



NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION ZONE ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES OF MEETING

January 26, 2023

The State Neighborhood Revitalization Advisory Board (advisory board) held a remote meeting on Tuesday, January 26, 2023, at 9:00 AM. The [agenda](#) and [videorecording](#) are available online.

Board Members or Designees:

Matthew Abbott, [City of Bridgeport, Office of Planning & Economic Development](#)
Linda Brunza, [CT Dept. of Energy & Environmental Protection](#)
Julie Carmelich, [CT State Historic Preservation Office](#)
Janice Castle, [City of Hartford](#)
Andrew Clark, [Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy](#)
Jennifer Edwards, [CT Social Equity Council](#)
Mike Gilmore, [Waterbury Development Corporation](#)
Marion Griffin, [Hartford NEXT](#)
Martin Heft (Chair), [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)
Jodi Hill-Lilly, [CT Dept. of Children & Families](#)
Matt Pafford, [CT Dept. of Administrative Services](#)
Jasmine Peele, [City of New Haven](#)
Marlon Pena, [CT Dept. of Transportation](#)
Sydney Phelps, [City of Norwich](#)
Mark Polzella, [CT Dept. of Labor](#)
Laura Watson, [CT Dept. of Housing](#)

Others:

Cynthia Bowser, West Side NRZ (Stamford)
Ginne-Rae Clay, [CT Social Equity Council](#)
Rebecca Dahl (staff), [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)
Owen Deutsch, [City of Hartford](#)
Maureen Goulet, [Capitol Region Council of Governments](#)
Jean Holloway, Clay Arsenal Revitalization Association (Hartford)
Debi Martin, [LISC Connecticut](#)
Jeffrey Stewart, Clay Arsenal Revitalization Association (Hartford)
Andy Toledo, [Mayor's Office, City of Bridgeport](#)
Bruce Wittchen (staff), [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)

1. Welcome, Introductions, Adoption of Minutes

Martin Heft called the meeting of the [Neighborhood Revitalization Zone](#) (NRZ) Advisory Board to order at 9:03. A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft [September 8, 2022, Meeting Minutes](#) as corrected and the motion was approved unanimously.

2. Approve 2023 meeting schedule

A motion was made and seconded to approve the 2023 meeting schedule: Jan. 26, April 20; July 20; and Oct. 19. The motion passed unanimously.

3. NRZ or Other Community Updates and Comments or Questions

Bruce Wittchen introduced new member Jodi Hill-Lilly, Deputy Commissioner of the [CT Dept. of Children & Families](#) and she described DCF's interest in local services. Bruce also introduced new alternate member Owen Deutsch of Hartford's Division of Planning & Zoning is in attendance and Owen mentioned his involvement in neighborhood and city planning.

Janice Castle said the [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#) is supporting the city's [Love Your Block program](#) and described the quality of life grants that will be available.

4. Next Steps for state NRZ advisory board

Martin Heft and Bruce Wittchen provided an overview of the advisory board 2022 discussions that led to the list of potential actions in [NRZ Advisory Board Concepts for 2023](#) document.

Julie Carmelich recommended the group begin with the 5th item in that document's list:

Reintroduce the state Advisory Board to NRZs: many NRZ leaders & members are unaware of the advisory board's existence, of state requirements, and potential state agency roles in support of what NRs do. Should the advisory board reintroduce itself to NRZs, perhaps city by city?

Julie mentioning the possibility of office hours or listening tours, city-by-city or region-by-region, to learn what they need so we can make the best use of our time. She volunteered to help with that.

Ginne-Rae Clay offered to help and noted the [Social Equity Council](#)'s responsibility to reinvest in communities and is working with communities to prepare a reinvestment plan. Bruce Wittchen asked people interested in working on that to let him know. Janice Castle said some NRZs need help to develop the capacity to do more for their neighborhoods and noted the potential benefit of providing them paid, part-time staff to help. She mentioned that [Hartford NEXT](#) is looking into options for assisting NRZs.

Matt Abbott said Bridgeport NRZs have tried to have websites and it has been a challenge. They are trying to find a way to provide individual NRZs' information on the [city's NRZ website](#). He recommended websites be maintained at the municipal, not NRZ level.

Jodi Hill-Lilly said DCF is providing technical support for community-level service providers similar to what this group is discussing for NRZs. She said DCF encountered the same limitations this advisory board sees with NRZs. Grassroots organizations need people with the knowledge to do these things and she mentioned DCF's use of technical assistance to assist in developing the needed organizational infrastructure. Bruce Wittchen noted that the situation described by Jodi Hill-Lilly is consistent with the 3rd

item listed in the 2023 concepts document – it could be beneficial to coordinate these parallel efforts.

Debi Martin mentioned coordination between community development corporations (CDCs) and NRZs, noting that CDCs focus on physical development and that NRZ broader perspective is important. She is willing to help with this. Marion Griffin noted the importance of assisting with NRZ capacity and training. She also pointed out that the same few volunteers tend to do all the work and that Hartford NEXT is experiencing the same limitations in maintaining its website. NRZ need people resources and financial resources.

Matt Pafford said the proposed guidance listed as the first task in the concepts document should identify capacity needs and the potential for sharing services. That should be the first priority for this group. Sydney Phelps said she has been attending NRZ meetings in her new role at Norwich and they are not familiar with the state's NRZ process. She recommended this advisory board consider a tiered set of steps for NRZs and added that we need to revitalize the NRZs.

Jasmine Peel said this is her first meeting representing the City of New Haven and mentioned her background in community organizing and said she looks forward to learning from this group. Bruce Wittchen asked if there should be two subgroups at this time: one focused on the task of reintroducing the advisory board to NRZs and a second focused on capacity development needs or if what is learned through the first effort could help guide the second.

Matt Abbott recommended working on how to address the capacity issue at the same time as on the reintroduction. He recommended the advisory board standardize a document like the Hartford checklist linked in the agenda. We should standardize processes instead of slowly rolling them out. Martin Heft agreed. Marion Griffin said we should go to NRZ committees with guidance to share. Some of that information is foundational to what NRZs should be doing and some NRZs are not operating as NRZs.

Ginne-Rae Clay noted that people have different levels of familiarity with this and recommended scheduling neighborhood summits to explain what state agencies are doing. Sydney Phelps agreed with the summit approach but and noted that the people we are trying to reach have job or other time constraints. A two-hour Zoom presentation would enable people to learn from it and the benefits of making that available through Zoom to avoid barriers to participation, such as people having to take time off from work or find childcare.

There was further discussion of possible approaches and Martin Heft agreed with the recommendations to go to neighborhoods and enable people to watch remotely. Cynthia Bowser pointed out that Stamford's South Side NRZ is active while the West Side NRZ has to be rebuilt. Regional meetings would enable people in the West Side to learn.

Andrew Clark highlighted the limited capacity of many NRZs and of the advisory board and asked if the advisory board can make good on its promises. He also pointed out that we might need NRZs to ramp up quickly and recommended asking the legislature for funding to support what we are asking of NRZs. Martin Heft mentioned the midterm budget adjustments of the 2024 session and suggested the advisory board take the steps necessary to make a case for funding then. Maureen Goulet agreed with earlier suggestions of regional approaches and noted the potential role of Councils of Governments (COGs), which are involved in various regional planning.

Ginne-Rae Clay said she agrees with Andrew Clark's comments. She noted that the Dept. of Children & Families is already out at the neighborhood level, as mentioned by Jodi Hill-Lilly, and said the Social Equity Commission will be going out too. The advisory board should inventory what is already available. Jodi Hill-Lilly pointed out that DCF's neighborhood-level service is supported by federal, not state funding. Marion Griffin mentioned the state's [Community Investment Fund](#) and said a COG could support an application for neighborhoods. Martin Heft recommended the advisory board develop a resource document to identify such opportunities.

5. Adjourn

There was no further discussion and the meeting adjourned at 9:58.