

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Friday, April 1, 2021

An audio recording is available at: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/ACIR/Meetings/2022/2022-04-01_ACIR_Audio.mp3

Members present: Kyle Abercrombie, Luke Bronin, Maureen Brummett, John Elsesser, John Filchak, Greg Florio, Sam Gold, Martin Heft, Karl Kilduff, James O’Leary, Francis Pickering, Lon Seidman, Brendan Sharkey (Chair), Ron Thomas, Mike Walsh

Members not present: Carl Amento, Sen. Stephen Cassano, Kathy Demsey, Brian Greenleaf, Harrison Nantz, Neil O’Leary, Troy Raccuia

Other participants: Antoine Campbell, Todd Carusillo, Matt Hart, Sheila McKay, Steve Mednick, Richard Porth, Rich Roberts, Margaret Wirtenberg

Member vacancies: Nominated by COST: Municipal official: Town of <10,000 population
Nominated by CCM: Municipal official: Town of 20,000 – 60,000 population
Nominated by CT-COG: Representative of Councils of Governments

OPM staff: Bruce Wittchen

1. Call to order and overview of telemeeting procedures

Commission chair Sharkey called the meeting to order at 10:35, noting that a quorum of members was not yet present. He mentioned that Lyle Wray no longer is a member following his retirement and pointed out that the group currently lacks a co-chair. He also explained remote meeting protocols.

2. Approval of the [minutes of the March 4, 2022 meeting](#).

Approval of the draft minutes was postponed until a quorum was present. At that time, a motion was made and seconded to approve the draft minutes and the motion was approved unanimously.

3. Membership update, if any

Bruce Wittchen said listed the current vacancies and said the nominees are Stratford Mayor Laura Hoydick for CCM’s position, Harwinton First Selectman Michael Criss for COST’s, and CRCOG Executive Director Matt Hart for CT-COG’s. Commission member Heft described his recent discussion with the Governor’s Office about the process.

4. ACIR regular reports

- ACIR Annual Report and 2022 work plan (no due date, target is July)
- ACIR Session Mandates Report (due November 15)
 - [Potential addition to ACIR mandate reporting](#)

Bruce Wittchen said the group decided last month to schedule the annual report and work plan so that the work plan can include any assignments resulting from legislation. He said the group also asked for a brief description of possible changes to mandates reporting, so he included the linked document. He explained that members have discussed the potential for doing a deeper dive into a sample of mandates each year. The intent would be to compare actual impacts with what was predicted when legislation was passed and evaluate how impacts vary with the size of municipalities and with characteristics of local government.

5. CT Local Government of the Future initiative

- Possible work for subcommittee
 - Intergovernmental issues re emergency managements system

Commission chair Sharkey said this topic was discussed at the recent subcommittee meeting and asked Commission member O’Leary to describe the meeting. Commission member O’Leary said the subcommittee discussed the emergency management system (EMS) at its 2/22 meeting and provided a brief overview (see [draft subcommittee meeting notes](#)). Commission member Elsesser pointed out the connection to the state’s [Enhanced 911](#) initiative and described recent personnel changes, an upcoming flyover for mapping, and pointed out improved emergency communications within the state and with neighboring states.

- [Two 2022 topics for LGF Subcommittee](#)
 - Municipal data collection
 - Maximizing federal funding

Commission chair Sharkey outlined the process leading to the identification of the two topics described in the linked document. He said key questions about state data collection are whether particular data are useful or not and whether they are used or not. He noted the connection to the leveraging of federal funds and said the mishmash of service areas hamper such efforts. Commission member Pickering said there are decades of data and some data are not used to their full potential. Data can be leveraged for action and he recommended doing an inventory.

Commission member Filchak recommended everyone review the Recent Rockefeller Institute of Government [balance of payments report](#), highlighting that CT is last. He said this group should invite people from county grants offices in other states to present what they do. Commission chair Sharkey said people in CT are not well informed regarding this. Such analyses would lend themselves to research in partnership with academic institutions.

Commission member O’Leary said former Commission member Lyle Wray might be able to shed some light on this. His COG, [CRCOG](#), is best positioned for grant work and what issues do they see? Commission chair Sharkey said he assumes no individual COG or RESC has the bandwidth for this that many county governments in other states do. We could analyze what comparable counties do and with what resources.

Commission member Elsesser said our COGs have been on a roller coaster of state funding, so COGs take on risk in hiring. Is there a state program for grants? The work requires a specific skill set and we should nurture programs to do this. Commission member Pickering noted the advantage of having a dedicated grant unit but his COG, the 2nd most populous in the state does not have one.

Commission member Filchak said his is the smallest COG but has a full-time dedicated grants person. He pointed out that a federal grant application reviewer from another state did not know what a COG is and highlighted the challenges created by CT’s fractured nature. He also mentioned that economic development tends to be town-by-town, rarely multitown.

Commission chair Sharkey said the question is how these factors hamper federal funding. He said the ACIR is taking on a lot of work on its own and will not know other possible assignments until the end of the session. He noted that the ACIR is mentioned in [HB 5359, An Act Establishing A Working Group To Study The Feasibility Of Permitting The Online Advertisement Of Legal Notices By Municipalities](#), and cautioned that the ACIR must be aware of how much it takes on.

Commission member O’Leary said CT has to figure out if its best option is to go to counties or to COGs or a combination of COGs. He noted that three COGs can share a role, such as they do for emergency management, but we have to know if that is not workable in the federal universe. Commission member Filchak said the discussion is settled and we should not go on the county vs COG tangent. There was general agreement and Commission member O’Leary suggested working with the state’s federal delegation to improve funding prospects.

Matt Hart introduced himself as CRCOG’s new executive director and said direct service by COGs is possible and that the state does not necessarily need counties to provide these services. Commission member Pickering said it is easy to be distracted by the boundary lines on our map but what is important is to have an awareness of grants and the capacity to find, apply for, and administer them. It is a steep learning curve. We should focus on developing the horsepower for doing that, not on where the lines are on our map.

Commission member Filchak agreed with this discussion and highlighted that his COG has 42 people servicing the towns while other COGs having more people have only 7-8. The chief elected officials of each COG make different choices. The largest or most affluent municipalities see less need for regional services. He mentioned MA’s [Franklin Regional Council of Governments](#) as being a model of regional service delivery. Commission chair Sharkey invited a motion to assign the discussed topics to the LGF subcommittee and a motion was made, seconded, and approved unanimously.

6. Other Old Business

a. Potential ACIR assignments in 2022 legislation

Commission chair Sharkey said HB 5359 was covered previously and Commission member Heft highlighted the ACIR’s role in the committee’s substitute language. He also mentioned a potential role in [SB 324](#), *An Act Establishing A Working Group To Study Title Seven Of The General Statutes*. Commission chair Sharkey highlighted that some ACIR members submitted testimony regarding that bill and there was further discussion of the ACIR’s interest.

b. UConn & UGA studies and [Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy](#)

Matt Hart said he will look into this.

c. Federal infrastructure funding and [Governor’s recommendations](#) re. ARPA funding

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned his desire for staffing to support the ACIR’s work and said he has planted the flag to do this in the 2023 session. Commission member Heft noted that there is language that would change the working group in the previously mentioned SB 324 to a task force including the ACIR. Commission member Sharkey said anyone interested in working on one of the efforts should let him or Bruce Wittchen know. It is not possible to do all.

7. New business or any other municipal, regional, or state matters for ACIR consideration

Bruce Wittchen mentioned UGA Public Policy professor [Eric Zeemering](#)’s invitation for ACIR members to write a perspectives essay on their work for an upcoming issue of *State and Local Government Review*, a journal he co-edits. Some interested members do not have time for it and Bruce will follow up with Commission chair Sharkey next week.

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned the letter the group voted to send in support of the [CT Assoc. of Public School Superintendents](#)’ (CAPSS’s) [Blueprint to Transform CT’s Public Schools](#). He has drafted the letter and is waiting for feedback on content from CAPSS. He added that the next meeting of the

full ACIR will be after the end of the session and asked if there is anything else that should be brought up now.

Margaret Wirtenberg said she hopes the legislature is able to pass an extension for remote meetings and there was a discussion of the partisan tone regarding this at the legislature. Commission member Thomas said CCM is trying to find out what the problem is and highlighted the urgency to get this passed by mid-April. Commission chair Sharkey said [Planning & Development](#) (PD) Committee co-chair McCarthy Vahey asked him for the ACIR's remote meeting survey data (see [raw data](#) and [analysis](#)).

Commission chair Sharkey said he tried to follow the [Government Administration & Elections](#) (GAE) discussion of [SB 467](#), *An Act Extending Permitting Remote Public Meetings Under The Freedom Of Information Act Through December 31, 2022*, but it was difficult. He questioned why legislators would overlook the 90% public approval rate for remote meetings revealed by the ACIR survey. Commission member Thomas said he hopes to have further information by Tuesday.

Commission member Filchak said he had discussed this with a legislator who told him there is a desire to make remote access mandatory for meetings of some of the more major municipal boards or commissions. Commission member Sharkey noted that the legislation makes it local option. There was a discussion of the GAE bill only extending the authorization for remote meetings to December, which is a bad time.

Commission member Filchak provided an overview of [SB 380](#), *An Act Concerning A Study Of State Tax Policies*, [SB 381](#), *An Act Concerning A Study Of State Revenue Collections*, [HB 5406](#), *An Act Concerning A Study Of State Revenue Policies*, and [HB 5407](#), *An Act Concerning A Study Of State Fiscal Policies*. Commission chair Sharkey said Dept. of Revenue Services Commissioner Boughton is a strong supporter of the ACIR, COGs, and data. We will want to work with him.

Commission member O'Leary asked if the ACIR should schedule a special meeting regarding problems with remote meeting legislation. Commission chair questioned whether the ACIR should take an advocacy role regarding that, noting that the ACIR had been asked to provide information and be a resource. We should be careful of the role we take. Commission member O'Leary said the ACIR has taken advocacy roles in the past, especially when legislators used to attend our meetings. Commission chair Sharkey said that is fair and pointed out that the December deadline in the GAE bill would be a disaster. We should see how this plays out and then decide if a special meeting is needed.

8. Additional public comments if any

There were no additional comments.

9. Next meeting

Upcoming meetings will be.

- Tuesday, April 26, 2022, 10:30 am Subcommittee
- Friday, May 6, 2022, 10:30 am Full ACIR

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:49.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM