

Local Government of the Future Subcommittee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Tuesday, October 24, 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:

<https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/17152>

The meeting recording is available at:

https://ctvideo.ct.gov/opm/2023-08-22_ACIR_LGF_Video.mp4

ACIR Members present: John Filchak, Martin Heft, Jim O’Leary, Francis Pickering, Brendan Sharkey, Katie Stargardt

Other participants: Owen Deutsch, Brian O’Connor, 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. If helpful for background: [draft 10/6/2023 ACIR minutes](#) and [draft 8/22/2023 LGF notes](#)

There was no discussion of the draft minutes and notes.

3. Old Business

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned that there had been some consideration of pausing the Local Government of the Future (LGF) initiative and Commission vice chair Filchak said he feels strongly that it should continue. He described its origin during the period of changes imposed during COVID and said there is a window of opportunity to change the delivery of services. Otherwise we will return to the status quo.

Commission chair Sharkey agreed regarding the opportunity being available now and added that this is at the core of the ACIR. He also noted recent discussions about the property tax not being the cornerstone for why the ACIR is doing this. He described conversations with House Majority Leader Rojas and Governor Lamont, including the Governor’s concern that towns did not reduce mill rates when receiving additional state funding. He plans to speak with someone from the Office of the Governor this afternoon.

Commission vice chair Filchak said that is good news and added that the ACIR can build from what it has already started. Commission member Pickering said this sounds promising but is almost intractable. He said MA and NY have property tax limits, but CT does not and entrenched groups will oppose. Commission chair Sharkey said that is all the more reason to push when we have the opportunity, but without rose-colored glasses.

Commission member O’Leary pointed out a recent meeting’s mention of TN’s ACIR being the country’s other active ACIR and being based on a think-tank model. He said governors do not notice the ACIR can bring new ideas forward and is not political. He added that change takes a long time and noted how much

time the merger of Region 6 and Litchfield schools had been under consideration. He also mentioned that the region's COG has now moved in with the RESC. Change takes a long time and the LGF initiative is very worthwhile because of the good ideas it generates even if they have not be accomplished.

Brian O'Connor said the devil is in the details and that municipalities will need additional state funds due to inflation and special education. He also pointed out that federal funds will decline and noted the potential fiscal cliff. He mentioned Commission member Hart's previous recommendation regarding common sense efficiencies that can reduce taxes but to focus on improvements. The ACIR can learn what the governor is interested in trying. There was a discussion of the details of employee benefits portability and of the need to avoid focusing on a single issue and to look more broadly, such as opportunities for regional shared services and to build capacity.

Commission vice chair Filchak said towns appreciate additional state funding, but federal funding has not been spent well in his region. He recommended that Commission chair Sharkey talk about the ACIR's recommendations when he speaks with Governor's staff later today. Commission chair Sharkey said he will report back on his upcoming discussion and also check with Rep. Rojas and the Planning & Development Committee co-chairs.

There was a discussion of the willingness of the legislature and RESCs and COGs to encourage regional approaches as recommended by the ACIR and of the need for funding. In response to Commission chair Sharkey's mention of the Governor's concern about mill rates not being reduced in response to additional state funding, Commission member O'Leary said towns had pent-up needs and state funding went to that. Commission member Pickering said the mill rate has no meaning on its own. MA calculates changes in property tax across time, which is more helpful because mill rates also reflect real estate values.

4. Potential Future topics/initiatives

- Tom Condon article: [Does CT need 169 municipalities? Some say merging makes sense](#)
- Engage with RESC and COG directors/chairs re LGF initiative

Commission chair Sharkey pointed out that the Tom Condon article is six months old and not directly relevant to what the group is focusing on. He suggested proceeding with RESCs and COGs as discussed today. Commission vice chair Filchak said he anticipates them getting together in December or January. Commission chair Sharkey said it will be more relevant with buy-in from the Governor. He added that some COGs might not be interested but RESCs are interested.

Commission vice chair Filchak said he will try to schedule a meeting at the LOB in December and invite Rep. Rojas and the Governor. Margaret Wirtenberg commented on the importance of regional approaches and Commission chair Sharkey noted the misalignment of state agencies' service regions and pointed out the potential benefits of re-aligning those and involving RESCs and COGs.

5. Next meetings

11/3/2023	ACIR
11/14/2023	MPO Study meeting #1
11/28/2023	LGF Subcommittee

5. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 11:19.

Notes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM