions of what it is. He said many people think they have independent control at the local level and need to be aware of the limits. He asked Commission member O'Leary if he considers home rule to be a worthwhile topic and if it needs to be more focused.

Commission member O'Leary said the effort began with how home rule affects what municipalities can do now and can do in the future, such as how it raises funds and pays for education. Commission chair Sharkey said the ACIR is looking at the boundaries that municipalities must operate within.

Commission member Filchak said he sees this study and what Commission member O'Leary suggests as being parallel tracks. Currently, they are putting home rule in context, but the LGF effort began before this and will continue after. The home rule report will be a primer. It's narrow, but the LGF is broad and will incorporate that.

Commission member Elsesser said he agrees with that perspective and added that he thinks Atty Mednick's report does that. He recommended that a teaser paragraph be added regarding how home rule influences bigger change, such as improving efficiency. Commission chair Sharkey said they should revisit finance and the impact of home rule.

Commission member Pickering said Atty Mednick's report is good, but said the ACIR should include a statement regarding the problem it sees and how home rule factors in. Commission chair Sharkey asked Commission member Pickering to provide that and there was further discussion of the ACIR's approach.

Commission member Cassano highlighted that the Republican and Democratic parties have different perspectives on home rule and Commission chair Sharkey agreed. He said the objective is to provide a report to the [Planning & Development](#) (PD) Committee on what the state constitution does and does not allow.

Commission member Cassano highlighted the need to include Republican legislators in that discussion, including [Rep. Dubitsky](#) and [Sen. Minor](#). He said there has to be a workable definition and there was further discussion of the best approach for this effort. Atty. Mednick encouraged the group to have that dialogue sooner and there was a discussion of the benefit of addressing the

dichotomy of views regarding home rule. Commission chair Sharkey said he can talk offline with Commission member Cassano about arranging that.

Commission member Filchak said he also agrees that this should be done sooner, given the differing views, and said January would be too late. Commission chair Sharkey asked Commission member Cassano if it would be possible to bring together people of different mindsets, perhaps as a meeting of the PD Committee. Commission member Cassano said the committee includes a number of conservatives who look to protect the interests of small towns and he will try to organize this.

Commission chair Sharkey said the next LGF subcommittee meeting will focus on applications of home rule in education and mentioned Commission member's Seidman's interest. Commission member Seidman said a number of school board members will be interested in participating. There was a discussion of impediments and controversies that school districts face and Commission member Seidman noted that remote learning provides an opportunity for cross-district learning. Commission member Sharkey said he will reach out to Commission member Seidman to organize this and invited others to help set this up. He also thanked Commission member O'Leary for raising his concern about the approach.

6. Other Old Business

a. Update: UConn & UGA policy studies

Commission chair Sharkey provided an overview of the previous meeting's discussion and of the move of the [CT Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy](#) (IMRP) from CCSU to UConn. Commission vice-chair Wray mentioned that the IMRP is involved in an upcoming webinar on youth automobile theft and that a presentation on cannabis equity by the [IMRP's Ken Barone](#) will follow. Commission vice-chair Wray said he will circulate invitations.

b. Federal infrastructure funding and [Governor's recommendations](#) re. ARPA funding

Commission chair Sharkey spoke of the potential for accessing [American Rescue Plan Act](#) (ARPA) funds for research. Commission vice chair Wray said UConn will be included in his COG's request for [US Economic Development Administration](#) (US EDA) research center funding and pointed out that the state is not submitting a competing application. He mentioned conversations with UConn and New Haven and provided further background. He recommended developing a list of potential issues to address, noting that should be done in the next 4-6 weeks, and also recommended that the ACIR invite Prof. Alkadry of UConn's [Dept. of Public Policy](#) to speak to the group every six months.

Commission chair Sharkey said the ACIR will need more bandwidth or to align with another institution to do its work. Commission member Filchak mentioned last month's discussion of the state proposal for the use of ARPA funds and the [2020 Task Force](#) report's recommendation to establish a government efficiency unit at OPM. He said that would have a cost of \$2 million and added that such an initiative needs to be housed at high level in state government. There was a discussion of possible approaches and Commission vice chair Wray said the Governor's transition team report also made that recommendation.

Commission member Filchak made a motion to submit that recommendation to the Governor and legislature. The motion was not seconded. Commission member Heft noted that ARPA funding cannot be used for hiring new permanent staff and said an alternative would be to hire a consultant. Commission vice chair Wray said another option is to use UConn for core staff and to bring in contractors or consultants when needed, noting that it would not be necessary to hire a permanent labor economist for an only occasional need.

Commission member Filchak said he disagrees with that alternative. He believes the entity needs to have the nimbleness of the legislature's former [Program Review & Investigation](#) (PRI) Committee and said that would not be possible from UConn. A consultant can be a bridge while building permanent capacity at OPM.

c. Plans for 2022 Legislative session

Commission chair Sharkey said the preceding discussion is a bridge to agenda item 6c and said the ACIR had success with a focused legislative proposal last year. What should be the legislative request for 2022? Should it be a long-term commitment at OPM with an ARPA bridge? Commission alternate O'Connor pointed out that the state's budget analysis for next year is happening now and said they can work on the ARPA aspect separately.

Commission member Cassano mentioned the possibility of sitting down with the Governor to discuss this. Commission member Heft said the Governor would likely include key staff and OPM Secretary McCaw. He also mentioned the conversation Commission chair Sharkey had with the Governor regarding the proposal for the 2021 session. Commission vice chair Wray noted that he and the Governor had served on the IMRP when he did, so has personal knowledge in this area.

Commission member Cassano said he will bring this up with the Governor and Commission chair Sharkey said he will be in touch. Commission member Filchak restated his prior motion to put forward a recommendation to provide \$2 million of funding for a government efficiency unit at OPM as described in Priority 3 of the 2020 task force report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously, with Commission member Heft abstaining.

Commission member Filchak said he did not mention it previously to avoid confusing the issue, but he would like to see the PRI Committee recreated at OPM. He said the IMRP provides value, but there will be more value to the COGs if the effort is based at OPM. He mentioned MA's approach through the [Division of Local Services](#) housed in its Dept. of Revenue.

Commission member Wray noted that the IMRP's focus narrowed over time and said the key is in how topics are selected. Commission member Filchak mentioned UConn's former [Institute for Public Service](#) (IPS) and said the IMRP's work has not been as valuable to his towns as the IPS's had been. Commission vice chair Wray said the key is in what an organization chooses to study and whether it is done well. He pointed the [Federal Reserve of Boston](#) as an example of an organization that chooses good topics for its studies and does them well.

Commission member O'Leary said this approach will have the greatest impact on the Governor and legislature. The academic ivory tower does not influence them as much and the work should be done by those who are respected by those who have to act on it.

7. New business

There was no new business

8. Other municipal, regional, or state matters for ACIR consideration (if any)

There was no further discussion.

9. Additional Public Comments

There were no additional public comments.

10. Next meeting

Commission chair Sharkey read the dates of upcoming meetings:

- To be determined
 - Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2021, 10:30 am
 - Friday, Oct. 1, 2021, 10:30 am
- Study group on municipal meeting formats
Subcommittee:
Full ACIR

11. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:53.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM

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