

# Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Friday, February 2, 2024

Agenda: <https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/24158>

A recording is available at: <http://ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=22564>

**Members present:** Carl Amento, John Filchak (Vice Chair), Sam Gold, Matt Hart, Martin Heft, Laura Hoydick, Karl Kilduff, Keith Norton, James O'Leary, Francis Pickering, Troy Raccuia, Lon Seidman, Brendan Sharkey (Chair), Ron Thomas, Ethan Van Ness

**Members not present:** Maureen Brummett, Steve Cassano, Brian Greenleaf, Jeff Kitching, Katie Stargardter

**Other participants:** Laura Francis, Rick Porth, Louis Rosado Burch

**OPM staff:** Christine Goupil, Greg Lowrey, Justine Phillips-Gallucci, Bruce Wittchen

**Vacancies:** Nominated by COST: Municipal official: Town of <10,000 population  
Nominated by COST: Municipal official: Town of 10,000 – 20,000 population  
Nominated by CCM: Municipal official: Town of 20,000 – 60,000 population  
2X Nominated by CCM: Two municipal officials: Towns of >60,000 population

## 1. Call to order and overview of telemeeting procedures

Commission chair Sharkey called the meeting to order at 10:33 and he, Commission member Hart, and Rick Porth spoke in remembrance of former Commission vice chair Lyle Wray, who recently passed away..

## 2. Approve draft minutes of [1/5/2024 meeting](#)

A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft minutes and the motion passed unanimously.

## 3. Membership Updates

Commission member Heft reported that the Governor is appointing the three people the CT Conference of Municipalities (CCM) had nominated to fill vacant positions on the ACIR: Janene W. Hawkins, Chief Administrative Officer, Bridgeport; Bridget Fox, Chief of Staff, Stamford; and Steve Stephanou, Town Manager, Manchester. He added that the appointment process should be complete in two weeks and that the Governor's Office was to have reached out to the Council of Small Towns (COST) about that organization's nominations.

## 4. ACIR Statutory Reports

Bruce Wittchen provided an update on the mandates compendium approved in January pending some technical corrections. One of those was to update section names to reflect any changes following last year's sessions, but there has been a delay in posting the browsable statutes that he uses for that. It is expected to be available by the beginning of the session, which should provide enough time to update the compendium before it is due two weeks later. Bruce said he will also include the names of new members. He also noted that an ACIR member had suggested including a tribute to Lyle Wray and Commission chair Sharkey said that should be included and invited members to send any suggestions.

## 5. Update on [2024 legislative proposal](#)

Commission chair Sharkey provided an overview of the history of this proposal and the most recent discussions of it at the 1/23/2024 LGF meeting. Commission vice chair Filchak pointed out that the most recent version is linked on the agenda and explained the proposed changes. Commission chair Sharkey described the steps he has taken to request a legislative committee to raise it as a bill.

Commission member Heft raised a point of order, pointing out that the ACIR has not voted on the proposal. A motion was made and seconded to approve the current proposal. There was further discussion and Commission vice chair Filchak went through the proposed changes in greater detail, noting that it is more narrowly focused than his original draft. Commission chair Sharkey said the proposal was a direct outcome of the ACIR's 9/2023 visioning session and pointed out that the changes will require a bill to be raised and a committee hearing where people can have further input.

Commission member Thomas said CCM would appreciate the addition of alternates and asked about the provision in which a member is replaced after missing three consecutive meetings. There was further discussion of that addition and Commission member Gold recommended limiting that to regular meetings being missed and also rephrasing it so that such a member "may" be removed, "at the discretion of the chair." Commission member Hoydick said she does not agree with including the language about members being replaced if the proxy provision might be lost. There was further discussion and the maker and seconder of the motion accepted the changes recommended by Commission member Gold as a friendly amendment.

Commission member Heft noted that he has some concerns regarding the proposal but said the Legislative Commissioners Office can work on the specific language. He noted that he is not 100% okay with the proxy provision and also pointed out that, being the representative of a state agency, he will abstain from voting on the request to the legislature and recommended that representatives of other agencies do the same. There was further discussion followed by a unanimous vote to approve the proposal, with Commission members Heft, Norton, and Van Ness abstaining.

6. **[Work plan for 2024](#)** (see discussion in [draft 1/23/2024 LGF notes](#))

- Roundtable: ACIR member priorities (*Note: also see the following*)  
[ACIR 2023-09-08 Visioning Outcomes](#)  
[2020 report of Task Force to Promote Municipal Shared Services](#)

Commission chair Sharkey introduced the topic, highlighting that the ACIR sometimes is mandated to review and report on a specific topic but can also choose to do that on its own. He provided an overview of the group's experience with last year's [draft Property Tax Restructuring Report](#), a topic he said was not on state leaders' radar, but said the ACIR should develop a work plan for 2024 addressing issues members consider to be relevant. He noted that there has been only a limited focus on education in the ACIR's work. The goal for today is for members to suggest ideas for inclusion in the work plan.

Commission member Seidman mentioned a topic raised at the visioning session: that the ACIR have a greater role in considering the potential impacts of legislation during a session. He added that it would not be a formal role but instead a culture should be developed in which the legislature would ask the ACIR for such a review.

Commission member Hart agreed and added that the ACIR should invite guest speakers including subject matter experts and key legislators, to learn about their work and where they think the ACIR could be helpful. He suggested the group work on 2-3 topics across a 1-2 year period, highlighting the broader topic of how local government services are delivered and funded. If state leaders are not as interested in that topic, the ACIR should consider an assessment of service sharing between local governments and between boards of education. Where is service sharing desired at the local level, where could it be the most impactful, and what role is there for the [Regional Performance](#)

[Incentive Program](#) (RPIP)? Commission member Hart added that workforce development for local government is another potential topic.

Commission chair Sharkey asked if invited speakers should be relevant for the specific topics the ACIR is working on or if they could speak regarding any topic. Commission member Hart said the group should hear about those and other topics. Commission member Pickering said he agrees with the previous suggestions and added that ACIR could also screen state agency plans for intergovernmental impacts. There are public comment periods and the ACIR can review and comment on those documents; it would not be an unreasonable lift for us. He added that the ACIR tends to focus on the municipal and council of governments (COG) level in its work, but the state level is important too. He recommended the ACIR look at digital government and pension plan debt.

Commission member O’Leary noted past discussion of who ACIR members represent: that they represent their appointing authorities but also bring their personal perspectives. Members have tended to focus on how to deliver cost-effective and better services. It’s a fast-moving world, so state culture has to change and leaders have to accept change. Also, he agrees with the suggestion to provide advice on the state side.

Commission member Thomas agreed with recommendations to look at shared services, noting opportunities for state and local sharing. He described difficulties in local hiring to fill positions, mentioning building officials, and agrees with holding informational hearings. Special education is a key topic. Commission member Hoydick said 21 tax assessor jobs are currently open and mentioned the sharing of building officials. Commission chair Sharkey asked if the state should encourage training in necessary skills at the secondary and post-secondary level and Commission member Thomas agreed. He also mentioned a municipal effort to develop an employment pipeline with a community college.

Commission chair Sharkey asked if there is a role for COGs and [Regional Education Service Centers](#) (RESCs) to house shared staff and mentioned education-related comments Lou Rosado Burch had placed in chat. Commission member Raccaia said the Comptroller had convened working groups including CCM, organized labor, and others to address municipal employee retirement and retention concerns. He recommended the ACIR contribute to such efforts rather than duplicate them. Commission chair Sharkey said he has reached out to the Comptroller, who sees the ACIR’s value for informing such efforts. The ACIR can coordinate with them and be a sounding board.

Commission vice chair Filchak said these are great ideas, noting potential roles of workforce boards, the Comptroller, and community colleges. He added that he did not want the ACIR to lose its focus on property taxes, highlighting the significance of education and special education costs. Those face challenges that could encourage shared services, but no new regional school district has been formed since 1987. He also mentioned a concern he has about discussions of shared services in a highly fragmented state, saying sharing should be done in a more logical way, such as through a COG or in the delivery of state services. He said two towns doing something together does not make a region and also said that economic development continues town-by-town, not by region.

Commission chair Sharkey said sharing a service with a neighboring town is not necessarily property tax reform. It might not be cost effective and that must be analyzed. Commission vice chair Filchak added that we do not want to see five towns near an urban center to get together and say they have already formed their region.

Commission chair Sharkey recapped the topics raised so far and cautioned against the ACIR becoming like the legislature’s former [Office of Program Review & Investigations](#) (PRI), which studied topics to the exclusion of all else, issuing a report 12-15 months later. The ACIR should be nimble and responsive, handing off some topics to others to continue while continuing with others.

Commission vice chair Filchak agreed, saying there are multiple sources of research the ACIR can bring in and synthesize and then move on.

Commission member Seidman identified some concerns seen in education, including declining teacher availability and declining enrollment. He added that it is difficult to share resources, mentioning past ACIR discussions of difficulties caused by the definition of “school district”, which he said is driving up property taxes.

Commission member Seidman pointed out the job training needs for the growing manufacturing sector, especially related to Electric Boat and businesses supporting it. Local high schools are developing job training programs but there often is a disconnect between different state agencies. He recommended the ACIR put together a presentation to talk about what school districts face. He noted that a school building in his district is closed due to mold but state funding is unavailable because there are not enough students and the regional school structure does not allow students to be moved as necessary. He does not believe the legislature is aware of the significance of such problems and offered to write this up.

Commission member Norton described the state Dept. of Education’s (SDE’s) efforts in post-secondary readiness and workforce development. He described grants for concurrent credits to be earned in high school and not only for college courses. It also is for going into industry: they are trying to keep students’ options open. He provided further background and offered to bring additional information to a future meeting. There was a discussion of the SDE’s efforts to do the same to prepare students to fill municipal employment needs.

Rick Porth said the ACIR is coalescing around a short list of topics and agreed with previous recommendations to focus on 2-3. He said topics should be selected by the ACIR and by decision makers, given the need to engage the people who will implement the recommendations being developed. Commission member O’Leary emphasized the need for the ACIR to respond to issues in a timely way while doing long-term work, using outside resources. We cannot do it all ourselves. He also pointed out that workforce development depends on salaries being attractive. He added that a new regional school district has been formed in his area – [Region 20](#) – through the consolidation of [Region 6](#) and Litchfield’s district. It took years to do this.

Commission member Pickering suggested the group start considering a schedule of forums and inviting subject matter experts. Commission chair Sharkey asked if those should be at scheduled meetings of the LGF subcommittee or of the full ACIR, or if special meetings should be scheduled. Commission member Hart recommended a small group put together such a calendar and Commission chair Sharkey said he, Commission vice chair Filchak and Commission member Heft, Christine Goupil, and Bruce Wittchen can put something together for discussion at the 2/20 subcommittee meeting. There was no disagreement.

## **7. Upcoming meetings:**

- Tuesday, February 20, 2024, 10:30 am LGF Subcommittee (3rd Tuesday)
- Friday, March 1, 2024, 10:30 am Full ACIR

## **8. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 12:06.

*Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM*