



**NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION ZONE ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING**

May 12, 2022

The State Neighborhood Revitalization Advisory Board (advisory board) held a remote meeting on Thursday, May 12, 2022, at 9:00 AM. The [agenda](#) and a [videorecording](#) are available online.

Board Members or Designees:

Matthew Abbott, [City of Bridgeport, Office of Planning & Economic Development](#)
Laura Brown, [City of New Haven, City Plan Department](#)
Jonathan Cabral, [CT Housing Finance Authority](#)
Julie Carmelich, [CT State Historic Preservation Office](#)
Andrew Clark, [Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy](#)
Jennifer Edwards, [CT Social Equity Council](#)
Mike Gilmore, [Waterbury Development Corporation](#)
Marion Griffin, [Hartford NEXT](#)
Martin Heft (Chair), [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)
Leah Kagan, [City of Stamford](#)
Vanessa Liles, [West Side NRZ, Bridgeport](#)
Margaret Malinowski, [City of New Britain, Neighborhood Preservation Program](#)
Marlon Pena, [CT Dept. of Transportation](#)
Mark Polzella, [CT Dept. of Labor](#)
Jim Vannoy, [CT Dept. of Public Health](#)
Laura Watson, [CT Dept. of Housing](#)

Others:

Valeria Alfano, [CT Housing Finance Authority](#)
Angela Berry, [LISC Connecticut](#)
Maureen Goulet, [Capitol Region Council of Governments](#)
Angela Harris, [North Hartford Promise Zone](#)
Luz Holmes, Upper Albany NRZ, Hartford
Jim Horan, [LISC Connecticut](#)
Liisa Koeper, [CT Housing Finance Authority](#)
Debi Martin, [LISC Connecticut](#)
Rob Michalik, [CT Housing Finance Authority](#)
Belinda Weaver, WOW NRZ, Waterbury
Bruce Wittchen, [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)

1. Welcome, Introductions, Adoption of Minutes

Martin Heft, Chair of the [Neighborhood Revitalization Zone](#) (NRZ) Advisory Board, called the meeting to order at 9:04 and asked everyone to introduced themselves.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft Adoption of [March 10, 2022, Meeting Minutes](#) and the motion was approved unanimously, with Mark Polzella abstaining because he had not attended the meeting.

2. CHFA presentation on MyHomeCT program

Valeria Alfano shared her screen to show [CHFA's presentation](#) on the [MyHomeCT program](#). Liisa Koeper introduced the program and highlighted on Slide 2 that the state received approximately \$123 million for the program. The goal is to prevent displacement of homeowners for reasons listed on Slide 3. Liisa highlighted that this program is just for homeowners, not renters, who are served by [DOH's UniteCT program](#).

Slide 4 lists program eligibility requirements, Slides 5 – 8 provide details about the four categories of assistance offered, and Slide 9 notes how assistance is provided and points out that the maximum award is \$30,000. Liisa provided an overview of the application submission process as outlined on Slide 10 and described CHFA's data-driven needs assessment, as indicated on Slide 11. She also pointed out communities mapped as having an especially high risk of mortgage delinquency and foreclosure.

Valeria Alfano discussed CHFA's marketing and outreach efforts detailed on Slide 12 and noted the variety of traditional and digital media approaches that have been used. She also described their outreach events. Liisa Koeper showed Slide 13's link to further information and added that any future questions can be sent to them by way of CHFA's NRZ Advisory Board member Jon Cabral. The PowerPoint presentation will be circulated to the Advisory Board.

4. **CT Institute of Municipal & Regional Policy and NRZs**

The order of agenda items 3 and 4 was switched because the people providing the Waterbury presentation were given the wrong date and will instead follow Andrew Clark's presentation. Andrew Clark provided overview of his background and of the [CT Institute of Municipal & Regional Policy](#) (IMRP), which recently moved from CCSU to UConn. He noted that he lives in Hartford's Asylum Hill neighborhood and mentioned his past involvement with the NRZ.

Andrew said the IMRP since 2005 has primarily been involved with social and criminal justice issues. He mentioned the IMRP's role in developing policy for racial profiling law and highlighted that initial data had not been collected in a uniform way, so they sought a federal grant for needed resources and now are able to provide 26 research-driven data points. He pointed out the importance of establishing good processes and said he and the IMRP are interested in helping to revitalize the NRZ process. He highlighted that funding from [Social Equity Council](#) or other grants would help, but organizations seeking grant funding must have a solid foundation. He recommended a soup-to-nuts review of the NRZ process, noting that the state advisory board itself must have bylaws. The NRZ process must be functioning for NRZs to be able to do more.

Andrew said UConn faculty and students are available to help and noted the importance of the NRZ process being a public process. A lot of NRZs have operated for many years without a lot of guidance. It is important to not undermine what has already been done, but the advisory board should ensure that efforts are consistent with the goals of the NRZ program. The 2023 legislative session will be an opportunity to update the NRZ process. NRZs have a lot of potential and, with the potential for new resources, it is an exciting time. The IMRP would like to partner with you for this.

Bruce Wittchen thanked Andrew and asked if anyone has any questions or comments. Bruce pointed out that Andrew had spoken at the advisory board's 2013 meeting, which had focused on governance, and noted the desire establish a process while avoiding a top-down, follow-these-rules approach. He mentioned discussions then and at the most recent meeting, of establishing 501(c)(3) or other fiduciary arrangement for NRZs, possibly on a city-wide basis. As Andrew said, however, they should avoid undermining what some NRZs have already done.

Bruce invited volunteers to meet for some conversations this summer about what direction the advisory board could go with this. They can bring some recommendations back to this group in September, which might correlate very nicely with the timing of the Social Equity Council's plans that were described at the advisory board's last meeting.

Marion Griffin said these are great thoughts and said Hartford NRZs do need updated guidance because many are operating in a vacuum. New people come on board and have no idea of expectations and they are struggling with the strategic plans. There is some support to help some of the NRZ help with their strategic plans, but they need up-to-date guidance because what we're 25 years in and so much has changed. We need to come together figure out how to help the NRZs – most don't have any funding – and 20% of the people must do 80% of the work. Anything we can do to improve this would be fabulous.

Andrew Clark agreed that a few people tend to carry much of the burden of an organization. He noted that NRZ members initially received training, provided by the city, but do not now. People becoming active in NRZs should be told what is expected and he said the state could help with a website with links for NRZs and a place to put minutes, or by providing support staff. Andrew added that people have ideas, but they are not implemented because we don't put the resources behind them. Resources might be available now and there is great potential to support what is already happening and to support new NRZs.

Bruce Wittchen noted the reference to the community organizing handbook at the end of the agenda and said the same thing happening in the NRZ process happens in many other fields. Processes are established without considering what will be necessary to sustain them. This should be part of the subcommittee discussion this summer – how to make the NRZ guides useful not only for organizing a new NRZ but also for reorganizing an NRZ that has fallen on hard times, and for sustaining an NRZ that is doing well.

Maureen Goulet said she was part of an association that had allowed its 501(c)(3) nonprofit status to lapse and said it is difficult to re-establish. Another group she is involved in had done no succession planning and they are trying to revitalize it. These are challenging things to do. Organizations are usually started by people who are passionate; others need to be coming up the ranks to step into their shoes in the future.

Laura Watson said the Department of Housing had given a consultant a small grant to help with their limited equity corporations that were experiencing similar problems. The consultant met with each one and helped them to resolve their specific issues. Once this group has developed the needed processes and guidance documents it could be helpful to have a consultant work the same way with each NRZ. Bruce Wittchen said that is a good thought and welcomed suggestions like that for the subcommittee to consider this summer so this effort can keep progressing.

Jennifer Edwards said she agrees with everyone and there needs to be guidance for how to start the strategic plan but also how to keep an NRZ active. She noted her experience with NRZs in Bridgeport that started up well but started to fall off as people lost interest. She found that training kept them going. Somebody leaves. A new person comes in. You work with them hand in hand.

Bruce Wittchen said the regular training Bridgeport is providing was a key point Jennifer had made when describing their process at a previous meeting. When he received 40 hours of site worker training for a previous job the agency did not assume everyone would remember it ten years later; they provided annual refresher training. Bruce added that the people who join this summer's subcommittee will set its direction.

3. Waterbury's Walnut, Orange, Walsh (WOW) NRZ

Mike Gilmore provided a brief history of the WOW NRZ and pointed out that he has learned many things from working with this and other local organizations. He mentioned that a city infill housing initiative had been putting single-family homes on vacant lots in multifamily home neighborhoods. Community members pushed back because of their concern about the impact of single-family homes on the multifamily streetscape.

Mike said NRZ plans are helpful for guiding people working for the city but pointed out that quality of life issues change over time and also mentioned changes in community policing. He introduced Alderman Belinda Weaver, noting he had previously worked with her mother in this neighborhood. Alderman Weaver said she didn't it was something she would do but her mother dragged her into the NRZ. She mentioned activities including an after-school program, community feedings, Christmas parties, and neighborhood clothing drives. Mike is their go-to person and she highlighted that a community police officer attends their meetings. They meet monthly and are always recruiting. People are most likely to come when they have an issue.

Mike said the city has taken down the most houses in that neighborhood, but things are changing; investors are coming in. He used to go to all community meetings but has had to limit his time to what he can work on. He mentioned that the city has a blight task force that came out of the NRZ process and they meet once per week with all the code enforcement officials and they're in contact with all the NRZs.

Mike agreed with Alderman Weaver's comment about people coming to the NRZ regarding a specific issue and the need for everyone to put aside their personal issues when planning for the future and to think about the whole neighborhood. Mike also agreed regarding the challenge of working with volunteers who drop off over the years. Some leaders have continued for many years but member participation varies on a month to month basis.

Mike said he has learned more from working with groups like this than he could from school. Alderman Weaver agreed and said she has learned a lot from the NRZ and from some of the people who are no longer with us. They taught her how to work with the community and to sit and listen more than talking. She noted that when she first got involved there was funding for plants, paint, and things like that. We don't have that anymore, but it's a nice feeling at the end of the day when you know you help someone out.

Bruce Wittchen thanked them for their presentation and asked if anyone had any questions or comments. He said he has two. First, he thinks their presentation highlights that NRZs are not all about blight. The NRZ statutes allow NRZs to do more, but the statutes focus on blight. One of the statutory changes to consider is to broaden what NRZs are about. He believes there are municipalities where an NRZ would be appropriate for addressing quality of life issue other than blight.

Bruce said the other point he wants to raise is based on Mike's comment about Waterbury being very active with its NRZs and they look at the plans, but the plans are getting old and just how important is the plan to what the NRZ does? This might be another factor to discuss – what should be the investment in developing a plan versus the amount of investment in developing neighborhood capacity or in getting people organized? How critical is the plan for doing those things? He said questions raised by presentations by the people active with NRZs are a reason for including local presentations at these meetings.

5. Updates, Questions, and Comments

- Local Updates and/or Questions
- State Updates and/or Questions
- Public Comments

Maureen Goulet said she had typed a link to a small business grants program in the chat and recommended people share it with businesses in their NRZs (see <https://crcog.hostingct.com>).

Jon Cabral said some people involved with NRZs might be interested a program to fund the rehab of small multifamily properties that the CT Housing Finance Authority works on with the Hartford Community Loan Fund. He no longer manages the program but anyone with questions or who knows people who have or are looking to purchase such properties can reach out to him. He also offered to ask the current program manager to give a presentation at a future NRZ Advisory Board meeting.

John noted that the program can help people rehab smaller, blighted multifamily properties that tend to be ignored by banks. Funds are available and he would like to see more activity in that program. Bruce said the future of many neighborhoods is in fixing up the existing, durable housing stock and Jon said such housing can be an important part of ongoing conversations about housing and equity.

Andrew Clark said a long-term resident in his neighborhood put her house into a reverse mortgage because she doesn't have the money to put in the house. He is going to reach out to Jon about this and he has seen this many times because it can be difficult housing to maintain. Funding that and energy efficiency make such a program a win-win.

6. Next Steps

Bruce said this section has been discussed already and highlighted that the subcommittee that meets this summer is not expected to do all the heavy lifting, it just should bring ideas back to this group in September. He invited suggestions for future presentations or discussion topics and noted the next meeting date.

7. **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15.