

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Friday, May 5, 2023

A recording is available at: https://ctvideo.ct.gov/opm/2023-05-05_ACIR_Video.mp4

Members present: Kyle Abercrombie, John Filchak (Vice Chair), Matt Hart, Martin Heft, James O'Leary, Francis Pickering, Troy Raccuia, Lon Seidman, Brendan Sharkey (Chair)

Members not present: Carl Amento, Luke Bronin, Maureen Brummett, Steve Cassano, John Elsesser, Sam Gold, Brian Greenleaf, Laura Hoydick, Karl Kilduff, Jeff Kitching, Harrison Nantz, Keith Norton, Neil O'Leary, Ron Thomas, Mike Walsh

Other participants: Doug Casey (presenter), John Harkins, Piotr Kolakowski, Sheila McKay, Brian O'Connor, Kevin Pisacich (presenter), CJ Strand

OPM staff: Rebecca Dahl, Christine Goupil, Bruce Wittchen

Member vacancies: Nominated by COST: Municipal official: Town of <10,000 population

1. Call to order and overview of telemeeting procedures

Commission chair Sharkey called the meeting to order at 10:34, noting the lack of a quorum. .

2. Approval of the minutes of the [February 3](#), [March 3](#), and [April 14](#) meetings.

Due to the lack of a quorum the draft minutes could not be approved.

4. Membership updates, if any

Bruce Wittchen said one position for a small town official nominated by COST and appointed by the Governor remains vacant and there was a discussion of the ACIR and COST reminding the Governor's office.

5. ACIR Regular Reports

- Annual Report + 2023-24 Work Plan: no deadline but targeting July-August
- Session Mandates Report: due 11/15/2023
- Mandates Compendium (full compendium): due 2/21/2024

Bruce Wittchen provided an overview of the three annual reports required by statute and explained that the next compendium of legislative and regulatory mandates will be the full compendium of all mandates that is required every fourth year. He mentioned the ACIR's past discussions of possible alternative approaches for mandates reporting and suggested that the group consider such options but issue this full compendium using the current approach before making a significant change.

3. [CT's digital equity efforts](#)

Doug Casey, [CET](#) and Kevin Pisacich, [DEEP Office of Telecommunications & Broadband](#)

Doug Casey and Kevin Pisacich arrived at the meeting and each provided an overview of their agency's programs. Doug showed a [presentation](#) on the state's digital equity program, described available programs, and said people are disenfranchised if not connected. He highlighted the planned activities and mentioned their research partnership with UConn's School of Public Policy. Kevin Pisacich described the broadband infrastructure grant programs and said they are first and foremost about

access. Slide 2 outlines the [Broadband Equity Access and Deployment](#) (BEAD) and [Capital Projects Fund](#) (CPF) programs.

Kevin highlighted Slide 3, *Why It Matters*, and explained the role of the community anchor institutions (CAIs) mentioned there and on Slide 4. Doug Casey described the goals of the [survey](#) listed on Slide 4. That survey target organizations that will assist people and he explained how the findings will be used. He also mentioned the mapping available at [broadbandmaps.ct.gov](#).

Doug proceeded to Slide 5 and explained the upcoming resident survey and how its findings will be used. He noted that they are still working on that with UConn and added that they will appreciate any assistance ACIR members' organizations can provide for distributing that survey widely. Kevin said they will be happy to meet individually with anyone and also mentioned the opportunity to participate in quarterly roundtables.

Commission member Seidman mentioned different states taking different approaches regarding smaller alternative service providers and Kevin Pisacich said CT is aiming for equal participation. Commission member Seidman said Comcast's approach has been difficult for potential customers with credit problems and Kevin said all providers must participate in CT's affordable program.

Commission member Hart asked what CT's towns and [regional councils of governments](#) (COGs) can do and Kevin mentioned the ongoing roundtables and a potential role in advisory groups. Commission member Hart said COGs can convene their municipalities to convey this information. Commission member Pickering added that housing authorities could be effective anchor institutions for reaching people in affordable housing.

Kevin Pisacich described state and nationwide efforts to map served and unserved areas. He added that they have been in contact with housing authorities and emphasized the need to look at the availability of broadband within buildings and to consider affordability. There was a discussion of considering lower cost service options. Kevin Pisacich also mentioned the state's desire to revise [FCC broadband availability mapping](#). Commission chair Sharkey thanked Doug and Kevin for their presentation and said he looks forward to collaboration.

6. Update: CT Local Government of the Future ACIR member survey

Commission vice chair Filchak said there is a working draft of a survey that should be ready to go out to members next week. He said the intent is to get the pulse of the members regarding the LGF initiative. There was a discussion of the intent and Commission vice chair Filchak highlighted the desire to hear from people who are not at ACIR meetings.

7. CT Local Government of the Future (LGF) initiative (see notes of [3/28/2023 meeting](#))

- [Property Tax Restructuring Report](#) and legislative informational hearing

Commission chair Sharkey described the desire to present the ACIR's recommendations to legislative leaders this session, to avoid losing traction. He pointed out, though, that the focus of the Governor and legislature is on the income tax, not the property tax, although there is momentum regarding local education and municipal retirement plans, topics consistent with the ACIR's work. He recommended affiliating the ACIR with reforms consistent with the ACIR's goals, but still hopes for a date to present the ACIR's recommendations this session.

Commission member Pickering said this is disappointing. He said the [Dept. of Revenue Services'](#) (DRS's) [tax incidence reporting](#) reveals the problem but the administration cannot control the property tax like it can the income tax. He added that there is a lack of connection between legislators' decisions and the resulting impacts on property taxes. He said [HB 6633](#), the Fair Share

bill, would result in an estimated 20% increase in property taxes. We are slipping instead of moving ahead.

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned [SB 961](#), *An Act Concerning Carbon-Free School Requirements For New School Construction And Establishing Other School Construction And Public Health Requirements For School Districts*, which would require an energy study of every building owned by every school district. He said the local costs identified in the [fiscal note](#) would be extraordinary and noted that the [CT Assoc. of Boards of Education](#) (CABE) spoke against it while the [CT Association of Public School Superintendents](#) (CAPSS) spoke in favor. People are not focused on the property tax.

Commission vice chair Filchak said the [2022 Tax Incidence Report](#) was simplistic and that the Finance Committee wants the next study to be strengthened. Commission member O'Leary said the ACIR used to study bills during a session and take a position during the session. Commission chair Sharkey said that, ideally, the ACIR would do that and Commission member O'Leary said it does not require a lot of discussion to take a position.

Commission chair Sharkey said we should continue to aim for an informational hearing at the legislature, but not be too focused on that goal. We should consider an Op/Ed piece in the CT Mirror or elsewhere about not attention being paid to the property tax and about bills that would exacerbate the problem. We should put that position out in the public. Commission member Seidman said that could be paired up with a press conference and there was a discussion of options.

Commission member O'Leary agreed with the ACIR taking a position but pointed out that the group has not had a quorum at recent meetings. Commission chair Sharkey said the ACIR's position would be kept within the confines of the property tax restructuring report approved by the group. Commission member O'Leary pointed out the ACIR's long-time role defending against municipal mandates and Bruce Wittchen offered to provide some background regarding that at the ACIR's next meeting and Commission chair Sharkey noted the political tension regarding mandates and said the ACIR must be careful.

Commission chair Sharkey recommended an Op/Ed be prepared that focuses on the recommendations in the ACIR's report and outlined the challenges ahead. Commission member Heft recommended the ACIR hold a vote regarding anything legislative and Commission chair Sharkey explained that the next step will be narrower than that.

- Update: Discussion with DRS Commissioner Boughton re. local match and other IJJA concerns (see [draft notes of 4/28 meeting](#))

Commission chair Sharkey noted that he was forced to miss the meeting and Commission vice chair Filchak provided an overview. He said it was a productive meeting and noted that Comm. Boughton is very aware of the state and national situation but does not see, at this time, state-level support for assisting municipalities in providing the 20% local match required for federal grants. He said Comm. Boughton recommended that COGs document towns not applying for [Safe Streets for All grants](#) and added that there also had been a discussion of potential problems with the regional approach to the grant process. Commission vice chair Filchak also mentioned that CCM spoke of the grant application assistance they are providing but the local match remains a challenge. He noted the potential for an infrastructure bank in the future. Commission member Pickering said the state is not considering the potential role of STEAP and other state funding as a potential match for federal funding.

8. Other Old Business

- Legislative update

Commission chair Sharkey said he spoke with Patrick Hulin, Deputy Policy Director in the Governor's Office, about [HB 6670](#), *An Act Studying The Consolidation Of Metropolitan Planning Organizations*. It was a late addition to the Governor's legislative package because it was thought that the state might be out of synch with other states regarding MPOs and due to concerns at DOT. Commission chair Sharkey pointed out that ACIR members who are directors of MPOs have said the relationship with DOT has never been better. Commission chair Sharkey said he was told the bill is a low priority for passage and added that he offered to schedule a meeting following the session to discuss this. Commission vice chair Filchak said HB 6670 is on the go list at the House. He also said it has been an issue for multiple administrations and DOT commissioners and there was further discussion.

Regarding [SB 1190](#), *An Act Concerning Regional Election Advisors And A Task Force On Election Administration In Municipalities*, Commission vice chair Filchak said he had written the bill and provided some background regarding the current regional election monitors and changes that would result from the bill. He pointed out that [CRCOG](#), [RiverCOG](#), and [NECCOG](#) have maintained election monitors with their own funds and explained the desired changes that would change monitors to advisors and also look at potential shared service approaches.

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned [HB 5004](#), *An Act Implementing Early Voting*, and there was a discussion of the expected the burden on small towns to staff polling locations for the longer period of time and also of potential benefits. Commission chair Sharkey also mentioned [HB 6906](#), *An Act Concerning Member Participation During Remote And Hybrid Municipal Public Agency Meetings Under The Freedom Of Information Act*.

- Update: Engagement with RESC and COG directors/chairs re LGF initiative

Commission vice chair Filchak said he has heard from every [Regional Educational Service Center \(RESC\)](#) and from two of the COGs and he will work with the leaders of the RESC Alliance and CTCOG to organize an in-person meeting.

- Potential for collaboration with UConn [Inst. for Municipal and Regional Policy \(IMRP\)](#)

Commission vice chair John Filchak noted that Matt Hart had left a message in the "Chat" that he will meet with Dr. Alkadry of UConn's [School of Public Policy](#) next week to discuss the potential policy institute and will report on this at ACIR's next meeting. There was a discussion of the potential collaboration and Christine Goupil mentioned that she spoke with Dr. Alkadry about the potential for interns to work with the ACIR. The ACIR will have to consider what it wants to study.

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

There was no new business.

10. Future Discussion/presentations

- Town of Chester Governance Committee Study: [Report](#) and [Presentation](#)
- Tom Condon

Commission chair Sharkey noted that the group's June meeting will include a legislative update and possibly also presentations by the Town of Chester and Tom Condon.

11. Additional public comments (if any)

There were no additional comments.

12. Upcoming meetings:

Commission chair Sharkey read the upcoming meeting dates and noted the potential Op/Ed press conference to be scheduled regarding the ACIR's property tax recommendations. He also mentioned the need to watch legislation. Commission vice chair Filchak recommended delaying the June meeting from 6/2 to 6/9 so the session will have ended. There was a discussion of that, of the group's recent quorum issues and of the potential benefits of holding hybrid meetings. The next meetings will be::

- Tuesday, May 23, 2023, 10:30 am Subcommittee
- Friday, June 9 2023, 10:30 am Full ACIR (2nd Friday)

13. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:06.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM