

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Friday, July 8, 2021

An audio recording is available at: <http://ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=19780>

Members present: Carl Amento, Sen. Stephen Cassano, John Elsesser, John Filchak, Sam Gold, Brian Greenleaf, Matt Hart, Martin Heft, Karl Kilduff, Keith Norton, James O’Leary, Francis Pickering, Lon Seidman, Brendan Sharkey (Chair), Ron Thomas,

Members not present: Kyle Abercrombie, Luke Bronin, Maureen Brummett, Greg Florio, Harrison Nantz, Neil O’Leary, Troy Raccuia, Mike Walsh

Other participants: Andy Foreman, Leah Grenier, John Harkins, Connor Martin, Steve Mednick, Richard Porth, Richard Roberts, Margaret Wirtenberg, Lyle Wray

Member vacancies: Nominated by COST: Municipal official: Town of <10,000 population
Nominated by CCM: Municipal official: Town of 20,000 – 60,000 population

OPM staff: Bruce Wittchen

1. Call to order and overview of telemeeting procedures

Commission chair Sharkey called the meeting to order at 10:35 while waiting for a quorum of members and provided an overview ACIR activities.

2. Approval of the [minutes of the April 1, 2022 meeting](#), the [minutes of the May 13, 2022 meeting](#), and the [minutes of the June 3, 2022 meeting](#)

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of all three meetings and the motion was approved unanimously.

3. Membership update, if any

Commission member Heft said Keith Norton is now the designee representing the state Dept. of Education and that a CCM position and a COST position remain vacant. Bruce Wittchen added that the Governor appointed Matt Hart to represent councils of government (COGs) and Commission member Heft introduced himself.

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](#)
 - [Cost Estimates for Selected Statutory Mandates on Municipalities in CT \(1995\)](#)

Commission chair Sharkey said the draft [2021-22 Annual Report & Work Plan](#) captures the ACIR’s discussions and plans for further work and asked for others’ thoughts. Commission member Thomas agreed and made a motion to approve the report. The motion was approved unanimously.

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned that the session mandates report is not due until November and Bruce Wittchen said he completed the review of 2022’s public and special acts and he is working on the report now. It should be ready in August, leaving time to consider other aspects of mandates if ACIR members are interested.

5. CT Local Government of the Future initiative

- a. Current subcommittee assignments
 - Municipal data collection
 - Maximizing federal funding
 - Property tax reform

Commission chair Sharkey introduced the topics and mentioned that the state's recent success at gaining [county equivalency](#) for COGS, which is expected to help avoid leaving federal funds on the table. He added that property tax reform is a perennially studied topic and noted that the comingling among these topics. He said he believes there is consensus among the subcommittee to proceed by working with interns. He mentioned an intern working with WestCOG and Commission member Pickering explained that the intern is looking at how grant writing is handled in other places.

Commission chair Sharkey noted the ACIR's previous work with interns and asked Lyle Wray for an update. Lyle said he and Prof. Alkadry at UConn spoke and they believe the ACIR should do three things in this area:

1. Maximize the visibility of what has already been done, with the next webinar focusing on the impact of state and local retirements;
2. Create a committee to vet new ideas; and
3. Chat with researchers at the [Federal Reserve Bank of Boston](#) (FRB) regarding potential work in this area. He pointed out that there is a significant lag time for them to undertake research and he said the ACIR should get on their calendar.

Lyle said OPM used to have a relationship with the FRB and Commission member Thomas said CCM works with them. He said he can provide names and Lyle said the group should try to proceed with this in September. Commission member Elsesser said the [Lincoln Institute of Land Policy](#) is another resource that does high quality work. Lyle recommended the ACIR work with both and Commission member Pickering recommended [Joan Youngman](#) of the Lincoln Institute. He added that CT already follows most of the best practices for property taxes.

Commission member Cassano mentioned the history of working with the [New England Council](#), other COGs, across the border with Springfield and the [Pioneer Valley Planning Commission](#) and a lot of that has disappeared. The New England Council had a lot of connections and meetings of the six states would look at things like rail service that are best viewed at that regional scale. He recommended looking at how to reconstitute regional-scale initiatives because that approach has disappeared in New England other than between Hartford and Springfield. Commission member Hart added out that his COG, the [Capitol Region Council of Governments](#), is in close communication with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the [Franklin Regional Council of Governments](#) in MA, continuing the work begun by Lyle Wray.

Commission chair Sharkey noted that he had taken on two tasks at the recent subcommittee meeting. The first is to look at existing studies regarding property tax reform. He mentioned CCM's data and other studies and said he will compile that information for consideration at the next subcommittee meeting.

Commission chair Sharkey said his other task was to contact DRS Commissioner Boughton and they spoke earlier this week. Commissioner Boughton is interested in working with the ACIR on tax reform and the thought is to develop initial recommendations to provide to the governor later this year. The focus would be on systemic changes to reduce the reliance on property taxes. He noted that such an approach will be controversial and said it must be discussed with the governor.

Commission chair Sharkey said Commissioner Boughton has staff who can support the effort and also mentioned the availability of think tanks. The objective is to put together a significant study that can be implemented. He said this is the kind of arrangement the ACIR is looking for and he and Commissioner Boughton will continue talking. Commission member Seidman said agencies have not completed potentially relevant studies previously assigned to them and mentioned a study assigned to the State Dept. of Education in Sec. 6 of [PA 19-91](#). Commission chair Sharkey noted that Commissioner Boughton had mentioned studies that have been assigned to DRS and perhaps the ACIR can assist.

Commission member Pickering asked about a scope of work for what the ACIR intends to do. He mentioned that there have been various critiques of DRS's [tax incidence report](#) and noted the different levels of services in different municipalities. He also pointed out the importance of how property taxes interact with other taxes. MA has lower property taxes than CT but a flat income tax. CT's progressive income tax makes up for its regressive property tax. Commission chair Sharkey said DRS is best situated for this work and Commissioner Boughton understands these things. He added that a scope of work has not been prepared yet but said that can be a topic for the next subcommittee meeting.

Commission member O'Leary noted the differences between COGs and asked if it could be useful to learn what COGs would be able to do if they could collect taxes. He said COGs might avoid certain obstructions but mentioned the potential opposition of municipal CEOs. Commission chair Sharkey said Commissioner Boughton is a proponent of working through COGs but agreed that such an approach would be difficult politically.

Commission member Pickering said COGs can collect limited taxes now but highlighted the concern that the state would respond by sweeping or reducing its COG funding in response. There is a trust issue. He said WestCOG has a federal grant to look at a regional tax-increment financing (TIF) approach to reduce the reliance on state and federal funding. Margaret Wirtenberg mentioned studies in 2015 and 2018 and added that the state's [municipal fiscal indicators](#) compilations are not used as they could be.

Commission member Filchak recommended compiling a list of people in CT to consult based on their expertise and ability to offer different points of view. Commission chair Sharkey said Commissioner Boughton has people in mind and agreed that out-of-state researchers might lack insights of people based here. He added that this is a big initiative and said he had mentioned to Commissioner Boughton that the ACIR intends to seek additional staffing and the Commissioner agreed with that.

6. Other Old Business

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

Lyle Wray said the next step will be a webinar on the labor shortage in state and local government and then it will be necessary to decide what work to launch in the fall.

- b. Update: ACIR representation on [Task Force To Study Title 7 Of The General Statutes](#)

Commission chair Sharkey provided some background regarding the task force. He mentioned Commission member Filchak's interest but noted that he had invited others to let Bruce Wittchen know if they are interested and Bruce said the only member to contact him was Commission member Filchak. Commission member Pickering said he will be interested in observing and said they should identify things of possible interest to the ACIR.

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

Commission chair Sharkey said Commission member Pickering had contacted him with an idea and Commission member Pickering explained that some towns approached their COGs for regional analyses to include in municipal affordable housing plans. He noted the similarity between this planning and natural hazard mitigation planning, which can be handled as a regional plan with local annexes. The same approach could also be used for plans of conservation & development (POCDs). He highlighted that regional POCDs avoid contradicting local POCDs and said there might be better planning with consolidated planning on a regional basis that includes local annexes.

Commission member Pickering pointed out that all municipalities faced the same deadline for their affordable housing plans but do not for local POCDs. POCD due dates would have to be aligned to enable municipalities to incorporate their POCD into a broader regional plan. He noted that something similar was done to allow for regional assessment.

Commission member Sharkey said this is a good example of an initiative to fund with RPIP 2.0, noting the benefits if a critical mass of a COGs towns are included. Commission member Filchak agreed and mentioned the relevance for [comprehensive economic development strategy](#) (CEDs) and transportation planning. He said towns received \$5000 for affordable housing planning and it was not a true planning approach.

Commission chair Sharkey asked if the proposed approach would require legislation and Commission member Pickering said it can be handled administratively: the statutes authorize OPM to grant waivers so towns can receive state funding at a time when the POCD has exceeded its 10-year deadline. He added, however, that municipal corporate counsel might not agree with taking that risk. Commission member Filchak mentioned [CGS Sec. 8-31b](#):

... Notwithstanding the provisions of any special or public act, any political subdivision of the state may enter into an agreement with a regional council of governments to perform jointly or to provide, alone or in cooperation with any other entity, any service, activity or undertaking that the political subdivision is authorized by law to perform. ...

Commission member Pickering said the state funds municipalities without encouraging them to plan together. There was a discussion of whether the suggested work is eligible for RPIP funding and that the work should be considered as providing a service, not performing a study. Commission member Filchak recommended that the group also look at state [Regional Services Grant](#) (RSG) funding at a future meeting and there was further discussion. Commission member Pickering said the approach discussed today would ideally all be through the regional plan but there are alternative approached.

8. Additional public comments if any

There were no additional public comments.

9. Next meeting

Upcoming meetings will be.

- Tuesday, July 25, 2022, 10:30 am Subcommittee
- Friday, August 5, 2022, 10:30 am Full ACIR

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:51.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM