

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Friday, June 9, 2023

A recording is available at: https://ctvideo.ct.gov/opm/2023-06-09_ACIR_Video.mp4

Members present: Kyle Abercrombie, Maureen Brummett, John Elsesser, John Filchak (Vice Chair), Sam Gold, Matt Hart, Martin Heft, James O’Leary, Francis Pickering, Troy Raccuia, Brendan Sharkey (Chair), Ron Thomas

Members not present: Carl Amento, Luke Bronin, Steve Cassano, Brian Greenleaf, Laura Hoydick, Karl Kilduff, Jeff Kitching, Harrison Nantz, Keith Norton, Neil O’Leary, Lon Seidman, Mike Walsh

Other participants: John Harkins, Rick Porth, CJ Strand

OPM staff: Rebecca Dahl, Christine Goupil, Justine Phillips-Gallucci, 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 10:33, noting the lack of a quorum.

2. Approval of the minutes of the [February 3](#), [March 3](#), [April 14](#), and [May 5](#) meetings.

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

3. Membership updates, if any

There was a discussion of the current vacancy and of future vacancies that will result from two members not seeking re-election.

4. 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 reports required by statute and of the schedule for working on them. He said an outline of the annual report can be developed following today’s discussions of work to be done in the coming year and that report might be complete in August.

There was a brief discussion of the interest in considering alternative approaches for the mandate compendium and Bruce said the next compendium will be the full compendium identifying all mandates and suggested issuing it using the current approach and considering any significant changes for subsequent reporting.

Commission chair Sharkey asked if people should meet to discuss options for the annual work plan and Bruce said one option would be for the chair and co-chair to meet with Christine Goupil, who can provide her perspective on what would be a useful approach, based on her recent time as a legislator and as a municipal official.

Commission member Hart recommended scheduling an in-person strategic visioning session. He questioned if the focus on property tax reform can get traction and said the group might consider

other needs, such as workforce development. The upcoming survey should help guide this. The chair and vice-chair agreed with such an approach and Commission member Filchak pointed out the need to begin the MPO study assigned by [SA 23-13](#), *An Act Studying The Consolidation Of Metropolitan Planning Organizations*.

Commission member Heft said OPM can host the suggested visioning session or it could be at the Legislative Office Building. He also noted the problems created by the lack of quorums at this and recent ACIR meetings. Commission chair Sharkey said he can call chronic absentees and Commission member Heft recommended also informing their appointing authorities. Commission member O'Leary supported replacing members who are not attending meetings and agreed with contacting their appointing authorities.

Commission member Thomas said it would be helpful if the ACIR's six municipal officials were able to appoint a designee in the manner that state agencies can. There was a discussion of that possibility and the limits of what might be done. Commission member O'Leary added that if the ACIR seeks that change it should also seek an allowance for bylaws, which could include a provision for addressing excessive absences. Commission vice chair Filchak said this is another item for the work plan.

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

There was a discussion of the timing of the survey, which should be soon enough for the results to influence the work plan, and of how broadly to distribute it. The survey form should go to ACIR members and others who regularly attend ACIR meetings or who might have valuable insight to offer.

6. CT Local Government of the Future (LGF) initiative (see draft notes of [5/23/2023 meeting](#))

- Discuss possible in-person ACIR Forum on Local Match as an Impediment to IIJA Funding see [draft notes of 4/28 meeting](#) with [Dept. of Revenue Services](#) DRS Commissioner Boughton re. IIJA concerns

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned the possibility of focusing the 6/27 LGF Subcommittee meeting on the local cost share concern discussed in recent meeting, including in a special meeting with DRS Commissioner Mark Boughton. It was noted that Commissioner Boughton had requested the ACIR and others compile information on the impact of local matches on municipalities' willingness to apply. Commission vice chair Filchak recommended reconvening this discussion in Sept. – Oct., when the ACIR will have information and can consider possible strategies.

Commission member Hart agreed that data are needed and agreed such information should be available in two months. Rick Porth also agreed and described CCM's discussions and expected approach. They intend to use targeted outreach and studies that will require few months. COGs are involved.

- [Property Tax Restructuring Report](#) and follow-up

Commission chair Sharkey described discussions he has had regarding the ACIR's role in successful legislation this session. He added that there must be a game plan for continuing – how, when, and what the desired reform would be. Legislators and others are interested and the ACIR can have a major role in focusing on property tax reform. We should flesh out a plan with a full proposal for next session.

Commission vice chair Filchak agreed and added that this is a fundamental issue to address. We should bring experts together regarding this year's reforms – how do those affect the property tax? Commission vice chair Filchak highlighted noted that the legislature has change the requirements for the DRS's [tax incidence reporting](#) and recommended including a range of perspectives,

mentioning UConn's [Fred Carstensen](#), the [Yankee Institute](#), and the [School + State Finance Project](#). There was a discussion of gearing up on this at the end of August. Commission member Thomas agreed with the approach and added that the additional education funding provided this session will help but something more comprehensive is needed.

Commission member Hart asked if the ACIR's focus on property tax reform still resonates. He suggested it might be framed more broadly around how to fund local and state government in the future. Commission chair Sharkey said the income tax cut was easier and property tax reform is more nuanced. If the Governor is not prepared to take that on the legislature will not be. Some legislators have long been interested in property tax reform but the federal dollars have temporarily removed much of the pressure. Commission chair Sharkey recommended framing the ACIR's recommendations around the impacts of coming changes in that funding.

There was further discussion about whether this approach will resonate but also that the change in funding is here now: districts are laying off teachers. Commission member Elsesser recommended also looking at inefficiencies in the handling of funding between the state and municipalities, which can involve numerous small payments. Commission member O'Leary agreed and recommended scouting how different entities and officials are looking at this. Scouting is necessary prior to the game plan.

Commission member Pickering agreed with simplifying the many small payments back and forth with the state. He also suggested that property tax reform could be rebranded, noting its impact on housing affordability. Rick Porth agreed regarding the significance of this topic, highlighting a recent Atlantic magazine article about commercial real estate leases expiring with offices empty. Urban areas face a looming problem and this could be a way to get attention. We have yet to see the full impact of workplace changes. Commission chair Sharkey asked if Coventry is experiencing this impact and Commission member Elsesser answered that they are not on account of having little commercial development. He added that state government should bring its employees back to the office.

Commission chair Filchak said these are great points. There currently are surpluses but the reduced income tax will make it more difficult to reduce the property tax. We cannot get out of this by cutting budgets. Commission member Elsesser noted that sales taxes are declining and Commission member Gold pointed out that the income tax is the only major tax that is means-tested. Commission chair Sharkey thanked Commission member Hart for changing the direction of this discussion and this will be discussed further at the 6/27 LGF meeting.

7. Other Old Business

- Legislative update

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned [HB 6670](#), *An Act Studying The Consolidation Of Metropolitan Planning Organizations*, which he had been told was not a priority of the Governor's. Now that it has passed, he suggested that Commission vice chair Filchak lead that study because he is a COG director but not an MPO director, so can lead from a neutral perspective.

Commission member Gold said the bill that proposed the study was based on a misunderstanding MPOs. He explained the role of MPO policy boards and highlighted that they operate under federal rules and that the Governor and DOT do not have power over their decisions. Commission chair Sharkey said the ACIR's approach will not diminish the voices of MPOs but said choosing someone like Commission vice chair Filchak avoids the appearance of the study being led by someone having a vested interest. Commission member Gold said MPO directors will act professionally and objectively as ACIR members working on the study.

There was a discussion of possible components of the study, including informational meetings at the LOB with the DOT Commissioner and MPO directors. Commission member Gold said the report should provide recommendations that can be implemented. Commission chair Sharkey said the ACIR will do that and there was further discussion about the ACIR remaining impartial in conducting the study. Commission member Hart recommended inviting representatives of the [Federal Highway Administration](#) to participate in the informational meeting. Commission member Pickering added that MPOs and the federal law they operate under are poorly understood and recommended that the study have two co-leaders: one from an MPO and one who is not.

Commission vice chair Filchak said he is happy to lead the study and said this is not a new discussion. He recommended the ACIR form a subcommittee for this, including MPO directors, and noted that the full group will vote on the final report. Commission member Heft said the ACIR has been assigned to do the study and agreed with the suggestion to hold a fact-finding meeting. There should be a facilitator, who does need to have full knowledge of the subject, and the ACIR can handle it as it has handled previous reports.

Commission member Gold said the consolidation of two MPOs during the formation of RiverCOG was the first-ever consolidation of MPOs in the country and there has only been one other merger since then. He added that he is willing to co-chair the study. Commission member Pickering suggested distributing an invitation to co-chair more broadly and there was a discussion of the distinction between chairing and facilitating and of the approach for the study. There was further Commission vice chair Filchak and chair Sharkey said any impression of bias would reflect badly on the ACIR. Commission member Thomas said he would like Commission vice chair Filchak to co-chair/co-facilitate and there was further discussion of co-chairs and facilitation, with the expectation that someone at OPM will assist with this.

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

Commission vice chair Filchak said he will organize this.

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

There was no new business.

9. Future Discussion/presentations

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

Commission chair Sharkey said he spoke with Tom Condon and OPM's Christine Goupil has reached out to someone involved in the Chester study, who were interested but wanted to know what the ACIR desires from them. He added that Tom Condon had not been aware of that study. He envisions a 5-10 minute presentation by each followed by discussion and questions. There was a discussion of having their presentations be a workshop sponsored by the ACIR rather than have them speak at an ACIR meeting.

10. Additional public comments (if any)

Commission member Thomas said Commission member Elsesser is retiring at the end of the month and Commission member Elsesser said he will remain with the town as acting town manager until the town hires his replacement. He asked about the nature of the Chester study and Commission member Heft provided an overview, noting that they are considering a charter commission and that he and others have provided presentations to them.

There also was a brief discussion of how some members' appointments to the ACIR are based on a specific role they have, such being a town official, and that their membership on the ACIR ends when they no longer are in that role. Other members' positions are not based on such a role.

11. Upcoming meetings:

The next meetings will be:

- Tuesday, June 27, 2023, 10:30 am Subcommittee
- Friday, July 7, 2023, 10:30 am Full ACIR

12. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:28.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM

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