



## NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION ZONE ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES OF MEETING

January 18, 2024

The State Neighborhood Revitalization Advisory Board (advisory board) held a remote meeting on Thursday, January 18, 2024, at 9:00 AM. The [agenda](#) and [video](#) are available online.

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### **Board Members or Designees:**

Ian Alexander, [CT Dept. of Emergency Services & Public Protection](#)  
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](#)  
Doris Johnson, [CT Dept. of Energy & Environmental Protection](#)  
Kaelie Moran, [City of New Haven](#)  
Matt Pafford, [CT Dept. of Administrative Services](#)  
Marlon Pena, [CT Dept. of Transportation](#)  
Pete Procko, Greenville NRZ, Norwich  
Andy Toledo, [City of Bridgeport](#)  
Laura Watson, [CT Dept. of Housing](#)

### **Other Participants:**

Matthew Abbott, [City of Bridgeport](#)  
Maureen Goulet, Capitol Region Council of Governments  
Bongi Magubane, [West End Civic Assoc.](#), Hartford

### **Staff:**

Justine Phillips-Gallucci, [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)  
Phil Shattuck, [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)  
Bruce Wittchen, [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)

### **1. Welcome, Introductions, Adoption of Minutes**

Acting chair Bruce Wittchen called the meeting of the [Neighborhood Revitalization Zone](#) (NRZ) Advisory Board to order at 9:02 and everyone introduced themselves. A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft [10/19/2023, Meeting Minutes](#) and the motion was approved unanimously. There also was a discussion of this meeting not being accessible by phone and Martin Heft said that will be remedied for future meetings.

### **2. NRZ/Community Group Resources Document (in preparation)**

Matthew Abbott noted that NRZs can face a variety of challenges and pointed out the impacts on NRZs when long-time leaders leave and the work underway to develop better

guidance for NRZs. He highlighted the successes of Bridgeport's [East End NRZ](#) and described that NRZ's capacity to do things without direct city involvement, but noted that many NRZs do not have that capacity. The guidance developed for NRZs could be as simple as explaining how to hold a more engaging meeting and do better outreach all the way to complex things like how to manage projects, access grants, or get a fiduciary.

Matt Abbott said the guidance being developed can benefit NRZs and their municipalities. Those of us working on the guidance are at an early stage of gathering information and writing things down and Matt asked if anyone else might be interested in helping. He also mentioned the possibility of sending surveys that would help generate a more powerful document.

Bruce Wittchen said the guidance Matt described will likely be a series of smaller documents. People might want to help with one subdocument regarding something they're especially experienced with or might help with the entire thing. People at state agencies can identify what their agencies might be able to provide, whether it be funding or other resources or information they have that could be helpful for an NRZ strategic plan.

Matt Abbott said Bridgeport's East End NRZ is seeking grants on its own. It's working with the Trust for Public Land, on their own initiative, to complete a waterway project at Johnsons Creek. The NRZ is also working with MetroCOG to improve the streetscape network, all of this completely on their own but with some help from the city. It is a collaboration: the city is not forcing the NRZ to do anything.

Pete Procko said these points are very helpful for what the NRZ in his Norwich neighborhood has been going through. The NRZ is aging and is trying to attract new people and get the community to participate. He said it is informative to see what other NRZ are doing and asked if a workshop is available to help if NRZs or if a workshop can be created to do so. Bruce Wittchen said that is an interesting idea and mentioned that there has been some discussion of scheduling some of these advisory group meetings in-person, outside of Hartford.

Bruce said this group used to meet once a year, but in a different place each time. They would meet in a town hall, at a Community Development Corporation, or elsewhere and tour the NRZ afterwards. Those visits were oriented towards showing off NRZs' successes, but it can also be an opportunity for a traveling workshop. The advisory board could learn what is going on at that NRZ but also bring people who can speak of things the NRZ wants to hear about. The workshop suggestion is a terrific idea, but the guidance documents probably need more work before that, although one can lead to the other.

Matt Abbott mentioned NRZ academies Bridgeport held before his time there. Those were successful and the city is interested in doing them again. Matt noted Pete's mention of an aging NRZ that is losing people and said his city's East End NRZ hires interns, including an intern that helps with the general administration work. He added that a friend of his from back at home in Queens worked for an NRZ type organization and experience in that line of work led to him now being an aide for a senator. There are a lot of transferable skills in managing an NRZ, working with the community, managing projects. We want to get young folk into NRZs and make it meaningful for them. It could also be meaningful through college credits or high school credits. It's a valid point we should address.

Pete Procko said he gave up his NRZ's chairmanship about five years ago to let the young people get involved and a wonderful person did but, being a young person chasing his dream jobs, was not as available as needed. That is what young people are supposed to do. That must be a problem for everyone: to find young people who are staying in the community. An NRZ is a day-to-day job; it is not just once a month. We have good relationships with city agencies but if you do not stay involved, they are going to forget about you.

Marion Griffin said people in Hartford do not know about their NRZ. She thinks there is an opportunity to do some marketing and help others understand what this is all about and why they should be involved. Maybe this group and OPM can help because it is a problem everywhere; a lot of people don't know the benefit of an NRZ and why they should be engaged. Pete said that is very true.

Matt Abbott said he was contacted by the City of Norwalk, which is considering NRZs. They are interested in blight remediation and neighborhood improvement, but also in collaborating with neighborhoods much like what Bridgeport is doing. A lot of cities are interested in doing this but, as he has found out from Norwalk, there is a long learning curve. The longer that curve is, the longer it will take for improvements to happen and that is a reason why he wants to work on the guidance document.

Bruce Wittchen mentioned that advisory board member Jennifer Edwards, who is now at the Social Equity Commission, previously worked for Bridgeport and was involved with the NRZ Academy that Matt had mentioned. He asked if she had any thoughts based on her experience with the academy that might help with what the advisory board is discussing.

Jennifer said the academy's training took NRZs from beginning to end. It began with how to start an NRZ and how to become perfect running the NRZ. They did the training in one day, including ethics. City planning and economic development staff were involved and a consultant was hired to put it together and run the meeting. City staff stepped in to talk during the training. The consultant cost \$10,000.

Bruce Wittchen said if others are able to contribute to the guidance Matt Abbott has been describing, we might be able to bring it to an NRZ in April to get a sense of where there might be gaps and to think about the opportunities for a consultant. There is not a pot of NRZ funding like there had been 15 years ago, but we can look into options available now. There was a discussion of the [5019\(c\)\(3\)](#) status of Bridgeport's East End and [Black Rock](#) NRZs.

Matt Abbott said he is working in-depth with Bridgeport's [East Side NRZ](#), which is separate from the East End NRZ, trying to build increase project management capacity. He also said the city has partnered that NRZ with the [CT Main Street Center](#) (CMSC) and described the work of that organization. They are working on a downtown storefront management program for the East Side Corridor, building organizational and generating more interest.

Bruce Wittchen thanked Matt for mentioning the CMSC and recommended involving them in what the advisory board is doing. The CMSC might be interested in an opportunity to help a number of Main Streets at one time rather than just one by one. Martin Heft said he will be meeting with the CMSC's executive director at the end of this month and that we might be able to bring them to a future meeting.

Matt Abbott said they are piloting their work with the CMSC in the East Side neighborhood because it is one of the more condensed corridors in the city outside of downtown or Black Rock. Once they finish that, they will try the main street approach for other interested NRZs.

Bruce Wittchen mentioned that advisory board member Laura Watson has previously mentioned her agency having a consultant work with local organizations and asked if she could describe what was done. Laura said they worked with a consultant team to support limited equity cooperatives that, like the NRZs, had originated quite a long time ago. There had been leadership changes and some issues regarding documentation, meetings, and accounting. Each of the cooperatives had a different issue or problem and consultants went to each to see if what was needed to help them, whatever their specific need was.

Laura Watson said the consultants were people on the ground who were going to all the night meetings and helping the cooperatives with any little thing that was needed. It worked out pretty well. Bruce asked if the benefits had staying power or if occasional refreshers would be required and Laura said she suspects a refresher would be needed every so often. Things were going strong when the cooperatives were first rolled out, but years pass and people leave. They were volunteers. Some were not able to sustain themselves and transitioned into apartment complexes. It was the best we could do; it can be just personality conflicts among the residents because they are all part of a board. The consultants were very to strengthen those who just needed a little hand holding and assistance to stabilize them.

Bruce Wittchen thanked Laura for that overview. He said no one has to volunteer right now to help with the guidance being prepared, but OPM staff will reach back out to everyone to ask if you have any further thoughts or if you would be willing to chip in on the work that Matt Abbott described earlier. He said lists from agencies of programs and other resources would be helpful. Many agencies have sent similar lists to OPM as part of the State Conservation & Development Plan update, but additional thoughts or suggestions would be helpful for this.

### **3. Other State NRZ Advisory Board Objective**

- See [NRZ Advisory Board Concepts for 2023-2024](#)

There was no further discussion.

### **4. Other NRZ, Municipal, State Agency Updates, Comments, or Questions**

Matthew Abbott said the South End NRZ is concerned about new poles being installed through Fairfield County that could impact a number of businesses and homes in the South End. He provided further background, including that they would be on properties adjacent to the New Haven Line tracks and some are shown going through buildings. There is concern about the possibility of eminent domain takings and some people have received letters. For some, it was the first time they heard of this. Bruce Wittchen said updates like this can be helpful for people from other places.

### **5. Next Meeting April 18, 2024**

Bruce Wittchen said he, Justine, or Phil will email everyone requesting help with the guidance that is being prepared. He added that it will be easier for people to see what is

needed when they see the initial draft. Matt and others will keep working on it and they will be looking for any additional thoughts from people.

Bruce said the April meeting might be a good time to restart the practice of meeting in different municipalities having NRZs, hosted by the municipality or a local community development corporation or other organization. A meeting room would be helpful and it will probably be a hybrid meeting. He asked interested NRZs or municipalities to contact OPM.

**6. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 9:48.