

# Local Government of the Future Subcommittee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Tuesday, July 25, 2023

*Note: This document is ACIR staff notes written during this subcommittee meeting. It is a public document and has been provided to meeting participants for their review and revised in accordance with any comments received but is not approved minutes of the meeting.*

The agenda is available at:

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**ACIR Members present:** John Filchak, Matt Hart, Jim O’Leary, Francis Pickering, Brendan Sharkey, Mike Walsh

**Other participants:** Sheila McKay, Brian O’Connor, Meghan Portfolio, Rick Porth, Margaret Wirtenberg

**ACIR/OPM staff:** Christine Goupil, Bruce Wittchen

## 1. Call to order

Commission chair Sharkey called the meeting to order at 10:34.

## 2. Review of [draft 6/27/2023 LGF](#) & [draft 4/28/2023 IIJA](#) notes, [draft 7/7/2023 ACIR minutes](#)

## 3. Local Government of the Future (LGF) Initiative

- Data collection regarding IIJA local match as impediment to federal grants

Commission chair Sharkey asked about CCM’s work on this and Brian O’Connor said CCM is researching the grant funding available and difficulties municipalities are experiencing. They are meeting tomorrow. Commission chair Sharkey noted that this is a possible topic for the ACIR seminar that will be discussed later.

- Update on Property Tax Restructuring (see [Property Tax Restructuring Report](#))

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned Commission member Hart’s advice at a previous meeting to re-orient the ACIR’s original approach regarding property tax restructuring to consider approaching fiscal changes that will impact local and state budgets. Commission member Hart mentioned efforts by and information available from the [CT Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Team](#) (CT BILT). He also mentioned the complexity of federal grant application processes and highlighted that the required benefit-cost analysis can require a consultant.

Brian O’Connor raised the question of whether applications are more successful if submitted by individual towns rather than by a group. He noted that, at the ACIR’s [4/28/2023 special meeting](#) regarding the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA), CT BILT lead and Dept. of Revenue Services Commissioner Mark Boughton said he would look into that. Commission member Pickering added that it would be helpful to look at states that appear to be punching above their weight and consider why. Data are available at <https://www.usaspending.gov/>.

- Possibly revisit [2020 Report by the Task Force to Promote Municipal Shared Services](#)

Commission vice chair Filchak outlined the ACIR's role in the study and highlighted the legislative interest in the resulting report, but that the pandemic followed immediately afterwards and the recommendations did not advance. He said some things have changed but pointed out that much remains valid and recommended it be updated. Commission chair Sharkey recommended that people review it.

- Activities for remainder of 2023
  - September: 1/2-day ACIR workshop
  - ACIR role in [CCM Convention](#)
  - Other

Commission chair Sharkey said he and vice chair Filchak had met with Commission member Heft, Christine Goupil, and Bruce Wittchen of OPM last week. He described an idea for a visioning session the morning of Sept. 8, the day scheduled for the ACIR's meeting that month. He recommended looking at where the ACIR is going and paths it can take, with the goal of recalibrating the group and encouraging member activity. Christine Goupil can organize this and he suggested considering structural and procedural changes.

Christine Goupil provided some background, noting the impact of potential legislative changes within the timeframe that such exercises typically loom into the future. She recommended the group and members consider potential partnerships, where the ACIR is heading, and a discussion on potential structural changes. Commission chair Sharkey said Christine Goupil will organize and manage this and Commission member Heft is looking for a centrally-located place for this to be held on 9/8, from 9:00 – 12:00. He asked if anyone has any thoughts.

Commission member Hart said he likes the idea and recommended that OPM look at other ACIR models around the country. He expects the group to emerge from that visioning session with ideas but it might require more than one session. Rick Porth agreed and said the framework Commission member Hart has proposed for the ACIR's property tax work would be good. He added, though, that the ACIR should not be seen as focusing at just the local and regional levels. The state should also be included and the group should reframe its efforts.

Rick Porth noted that he and Commission chair Sharkey had co-chaired the [Shared Services Policy Committee](#) of the Governor's [Transition Policy Working Group](#) and pointed out the Governor and legislative leaders influence over the ACIR's relevance and the resources available to it. Margaret Wirtenberg referred to a recent mention of an ongoing Water Planning Council initiative and said the ACIR needs to get similarly engaged with state and local issues now.

Commission member O'Leary said both Democratic and Republican governors and legislatures have tended to not pay attention to ACIR recommendations regarding state operations. He mentioned that they were told to take some things off the table during Governor Rell's second term and said we need buy-in by the Governor and legislature. Commission chair Sharkey agreed that the ACIR needs to integrate the Governor and legislature into its work but added that the engagement must go beyond individual relationships and conversations that he has been relying on.

Christine Goupil said that, from a project management perspective, the ACIR should consider what it wants to focus on and the time frame, using process mapping, and come out of the September visioning session with consensus on initiatives and a schedule for what needs to be done. Commission vice chair Filchak suggested including the [Planning & Development Committee](#) (PD) co-chairs in this and people from relevant agencies, noting the limited participation in ACIR meetings by some agency designees. He noted that many recommendations of the legislature's [former Office of Review & Investigations](#) never saw the light of day and results similar efforts have been meager.

Margaret Wirtenberg said the ACIR had been different because there had also been the federal ACIR and ACIRs in other states. She pointed out that other states got rid of their ACIRs but CT might be different due to the lack of county government. She added that perhaps the ACIR should prod more, but the legislature does not want that. Commission vice chair Filchak said ACIR meetings had been packed in its earlier years, describing his experiences attending prior to becoming a member, and said important things came out of the ACIR, noting that its work affected environmental and agricultural issues he had been involved with.

Commission member O’Leary pointed out that the ACIR had more staff directly assigned to it, plus the assistance of others, during the period it accomplished more. The ACIR set the direction and the staff did the work. Commission chair Sharkey agreed that would be better, with more participation by members in that manner and more staffing.

- Activities for remainder of 2023 – ACIR role in [CCM Convention](#)

Commission chair Sharkey described a conversation regarding time being set aside for the ACIR at the CT Conference of Municipalities’ (CCM’s) conference in November and said concepts developed at the September visioning session could be rolled out there. Brian O’Connor and Rick Porth outlined the conference schedule and what CCM is able to offer and Commission chair Sharkey will discuss the options with them.

#### 4. Future Topics/Initiatives

- 2/9/2023 [Governance Study Committee Report](#) – Town of Chester (2/9/2023)
- Tom Condon article: [Does CT need 169 municipalities? Some say merging makes sense](#)

Commission chair Sharkey said these topics can be included in the ACIR’s ½-day session and the ACIR can also consider towns moving to a shared town administrator or manager, not just formally merging their towns. Bruce Wittchen and Christine Goupil said the speaker from Chester expects to give his presentation at the ACIR’s regular August meeting and Commission chair Sharkey said Tom Condon’s presentation can be at a later meeting.

Commission vice chair Filchak said the visioning session is needed so the ACIR can agree on a course of action and more than one session might be required. Commission member O’Leary said the idea of towns combining is something most will not consider and said the ACIR might be spreading itself too thinly. There was a discussion of what towns will and will not consider and Commission vice chair Filchak said this topic comes up frequently comes up in his region. He added that some need professional administration but cannot afford it, resulting in inconsistency.

Commission chair Sharkey asked if this would be an appropriate topic for a larger workshop and Commission vice chair Filchak said it would be. He added that many people cherish the traditional town governance structure, but even small towns have a large budget to manage. Commission member O’Leary said most would not seek to merge. Commission chair Sharkey said this could be addressed at a regular meeting or be part of the workshop, but the latter might be better.

Commission vice chair Filchak said this is a significant concern and he expects we will eventually see small towns under review by the [CT Municipal Accountability Review Board](#) (MARB). He suggested that the ACIR provide options to help towns avoid a crisis. There was a discussion of possible approaches, including a workshop and a possible subcommittee. Brian O’Connor said the ACIR could bring it up at a meeting the way the [CT Assoc. of Public School Superintendents](#) (CAPSS) [Blueprint](#) was presented in 2021 and the ACIR can choose to do a deeper dive afterwards if it wants.

Commission chair Sharkey recommended reserving this for the ACIR’s October meeting, along with the Tom Condon presentation and associated topics. Margaret Wirtenberg noted the tendency to only solve

a problem after it results in disaster. Commission chair Sharkey said the additional topics under Sec. 4 of the agenda can be raised at meetings.

Commission member Filchak said the MPO study required by [SA 23-13](#), *An Act Studying The Consolidation Of Metropolitan Planning Organizations*, should have been included on this agenda. He recommended the ACIR plan a forum of speakers from CT DOT, the Federal Highway Administration, the legislature's Transportation Committee, the Governor's Office, the MPOs, and former DOT Commissioner Emil Frankel.

Commission vice chair Filchak said the participants should be balanced and the ACIR can learn how far we have to go with the study. Bruce Wittchen said he will list the MPO study on the August agenda so the group can discuss scheduling that. Commission member Pickering said the national [Association of Metropolitan Planning Associations](#) (AMPO) could also participate and Commission vice chair Filchak highlighted that this would be an informational meeting.

## 5. Next meetings

8/4/2023	ACIR
8/22/2023	LGF Subcommittee

## 6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:38

*Notes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM*