

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Friday, August 4, 2023

Agenda: <https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/17140>

A recording is available at: <http://ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=22014>

Note: A quorum was not present for this meeting, so this document is considered notes, not minutes.

Members present: John Filchak (Vice Chair), Karl Kilduff, Matt Hart, Martin Heft, James O’Leary, Francis Pickering, Troy Raccuia, Lon Seidman, Brendan Sharkey (Chair), Ron Thomas

Members not present: Carl Amento, Luke Bronin, Maureen Brummett, Steve Cassano, Sam Gold, Brian Greenleaf, Laura Hoydick, Jeff Kitching, Harrison Nantz, Keith Norton, Neil O’Leary, Katie Stargardt, Mike Walsh

Other participants: Sheila McKay, Brian O’Connor, Rick Porth, Richard Strauss, Kevin Tedesco, Patrick Zapatka

OPM staff: Christine Goupil, Justine Phillips-Gallucci, Bruce Wittchen

Member vacancies: Nominated by COST: Municipal official: Town of <10,000 population
Nominated by COST: Municipal official: Town of 10,000 – 20,000 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 July 7 meeting.

Due to the lack of a quorum, the ACIR could not vote to approve the [draft 7/7/2023 minutes](#).

3. Membership updates, if any

Bruce Wittchen said Kyle Abercrombie will no longer be DECD’s designee to the ACIR because he has a new role at DECD. Katie Stargardt is the new designee but is unable to attend this morning’s meeting.

4. Presentation: Town of Chester [Governance Study Committee: 2/9/2023 Report](#)

Richard Strauss of the Town of Chester Governance Study Committee gave a presentation on that study, which has been discussed at recent ACIR meetings. He provided an overview of discussions that led to the study and, in Slide 2 of [his presentation](#), showed the committee’s charge and the complexity, continuity, and engagement issues considered. Slide 3 outlines the process followed by the committee and, as shown in Slide 4, findings include that the challenges faced by Chester are not unique, many can be addressed without changing the form of government but that addressing some overarching issues might require a charter.

Mr. Strauss explained Slide 5, which identifies forms of municipal government in CT and also mentioned that there is an increased interest in professional management, which is further described on Slide 6. Slides 7 & 8 breakdown the different forms of local government in place in CT and nationally. Mr. Strauss pointed out that 33% of CT towns governed by selectmen and town meeting are non-charter towns and noted that many of those having a mayor-council government have a town

manager. He also highlighted that CT accounts for nearly 10% of the nation's municipalities having town meeting government.

Slides 9 – 11 provide additional details regarding the most common forms of municipal government. As indicated in Slide 9, 90% of town meeting towns with a population <5,000 do not have a charter and, as noted on Slide 10, some council-town manager towns still hold town meetings for certain actions. The focus of Slide 11 is on mayor-council towns and Mr. Strauss pointed out that mayors range from weak to strong. A less common form of government is the selectmen-representative town meeting form detailed on Slide 12 and Mr. Strauss pointed out Greenwich's large number of representatives. Slide 13 shows how town clerks, tax collectors, and treasurers are selected.

Slides 14-16 summarize the study committee's findings and Mr. Strauss highlighted the independence of a Board of Finance and emphasized the need for balance and collaboration between those involved in the financial policy, administration, and budgeting process. Slide 17 looks at engagement in local government and Mr. Strauss noted the low rate of participation.

Mr. Strauss described the committee's study methodology, referencing Slide 18, emphasizing the interview process, and mentioned that other towns experience the same issues as Chester. Slide 19 itemizes potential next steps and Mr. Strauss distinguished between changes that can be made administratively vs. those requiring a charter. He pointed out that the [statutory authority for appointing a town manager](#) that applies to towns lacking a charter gives the Board of Finance a central role in appointing and removing a manager, whereas the appointment process for towns with charters is typically different and as specified by charter.

Slide 20 identifies potential next steps for leadership continuity and Mr. Strauss noted the potential interest in having more boards be appointed, not elected. Slide 21 lists next steps to improve engagement and Mr. Strauss highlighted the slides final point, to *(e)xamine why residents do and don't participate in town government and how to engage them for volunteer service*. Slide 22 summarizes the committee's recommendations.

Slide 23 provides a post-study action update and Mr. Strauss described actions taken to develop a charter, emphasizing that a nominating committee was created to limit the politics in selecting Charter Commission members. He mentioned that he is the only Governance Study Committee member who is on the Charter Commission and pointed out that ACIR members Matt Hart, Karl Kilduff, and Sam Gold have spoken to the commission. He noted that one outstanding issue is the approach to financial oversight and an option being considered is to expand to a 7-member Board of Selectmen who serve staggered four-year terms.

Commission chair Sharkey commented on the role of members of the public in overseeing government and noted the mention of regional shared services on Slide 20. Mr. Strauss described the difficulties of first selectman succession in a small town and also of hiring a building inspector and zoning enforcement officer. He added that Sam Gold discussed shared services when he spoke with the Charter Commission but that is a long-term approach that will not solve a problem faced next month. Mr. Strauss also said [Title 7](#) of the state statutes should provide more guidance to municipalities and mentioned difficulties in drafting charter language.

Commission member Pickering commented on opportunities for business process re-engineering, mentioning vehicle assessment and zoning options. Mr. Strauss said it can be a tough sell but mentioned that they are considering replacing the Planning & Zoning Commission's current structure of nine members plus three alternates with seven members and no alternates. Commission member Heft commented on the value the work done in Chester and added that the state is working with the COGs to make it easier to provide services regionally. He invited people and groups to provide suggestions. Mr. Strauss said he will do that and added that the working group established by [Special Act 22-4](#) to study of Title 7 of the statutes should get moving.

Commission member Seidman noted that more positions are appointed in Essex than are elected and asked if having to run for election is a turnoff for some people. Mr. Strauss said it is and described some changes being considered in Chester, including reducing the number of people required for a board. Commission vice chair Filchak complimented the work done by the town and asked Mr. Strauss what he sees as being barriers to improvement. He also noted the bifurcation between the general government and education sides of small government and said administrative capacity tends to be more robust on the education side and possibly able to assist with general government. The Regional Educational Education Centers (RESCs) also have such capacity.

Mr. Strauss described the complexities of the education system serving his town, which is served by local and regional schools, but said an administrative structure could be established with the elementary schools in the district. Commission vice chair Filchak mentioned Mansfield's experiences with such sharing and noted the involvement of the regional district. Mr. Strauss said it would be a challenge for each district to do that independently; there should be a model approach. Commission chair Sharkey said this information very helpful because the ACIR is seeking new approaches for how local government can be done. Mr. Strauss said he is interested in following the ACIR's work too.

5. In-person ACIR Visioning Session/Charette: 9:00 – 12 on 9/8 at Dinosaur State Park, Rocky Hill

Commission chair Sharkey noted the time and said he would like to spend just a few minutes on this topic. He described a meeting he and Commission vice chair Filchak had with Commission member Heft, Bruce Wittchen, and Christine Goupil. He said they talked about the ACIR's effectiveness, its mission, and how to reimagine some of the work we do.

Commission chair Sharkey said there are a lot of items on the ACIR's plate, some by our choice and some that is legislatively prescribed. We might be more effective if we consider changes in our approach and set out goals and objectives for the group, and possibly legislative changes to the makeup of the group, to make us more effective. He described the idea of dedicating the morning of the ACIR's September meeting to a 3-hour, in-person, off-site charette to flesh out what we want to do as a group and how to do those things, including consideration of the design and size of the ACIR. He noted that Commission member Heft had reserved the conference room at Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill and pointed out that the public is also invited.

Commission vice chair Filchak said he thinks it will be beneficial and help provide a vision for the ACIR. Christine Goupil provided additional background and noted the opportunity in the next legislative session to advance the ACIR's goals and added that a good turnout can help the ACIR set its goals for the foreseeable future. Commission chair Sharkey encouraged everyone to put that meeting on their calendar and highlighted that it will be in-person only, not hybrid. Commission member Thomas said discussing priorities in that atmosphere is a very good idea.

Commission chair Sharkey highlighted the importance of as many members participating as possible and added that the turnout might influence recommendations to the legislature regarding the makeup of the ACIR. Commission member Thomas noted that three of the municipal official members nominated by CCM are not running for reelection, which could impact their attendance, but he will reach out to them. Commission chair Sharkey said that had come up in the previous conversation and said an appointing authority who is aware that a member will not be staying with the ACIR can identify others who might be interested to invite them as well. Commission member Thomas noted CCM's desire for mayors appointed to the ACIR to be able to designate someone to attend meetings in their absence. Commission chair Sharkey said that will be discussed in September.

Commission vice chair Filchak agreed with the points made by Commission member Thomas and recommended inviting former ACIR member John Elsesser, who was never afraid to voice his opinion

at these meetings. He would be helpful and it would be an opportunity to recognize his contributions to the ACIR. Commission chair Sharkey agreed. Commission member Pickering recommended also looking at other states' experience with ACIRs and what best practices are. Commission chair Sharkey said that is a good suggestion and noted there will be some discussions of the agenda this month. Christine Goupil said the agenda will likely begin with the history of ACIRs and similar structures around the country. Jim O'Leary asked if people at OPM can look into why the Governor's Office has not quickly acted on some nominations for new ACIR members. Perhaps that can be streamlined. Commission chair Sharkey said that was a good point and that all of this will be on the table.

6. CT Local Government of the Future ACIR member survey

Commission vice chair Filchak said participation was not great but there is some insightful commentary in the responses. He suggested it be taken up at the September meeting. Christine Goupil agreed and said it is one of the things being considered for that agenda. Commission vice chair Filchak said people can still respond.

7. ACIR workshop on Local Government of the Future initiative: discussion of date/structure

There was a discussion of this being a longer term item that should be considered following the September meeting.

8. [SA 23-13](#), *An Act Studying The Consolidation Of Metropolitan Planning Organizations*

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned previous discussions and said he has been contacted by the Governor's Office asking about the status and what assistance might be needed. Commission vice chair Filchak said he has talked about this with Commission member Hart and noted the required role of CT DOT. He recommended that Commission chair Sharkey and the Commissioner of DOT or his designee co-chair the study and organize a meeting to kick off the study.

Commission vice chair Filchak suggested some presentations. Amy Jackson-Grove of the [Federal Highway Administration](#) (FHWA) should be invited to give a brief presentation on MPOs, adding that some members might not be familiar with them, and the Governor's Office could give a presentation on why they introduced the legislation. He recommended there be a panel including the House chair of the [Transportation Committee](#), who seemed to be the most focused on this, Matt Fulda of MetroCOG, former DOT commissioner Emil Frankel, and one of the MPO chairs.

Commission vice chair Filchak said he has prepared background material with legislative history, including the transcript of the public hearing with the back-and-forth discussion that included Commission member Pickering. That can provide a starting point and we'll see where the study goes. He added that a lot of the study will focus on the federal side because a lot of this is governed by federal law, not by state statute.

Commission chair Sharkey said he is not as familiar with MPOs but the word "consolidation" is almost a misnomer because it depends on federal authorization. The first meeting might answer what the state can and cannot do and it seems the weight might be on the side of what the state cannot do. Much of this can come out at the first meeting, which would be a purely informational meeting without public input. Members of the public and others should not expect to be able to pepper speakers with questions.

Commission vice chair Filchak said this is a meeting is intended to provide information and will be followed by other meetings where other people can provide their input. He mentioned previous experience with related reviews and commented that the late Oz Griebel would have been a great person

to hear from because of his long interest in transportation. This is not a new topic; multiple governors have talked about it; but we will learn what the realities are and go from there.

Commission member Pickering commented on the special act seeking to achieve a greater level of efficiency and consistency in transportation planning, saying CT MPOs are more consistent and efficient than most states' MPOs. When he has given talks on this at the national level people have said CT is a model for this. He recommended including two other people: the executive director of the [Assoc. of Metropolitan Planning Associations](#), the trade organization of MPOs, and [Jeff Kramer](#) of the [Center for Urban Transportation & Research](#), who he said is the country's leading expert on this topic. Commission member Pickering said he can invite them.

Commission chair Sharkey said those are good suggestions and the national perspective is important, but there is a concern about how large the panel can be for a for a 1½ to 2-hr session without being unwieldy. Commission member Filchak add that this will not be the only meeting and the intent is to bring ACIR members who are not familiar with MPOs up to speed about them and the purpose of SA 23-13. He agreed with Commission member Pickering's suggestions, which can be discussed at a following meeting so the first is not a 4-hour meeting.

Commission member Pickering said he is concerned about how the issue is framed at the first meeting because, if we ask the wrong questions, we will get the wrong answers. We should avoid starting down the wrong path and he commented on the challenges he had faced when he testified against this bill at the Transportation Committee and had to correct the misinformation and misunderstandings behind the bill. He said the additional experts are necessary so the scope of this study does not have to be revised later.

Commission chair Sharkey said the goal for the first study is to put facts out there, not to hear opinions about what should or should not be. Commission member Pickering said Jeff Kramer's input will be important for scope development, not necessarily at this first meeting. Once we have the draft scope, we can show it to an expert familiar with MPOs around the country and ask if it makes sense. Commission vice chair Filchak noted that the ACIR includes four members who are MPO directors and mayors who might be chairs of their MPOs. That is a body of expertise that can raise questions. Commission chair Sharkey agreed with proceeding and with the value of bringing in national expertise at the first or a subsequent meeting and asked Commission member Pickering to contact the people he had mentioned and inform them of this.

9. CT Local Government of the Future (LGF) initiative (see draft notes of [7/25/2023 meeting](#))

There was no further discussion

10. 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

There was no update

11. Other business or municipal, regional, or state matters for ACIR consideration

There was no further discussion.

12. Future Discussion/presentations

There was no further discussion.

13. Additional public comments (if any)

There were no additional public comments.

14. Upcoming meetings:

The next meetings will be:

- Tuesday, August 22, 2023, 10:30 am LGF Subcommittee
- Friday, September 8, 2023, 9:00 am In-person visioning session at Dinosaur State Park

15. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:58.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM