



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

September 8, 2022

The State Neighborhood Revitalization Advisory Board (advisory board) held a remote meeting on Thursday, September 8, 2022, at 9:00 AM. The [agenda](#) and a [videorecording](#) are available online.

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**Board Members or Designees:**

Matthew Abbott, [City of Bridgeport, Office of Planning & Economic Development](#)  
Laura Brown, [City of New Haven, City Plan Department](#)  
Linda Brunza, [CT Dept. of Environmental Protection](#)  
Jonathan Cabral, [CT Housing Finance Authority](#)  
Julie Carmelich, [CT State Historic Preservation Office](#)  
Janice Castle, [City of Hartford](#)  
Andrew Clark, [Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy](#)  
Jennifer Edwards, [CT Social Equity Council](#)  
Mike Gilmore, [Waterbury Development Corporation](#)  
Marion Griffin, [Hartford NEXT](#)  
Bruce Wittchen (Acting Chair), [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)  
Matt Pafford, [CT Dept. of Administrative Services](#)  
Jim Vannoy, [CT Dept. of Public Health](#)  
Laura Watson, [CT Dept. of Housing](#)

**Others:**

Rebecca Augur, [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)  
Ginne-Rae Clay, [CT Social Equity Council](#)  
Sherry Frazier, Clay Arsenal Revitalization Association (Hartford)  
Maureen Goulet, [Capitol Region Council of Governments](#)  
Alicia Leite, [CT Dept. of Transportation](#)  
Debi Martin, [LISC Connecticut](#)

**1. Welcome, Introductions, Adoption of Minutes**

Bruce Wittchen, Acting Chair, called the meeting of the [Neighborhood Revitalization Zone](#) (NRZ) Advisory Board to order at 9:04 and asked everyone to introduce themselves. A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft [May 12, 2022, Meeting Minutes](#) and the motion was approved unanimously.

**2. CT Dept. of Transportation [Public Transportation Customer Experience Action Plan](#)  
Alicia Leite, Transportation Supervising Planner, [Customer Experience Unit](#)**

Alicia Leite shared [DOT's presentation](#) and said the agency is developing a customer experience action plan to shape future investments based on what they learn from people using public transportation. She mentioned their current survey that runs through next

week but added that they are also collecting feedback in other ways. She highlighted that this is not a one-time effort: her unit will continue updating this.

Alicia listed the numbers of interviews with Councils of Governments (COGs) and service providers, of focus groups with customers, and pop-up events at bus stops, transit hubs, rail stations. They ask people what is working and what is not working. The data go to a central location for analysis. She also mentioned her program's survey asking people about their entire transportation experience – the trip to their bus stop or train station, while they onboard, and when they leave. DOT is trying to understand where the transit pain points are across the state. She hopes people at this meeting will be able to share information about her program and the survey with their organizations. She will provide documents after this meeting and also mentioned the program website and other contact information.

Alicia said they probably will slow down the outreach in October to start analyzing the information they received. That will continue into early 2023, when they will go back out to the communities with a draft plan for comment. It will not stop there: they will continue to build upon it. That is the main purpose of her unit and she said she appreciates being here today.

Marion Griffin asked if there is a flyer that can be sent out and Alicia said she will provide [DOT's flyer](#) and other information. Bruce Wittchen asked if people in this meeting can think of anything else that DOT or other state agencies should consider when trying to get such information from the community. He added that one thing he hopes for in the future is that we reach a point where NRZ meetings or perhaps a meeting of something like Hartford's coalition of NRZs will be the place where state agencies show up and talk about their things

Ginne-Rae Clay asked if the survey asks specifically about the transportation available in a person's city. She explained that her part of Waterbury has people who must walk almost a mile to a single bus stop, including elderly people and people with canes. That is their only affordable transportation. She also mentioned the city's rail service, which only goes to Bridgeport, and said there should also be service to New Haven, Danbury, and Torrington. Alicia Leite thanked Ginne-Rae for her comment and said that is exactly the kind of local input they are looking for and the survey is set up to enable people to provide that.

Sherry Frazier recommended that DOT set up its outreach locations so people can see the information being provided to them and immediately type in their responses. It can excite people about participating and they can provide that information to others. Alicia thanked Sherry for the suggestion and said they have iPads with a shorter survey at events. People can do the full survey but many do not want to spend so much time. DOT tries to be where people are boarding a train or bus and the shorter survey is for people with limited time.

Maureen Goulet said QR codes encourage responses and Alicia Leite said DOT's flyer and posters include one. She added that they are happy about the number of responses received so far but will appreciate any suggestions that can increase meaningful engagement. Maureen also mentioned bus stops, saying that many she is familiar with in suburbs east of the river are in locations unsafe for riders to use. She hopes that issue is considered too and Alicia said it is being discussed at DOT.

### 3. State Historic Preservation Office programs and funding sources

*Julie Carmelich, Historian, [State Historic Preservation Office](#)*

Julie Carmelich shared [SHPO's presentation](#) on historic properties programs and funding sources. Julie noted that many people have never heard of SHPO and there is a lot of misunderstanding about what it does. It primarily is a regulatory agency with a lot of work carried out through guidelines, statutes and regulations. It also is a granting agency so can provide funding for people working with historic resources.

Julie pointed out that NRZ plans routinely point out historic resources and said historic preservation can provide jobs and housing, enhance property values, increase local tax revenues, and attract tourism. It also contributes to sustainability because the greenest building is the one already built because building a new one requires more energy and natural resources, increasing the environmental impact.

Julie described ways for people in NRZs to start identifying their neighborhood's historic resources. She outlined possible uses of SHPO's survey and planning grants, which are matching grants, with SHPO providing 50%. Organizations that have identified historic resources and completed feasibility studies and conditions assessments, such as what those grants can fund, can consider SHPO's historic restoration fund grants. Julie provided an overview of those too, adding that those also are matching grants and highlighting that the funding limit was recently raised to \$200,000 and, beginning next year, there will not be a limit.

Julie proceeded to SHPO's three tax credits programs. One is a federal program, but SHPO is the connection between property owners and the federal agency that administers the program. That one offers a 20% tax credit on income from income producing properties, so is for apartment buildings, office buildings, and other commercial properties. She described some program requirements. Julie explained the state's separate version of a commercial tax credit program, highlighting that it is not a maintenance and repair type program, so is not for someone who has a leaky roof or needs to replace windows.

The final funding source is the historic homes rehabilitation tax credit for owner-occupied homes of 1 to 4 units. Julie said that is a 30% tax credit on expenditures up to \$30,000 per dwelling unit. She provided a brief overview and encouraged people who might be interested in any of these funding sources to contact the program.

Julie asked if there are any questions and Jon Cabral noted he has accessed that funding but pointed out the questions about accessing such funding for condos. He highlighted the complications: there can be many separate units, with some needing repair or updating, but it is a gray area because each unit is an owner-occupied unit. Julie agreed that condos can fall into a gap between programs and described some nuances regarding the eligibility of condos for the funding programs.

Jon Cabral said he has dealt with SHPO and they have been amazing, but pointed out that a number of buildings were converted into condos in Hartford and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s and now need significant updating or repairs. Julie said the federal tax credit

program has been used for large apartment buildings but it is different for individual condo owners.

Maureen Goulet mentioned the Capitol Regional Council of Governments' (CRCOG's) brownfields assessment and revolving loan fund program. She also mentioned an EPA webinar regarding a [nonprofit using social impact bonds and brownfield funding to rehabilitate housing](#) in a setting similar to many CT cities. Julie Carmelich agreed, noting the smaller industrial communities that grew up around industry that is gone, leaving many vacant mill buildings and vacant housing. She acknowledged the need to layer multiple funding sources. Janice Castle requested information that can be included in Hartford's fall/winter resident guide and Julie said she would provide that and mentioned an upcoming presentation in the city about the homeowners tax credit program.

Sherry Frazier asked about application fees and Julie said there is no fee for the homeowners tax credit. There are application fees for the other programs for projects over \$1,000,000. Sherry said it is important to get this information to the neighborhoods and described the poor condition of two historic properties in her neighborhood. Julie suggested starting with the city and Janice Castle said Hartford's housing department and blight team work to identify resources for such properties and work directly with property owners. Julie invited anyone else who has questions to call or email her.

#### **4. Updates, Questions, and Comments**

- Local Updates and/or Questions

Janice Castle provided an update on Hartford's pilot art program to preserve and protect our bus shelters. They install local art commissioned from local artists to address vandalization and unwanted graffiti on bus shelters and utility boxes. She highlighted the work they have already done along the Albany Ave corridor. She added that they no longer paint directly on the structure and instead professionally wrap them after digitizing the art so it can be replaced if needed. Debi Martin asked about the city's plans and Janice said they are talking with CT Transit and hope to expand the project, especially along major corridors. They chose to begin on Albany Ave because of the recent work and new bus shelters they could protect there.

- State Updates and/or Questions

Ginne-Rae Clay provided an update on the [Social Equity Council](#), describing the ongoing industry licensing process and the process for social equity applicants, who will have a variety of benefits, services, and programs to help them be successful in the adult use cannabis industry. There is a staff of five, the council has 15 members and the SEC website has the further details.

Ginne-Rae outlined recent work and the next steps, the timing, and assistance being provided, noting the unavailability of federal assistance. The aspect she thinks is most exciting is the reinvestment in disproportionately impacted communities. They have to open up the cannabis market first but when the state begins collecting revenue, money will be brought back to [disproportionately impacted areas](#). The SEC is working now to recertify the 2021 map.

Ginne-Rae said they do not yet know how funding will be reinvested in those areas but will go into those communities discuss what the needs are. The SEC's intention is for dollars to go to local organization, possibly NRZs, and they will work with them, state agencies, and others to put this program together once the current licensing lotteries are completed. You will hear more about that in the months to come.

Marion Griffin asked what proportion of the state's cannabis revenue will go to this fund and Ginne-Rae said those numbers are not yet known but there will be different sources of revenue and separate funds. Sherry Frazier asked how the SEC will educate the community and what model the SEC is using, noting similar programs in different cities and states. Ginne-Rae mentioned the SEC's role in educating the public and highlighted that CT is one of the first to reinvest in disproportionately impacted areas; one of the only states with a loan program; and one of the only states that has put social equity and disproportionately impacted areas first in standing. It is all about the areas and people impacted by the war on drugs.

Sherry expressed her concern about the lack of guidelines for the reinvestment process. Ginne-Rae said they will have community conversations, but first must identify the areas that will be eligible. She described the factors they are using to do so. Bruce Wittchen said this leads right into the next section of the agenda because the NRZ process has to be working well for NRZs to take on the kind of role the SEC might have in mind. He asked Ginne-Rae what the SEC would want to see from NRZs, their cities, and this advisory board for something like that?

Ginne-Rae said the advisory board is doing what it should be doing. Continue to meet you; continue to be updated; continue to listen, to know to the communities and the members of the communities, and what their needs and desires are. She noted the importance of the NRZs' strategic plans but highlighted that the SEC is still at a very early stage with this. She said they are looking at what already exists in those areas and are putting together a plan and a program. They do not want to duplicate services; they want to enhance them.

## **5. Revitalizing the NRZs and the state NRZ advisory board**

Bruce said this section of the agenda lists six points:

- What information should be provided to NRZs to provide guidance?
- What is the appropriate level of oversight? (see [Hartford NRZ compliance checklist](#))
- What are options and limitations for in-person, fully remote, and hybrid meeting?
- Funding and other non-training capacity development: what do NRZs need/want?
- Needs assessments of individual NRZs?
- Reintroduce the state Advisory Board to NRZs: city by city?

Bruce explained that those are the general concepts that the subcommittee of people who met this summer decided this advisory board should work on. More recently, he talked with people from the community college and state university system about potential roles for them in helping develop NRZ capacity. Another topic was what resources NRZs might need to take on roles such as what the Social Equity Council is considering and to have a role in state outreach such as the DOT and SHPO work discussed earlier. He said it is late to begin the discussion and recommended scheduling another meeting this fall.

Sherry Frazier expressed her concern about communications and other aspects of NRZs and are ready for new responsibilities. Marion Griffin pointed out the 5<sup>th</sup> bullet point listed in this section of the agenda and said we are working toward making sure that all NRZ are functioning as they should. NRZs are an appropriate tool and they or other associations within neighborhoods should be engaged in the whole process. She said the advisory board should schedule another meeting to bring the issues raised in our subcommittee meetings to the full board and come up with some solutions.

Ginne-Rae Clay described her history with NRZs back to when Governor Rowland rolled out the concept and in various ways since then, highlighting her and Jennifer Edwards's experience with NRZs in Bridgeport. NRZs are a very good model for what the SEC needs to do as far as reinvestment. She noted that NRZs are not all operating at the same level and there needs to be a level playing field. Some have a strong administrative support team; some do not. But it's a great model, a grassroots model.

Bruce Wittchen said the group is almost out of time and recommended setting up another meeting in October or November, perhaps with a presentation by an NRZ and the rest of the time devoted to this topic.

## **6. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:29.