



NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION ZONE ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES OF MEETING

April 20, 2023

The State Neighborhood Revitalization Advisory Board (advisory board) held a remote meeting on Thursday, April 20, 2023, at 9:00 AM. The [agenda](#) is available online. Due to an oversight, the meeting was not recorded.

Board Members or Designees:

Julie Carmelich, [CT State Historic Preservation Office](#)
Janice Castle, [City of Hartford](#)
Jennifer Edwards, [CT Social Equity Council](#)
Mike Gilmore, [Waterbury Development Corporation](#)
Marion Griffin, [Hartford NEXT](#)
Martin Heft (Chair), [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)
Matt Pafford, [CT Dept. of Administrative Services](#)
Jasmine Peele, [City of New Haven](#)
Marlon Pena, [CT Dept. of Transportation](#)
Mark Polzella, [CT Dept. of Labor](#)
Andy Toledo, [Mayor's Office, City of Bridgeport](#)
Laura Watson, [CT Dept. of Housing](#)

Other Participants:

Ginne-Rae Clay, [CT Social Equity Council](#)
Susan Cunningham, [CT Dept. of Children & Families](#)
Owen Deutsch, [City of Hartford](#)
Ines Eaton, [CT Dept. of Children & Families](#)
Jean Holloway, Clay Arsenal Revitalization Association (Hartford)
Debi Martin, [LISC Connecticut](#)
Ted Sanford, [CT Dept. of Children & Families](#)

Staff:

Rebecca Dahl, [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)
Bruce Wittchen, [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)

1. Welcome, Introductions, Adoption of Minutes

Bruce Wittchen said he would begin the meeting as acting chair because Martin Heft had to join a different meeting. He called the meeting of the [Neighborhood Revitalization Zone](#) (NRZ) Advisory Board to order at 9:05 and asked everyone to introduce themselves. A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft [January 26, 2023, Meeting Minutes](#) and the motion was approved unanimously.

2. Hartford NEXT's Neighborhood Training Institute

Marion Griffin, Hartford NEXT

Marion Griffin's [slide presentation](#) was not shown but she outlined the history and mission of Hartford NEXT and of the city's NRZs. Their operating framework highlights three roles: Advocacy & Community Economic Development; Communication and Education Platform; and Strategic Partnerships and Marion pointed out that the Neighborhood Training Institute (NTI) is an aspect of the second. She mentioned a series of presentations explaining the roles of the different city departments and another on preservation. Another is being planned to provide tips and tools for improving engagement. She pointed out that Hartford is a small city and NRZs must support each other.

Marion described how the NTI helps with information sharing, providing an informed citizenry and improved example, pointing to a proposed gun shop that was prevented from opening by neighborhood opposition as an example of what can be accomplished. She mentioned NTI seminars, workshops, and programs regarding what she described as the four pillars: technical assistance, capacity building, leadership development, and community economic development.

Marion pointed out that new leaders are often unaware of requirements for NRZs and also that some long-time leaders want to step down but no one is available to replace them. She listed challenges faced by NRZs, including the need for administrative support, succession planning, leadership training, and outreach & engagement, highlighting that NRZs rely on volunteers plus limited funding.

Bruce Wittchen asked how much funding has been available and Marion said they have been working with \$50,000 received in 2021. She asked about the possibility of funding for strategic planning and Bruce said the NRZ statutes include a provision for that and the state had previously provided funding to the [CT Community Economic Development Fund](#) for grants to assist with that planning, but the funding ran out long ago.

Becca Dahl asked how NRZs are involved in city-driven projects, specifically, if there is an NRZ role in the redevelopment underway in Parkville and Marion said the NRZ is integrally involved. Marion added that the Upper Albany NRZ is looking for a building for a development comparable to the Parkville Market, but many NRZs lack the capacity for such an initiative.

Owen Deutsch said the next round of neighborhood plans undertaken by the city will incorporate NRZs' strategic planning. He pointed out that NRZ approval of proposed work is influential. Jennifer Edwards asked if Hartford NEXT has applied for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding and Marion said they have and were rejected both times.

3. Updates, Comments, or Questions

Ginne-Rae Clay updated the group on the Social Equity Council's ongoing efforts with the [Community Reinvestment plan](#), explaining that the program will be administered by 3rd party grant managers. She recommended that NRZs keep an eye out for coming opportunities and communities should think about how they can use funding. Currently grant program areas include focus on local youth initiatives and re-entry programs. Community conversations are planned this summer.

4. DCF Collaboration in Community-Based Capacity Building

Susan Cunningham and Ted Sanford, CT DCF

Martin Heft introduced Susan Cunningham and Ted Sanford of the Dept. of Children & Families (DCF). Ted shared his screen to show [DCF's slides](#) and mentioned the agency's changing approach, pointing out that most people do not want DCF knocking on their door because of the associated social stigma. Susan Cunningham showed a slide of DCF's regions and facilities, noting their Solnit campuses that provide psychiatric support and adding that the wilderness school's programs are available to anyone. She provided an overview of DCF's various roles, highlighting that their approach is family-centered and safety-first. Susan noted that [DCF is out from federal oversight](#) and showed the 4th slide, illustrating DCF's aspirational goals.

Susan described the sequence of goals, explaining that DCF intends for 70% of children they work with to live with their family and 70% of those who do not to live with a relative or someone else they know. They want to limit the proportion living in a congregate setting and are seeking greater permanency in children's living arrangements and in high school graduation, jobs, with less than 5% aging out of the system into homelessness.

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) slides show DCF's approach, which is a shift from a focus on protection to system-focused prevention. The aim is to provide support within the community to avoid a need for direct contact with DCF. Susan described the approach for working within communities, across different agencies, so families can care for their children.

Slide 8 outlines how DCF's contracted services are divided among 93 community providers, 80 service types, and 337 individual programs. Susan described services DCF pays for, but families can access without DCF involvement, and also mentioned Voluntary Care Management, described on Slide 10, noting that it used to but no longer requires contact with DCF.

Susan highlighted Slide 11's description of DCF's Racial Justice Provider Institute, which is currently under development, and Slide 12's description of the nexus between NRZs and DCF. Susan mentioned capacity development and added that people look for services where they feel safe. She highlighted the potential "trusted messenger" role of NRZs.

There was a discussion of potential NRZ roles, given their place in many communities, and of the need to develop their capacity for such roles. Ted Sanford mentioned the technical assistance and training available through DCF's [Academy for Workforce Development](#) and there was further discussion of how the relationship can meet various needs. Marion Griffin said Hartford NEXT would be happy to partner in this and Debi Martin mentioned the [Local Initiatives Support Corporation's](#) (LISC's) related work.

5. Next Steps for State NRZ Advisory Board

Bruce Wittchen recommended that a few people meet to help prepare for the next full meeting of this group, which is scheduled for July, focusing on the training and capacity development needs discussed today. He said similar meetings last summer helped frame the various options this group has been considering since then. He will contact everyone in a couple weeks to invite people who are interested in volunteering.

6. Adjourn

There was no further discussion and the meeting adjourned at 10:19.