

DRAFT - Meeting Notes

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations
<https://portal.ct.gov/acir>

Municipal Workforce Development Subcommittee

Thursday, September 19, 2024

Agenda: <https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/26299>

A recording is available at: https://ctvideo.ct.gov/opm/2024-09-19_ACIR_Workforce_WG_Video.mp4

Present: Drew Baklik, Bridget Fox, Matt Hart (Chair), Kevin Mercik, Cara O’Sullivan, Troy Raccuia, Peter Sousa, Steve Stephanou, Ron Thomas (Co-chair)

Other participants: Michael Paulhus, Town of Plainville, Matthew Reed, Town of Ellington, Elizabeth Sanderson CRCOG, Marcus Yancoskie, Rome, Smith & Kowalski

OPM staff: Christine Goupil

Matt Hart called the meeting at 9:02AM and invited subcommittee participants to introduce themselves. Recording commenced.

The subcommittee reviewed the scope of the Municipal Workforce Development [2024-25 Work Program](#) with a focus on Connecticut’s towns and cities need to recruit and retain qualified persons to fill positions to deliver essential municipal services. The subcommittee will explore and recommend actions regarding public sector hiring, challenges, training and retention that have, put local government’s ability to deliver services at risk and to examine opportunities and barriers for shared and regional approaches to address public sector workforce challenges.

Recap of Work program, Timeline, and Membership

Matt gave an overview of ACIR’s structure, membership, and the two subcommittee workplans. The subcommittee then moved to agenda Item 5 with respect to our guest’s time.

Best practices Recruitment and Retention. Guest speakers: Matthew Reed, Town Administrator, Town of Ellington and Michael Paulhus, Town Manager, Town of Plainville

Our first guest speaker was Matt Reed, the first Town Manager of Ellington starting August 2023. Prior to having a town manager was the form of government was board of selectmen, board of finance. The first selectman continues to be the CEO full-time but is not a professional town administrator. Matt provided an overview, and the pros and cons of the process Ellington went through to provide a work environment to encourage staff retention by reducing the work week to four days.

Transition Timeline:

In August 2022 a four-day work week was proposed on a trail run. The program was successful and by the end of October 2022 they had modified all the letters of agreement for the union contracts allowing for it.

Not all jobs were conducive to a four-day work week such as public works personnel, public safety, police personnel are 40-hour positions and are not on the four-day work week schedule. The fire department has three-day work week work, we weren't willing to put sleeping quarters in there either.

Police, animal control our fire/EMS volunteers work on their normal schedules, although some full time EMS providers that are paid.

The town clerk, the assessor, the tax collector, administrative, planning department, town hall personnel that include the annex, which is their community development group, building inspector, fire marshall and planning and zoning enforcement were all included in the program.

Hurdles Included:

Union contracts and scheduling of personnel, customer service, and childcare accommodations which were addressed with union arrangements. Matt Reed highlighted that importance of the relationship between the town and the union especially when instituting new programs.

Risk Management:

They didn't want people necessarily in the building alone, but also understood that in order to make the program work there are times when they allowed staff to complete administrative work on a Friday when the building was closed.

Scheduling:

Monday through Thursday 35-hour work week for administrative positions. During the transition they took those four-days and split them up so that on Monday people would work 10.25 hours from 8:00 to 6:30PM. The added benefit is it would accommodate board of selectmen meeting preparation. The remainder of the week, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays 8.25 hours, 7:45AM- 4:30PM with a 1/2-hour lunch.

Similar to our second speaker Ellington encountered challenges not providing hours on Friday for their senior center. In the end the senior center implemented a 1/2 day on Friday, so they have more hours.

Benefits to Adjusting the Time:

That first 15 minutes staff found it productive to be able to get settled in and ready for customer service activities. They also found staff are more willing to stay a little late or come in early to complete work to keep with the new schedule to satisfy the needs of a citizen.

Overall found it to have a positive mood change.

Another benefit is the town is more attractive to fill open positions by providing the flexibility of the four-day work week and that added time off for work life balance.

Future Analysis:

An area to research is the potential energy savings being able to turn everything down on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Not having the doors opening and closing, the environmental control system switching on and off and introducing humidity and/or more heat into the building.

Overall, it has been beneficial as a tool for retention. During the time Matt Reed has been in the role few employees have left. For example, a couple didn't make probation because of some performance issues. One left to take a private sector job in the tax office because they were very poorly treated by the citizens, not related to the work schedule. One retirement and another left simply because there was more money in another opportunity and closer to home, but other than that, in this just over a year that he has been with the Town of Ellington all the department heads are firm.

They just negotiated the town hall contract and there was no talk of making a change. So, it seems to be here to stay.

Matt Reed pointed to other communities with similar schedules such as South Windsor, Vernon, and Tolland.

Governance:

The board of selectmen have not received push back since the program has settled in and no concerns that it's not saving money because it can be justified as a recruitment and retention tool.

Other Benefits:

There is administrative flexibility to work remotely from time to time.

Matt Reed is working on creating set days a year for sick time, a disability leave program if you're out more than four or five days, you automatically go on short term disability, which is at 60% of your pay and you have to be completely disconnected from work. So, there's no accrual of sick time. Matt Reed has tried to modernize and upgrade the benefits.

The four-day work week is good when integrated into a larger set of rules, regulations and benefits. When people realize they only have 12 days off a year they don't have the ability to accrue time in the event of catastrophic illness. They end up out of work with only 60% of their pay and that's not the way people work in a lot of towns. They must allow people to accrue.

Our second guest speaker was Michael Paulhus Town Manager, Town of Plainville.

Michael Paulhus noted their program mirrors Ellington in the timeline. They looked at it in 2023 along an August time frame and put out an internal survey and then a community survey. The town was already operating from a half day on Fridays and a 35-hour workweek for the municipal center for town hall with many departments under one roof and including the board of education that the town shares services with.

Not included in the change was the department of public works, which consists of a separate roadway department and our building and grounds, police and animal control.

After a six-month pilot of the hours, they surveyed the public and held that open for the six months 35-hour work week to Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, 8:00AM to 5:00PM, Thursday, 8:00 to 6:00 at the municipal center. Lunch down to 1/2 hour

What they learned:

Senior Center couldn't shut it down on a Friday because of the socialization needed for seniors. They reinstated that back to a five-day work week for the senior center with three-full time or three and 1/2 of personnel rotating.

The library has internally done their modification to give a four-day work week to their members because they have enough coverage without changing their hours.

The extra hours on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday they have found have been well received within the community and obviously at the later time on Thursday as well, so the balance seems to be working.

Hiring and retention:

They extended the six months by a month to get an additional wrap up on the survey and then went before the town council to make it permanent.

It's been great for morale internally and the feedback is they appreciate flexibility and work life balance.

During the few exit interviews, they have not really seen much turnover. Similar to many communities in police department and law enforcement, has the most turnover, but not a lot in Plainville.

One person came over from the library to the tax office as an entry level because they wanted the four-day work week.

Internal polling suggests that they are at the low end of wage spectrum for employees. Some are working second jobs, and this affords them the opportunity. Ellington will be rolling out of salary survey in the next couple of months as study.

They do not have enough information to know if work life balance and family moved the needle for hiring. They will be incorporating some questions within our exit interviews, again trying to gauge more feedback as to the impact of the four-day work week.

From the beginning and during the process they have had union support. Communication, open dialogue, transparency before we even thought about rolling it out or the pilot. They talked about what that would look like, how we would address issues internally get union feedback such as holidays and floating holidays.

So been a great program and they are very happy that they've done it. For Plainville to compete with Farmington, they sometimes feel they are a training ground for employees to leave to go to Farmington. This will help retention and recruitment. They continue to gather data, but are happy with the way it works thus far.

Follow Up Questions For Our Guest Speakers:

Peter Souza asked how the relationship or the response from those who still have to work the five-day week or 4 1/2 day week when others are getting something different?

Matt Reed responded that he's not aware of any concerns, or uproar or dissatisfaction with those who still must work longer. Public works crew is generally out by 12:30PM on Friday. Understanding it's of the nature of the business.

Their first responders to a certain extent have to work those extra hours.

Some of the library staff are part time, so they have that flexibility. He's not aware of any challenges that they have put forth.

Nothing has come to the surface or made it to his office. It's so far been good for Ellington.

Michael Paulhus echoed that there's nothing that he's heard coming back, formal, even informal grumblings.

Public works with our respect to roadways and buildings and grounds combined, 40-hour workweek with overtime, and on the front lines your expected to be responding.

He likes to be the one who gets out there and has a breakfast/lunch with staff to find out what's happening or the pulse. He senses they don't want to lose hours or opportunities for overtime. No, no issue from his standpoint.

Matthew Reed followed up to say they may like the fact that in town hall the bosses aren't all around during maintenance issues. The town hall is an old building. For HVAC work, electrical work, we're about to have the place sprayed and painted, new gutters put on they know that Friday's the day they can make it happen. And the parking lot is clear.

When it comes to winter storms and clearing, the facilities have a little town center where our town hall is next to the town annex. They know that the urgency for plowing and clearing is somewhat reduced because there isn't any customer traffic on those particular days.

Steve Stephanou asked about the response from the community. He would be surprised if they didn't at least get a few emails or phone calls or in person complaints to either the town manager's office or members of the elected body about staff being off on Friday.

Michael Paulhus indicated that he anticipated that. But it did come up early in the process when we did the pilot. But Plainville was already closed at noon on Friday, it wasn't really a shocker so to speak.

They also went the extra step to really educate people about how they can perform functions online. Driving them to the website, making transactions, paying tax or getting a permit or getting information and so.

While highlighting their website what was realized is they need to revamp the website. They are going through that process to make it mobile accessible. They want an interface that is seamless and without any friction. They did a little education around that as well, but there's always pushback.

Again, it wasn't such a heavy lift for 1/2 hour on Friday to eliminate Friday, especially with the extra hours during the week.

Matthew Reed responded that he wasn't in the position in 2022 when they started, but in speaking with the first selectmen and others who were, they were coming off a failed referendum for turf fields and an addition to town hall. Part of the argument, from his understanding, was that nobody ever goes to town hall anymore. There's so much available online. There is not a stream of customers or people walking into the town hall.

On the heels of that, to use that as a springboard to start the conversation to close town hall. That may have contributed to the lack of citizen pushback because they had just been bombarded with these vote no.

Interestingly, the battles since he's been there is the whole public education campaign to let people know that Ellington is not a 4000 or 5000 people. That they are in fact a growing community. They are approaching 17,000 people and should have our own Police Department. They should have a lot of services that they don't have, but people have that mindset that Ellington's a small town and that nothing goes on. Perhaps they should put counters on the doors because there's an incredible line of people for permitting.

The other customer group that you would expect to get some grumblings from would be your contractors. The ones who file plans have to get permits. Perhaps within their community they complain that you can't go to town hall after one or make sure you get your stuff filed on Thursday. But if they're complaining about it, they're not or doing it on Facebook, and of course we never would look at that. They're certainly not calling his office or coming into a board selectman meeting about getting permits on a Friday.

Steve Stephanou asked if either town has done any data tracking or how many people come in after 5:00PM. Or keeping statistics before or after to try and use in terms of justification.

Matthew Reed responded they have not. They have extended hours and are more convenient for the public because now we've incorporated those late hours into our weekly schedule. It's also the time when the employees have to get their work done. Oftentimes it's a quieter time for them to be able to focus and get things wrapped up. That time is more to get the employees full 35 hours in as opposed to the sole purpose being convenient for the public, although that is certainly used as a selling point.

Michael Paulhus stated they did not collect data.

Drew Baklik noted as Canton administrator they're open earlier for people who work 9:00 to 5:00 or 8:00 to 5:00 who cannot get there during regular working hours or have to take extra time on lunch in order to pay their taxes etc. It's also a very good point that Matt made that cannot be overstated, even if you are slow in those periods of time, it's difficult for those people who work in town hall, who are front facing to have time for side projects.

If you have that hour and a half, when nobody is coming in to pull land records staff can work on other things. I think that was a huge benefit that we saw on some of those days when they stayed open late.

Also, the fact that you lead into your night meetings, whether it be board of selectmen etc without having to

have that gap of go home, have dinner or whatever you're you know, you're staying for that long day. You get accustomed to it. The same with the contractors in his experience as well.

And then with the online option being the same cost was important too. I found people complain if there's a fee online to pay my taxes. Making sure that it was apples to apples was important with the rolled out.

Matthew Reed noted that town clerks are preparing absentee ballots and, even in a small town, they've got some 1800 requests for absentee ballots. They've need to be able to lay those all out and get them all prepped for mailing. It's a great opportunity for them to do that when they've got those quieter hours after 4:00 on Mondays.

Steve Stephanou made a note that we've had the same issue in Manchester. They waived the fee for motor vehicle payments to encourage people to use services online. They should be trying to invest in that to make sure that you're not paying more, you're not penalized for doing the transactions online.

Maybe that's something the ACIR could lobby the state for or additional funding so municipalities can implement that. Just a thought.

Ron Thomas thanked the guest speakers and would be giving this information to his research team so that they can share it with other CCM members. He followed up with a comment that there was a person who left Town Hall service in the tax office and had left because of treatment by certain citizens. This group has been thinking about is the civility issue and how the treatment of employees can impact your ability to retain employees.

Ron Thomas asked if comments by employees in your town about the treatment they received by citizens come to the point where you think it's a real issue?

Matthew Reed responded that historically it's always been an issue, even since his time in South Windsor, when he was in law enforcement. As police chief and it was not uncommon to respond to town hall for just that issue. Citizens who are upset at their assessment or their tax bill, those tend to be the two biggest offices where they go to.

At one point they did responder training with the town hall with all our town hall employees and with the town council and did some crisis preparation, hazard training and active shooter training and how to deal with de-escalation.

With de-escalation training on how to deal with this citizen who comes to the town council meeting and just goes on the rant and then the mayor says, your 3 minutes are up have to sit down now and that just makes it even worse.

That certainly is for a number of years now has been a concern in municipalities and in Ellington.

Whether the outbursts have been with folks who perhaps are suffering from some form of debilitating condition, or whether it's mental health condition or have a legitimate grievance, but they just aren't sure how to cope with it or how to get that message across. They think if they come to town hall, they are going to be against them. They've trained their employees to say something a little unexpected to the person in order to calm them down as a way to de-escalate. He has seen tax collection time as a big challenge this year, because the budget went up this year almost everybody's did, and assessments increased. The motor vehicles increased coming out of the COVID era and people were upset.

It only takes a few to set somebody off and make somebody realize they don't want to be belittled and accused of things and mistreated and called names. And it's very public in line at town hall. Everybody hears everything. If signed up to be a tax clerk, they may not be signing up to be in the spotlight. And lo and behold, this employee is now the center of these, vile, hateful comments. Not just once, but multiple times.

They have focused on the seeds of civility campaign. They have posters all over, not just in the town hall, but at the schools and all of our public buildings.

Comments are made at the beginning of many of the public meetings encouraging people to participate, but to participate civilly and to not attack individuals and make disparaging comments or allegations and things like that.

So we're very aware of it.

We've had the 1st Amendment auditors come in and approach our people and try to stir things up. Matt Reed thinks they were one of the only communities that got an A+, because they knew they were coming, and their people had been trained and knew how to deal with it.

Again, it's part of a total package, but communities have to recognize it and they have to engage either their emergency management or public safety personnel and often times some outside training in order to make sure employees understand that they are a key part of de-escalation and personal safety and public safety in all of these offices, because, like it or not, they're they are public officials in the public eye.

For an employee in finance where they like the work, but they decided to take a position in banking where people come in and they're nice to her. So yes, it's unfortunate when you lose somebody for that reason.

They try to be sensitive to how the employees deal with it, kind of like the way law enforcement deals with tragic situations. They make light of it; they talk about it when they're on break to try to try to relieve the tension. Understand that other people are experiencing some of those same feelings of anxiety as well.

Michael Paulhus elaborated on their experience that they have been fortunate.

They do obviously still have an occasional taxpayer that'll come in the tax department. They know how to respond, the protocols and de-escalation tools. And they operate on the front lines and in a fishbowl, if you will. It hasn't been bad at the town council meeting. Maybe it was a reset, people just aren't coming out post COVID like they did pre COVID.

At the council meeting level, there is civility, and it is a discourse, or they agree to disagree. It's unfortunately when the taxpayer comes into the window and doesn't understand that in some cases, depending on what the situation is, where their hands are tied due to state statutes to waive the penalties and so forth. They want to talk to the town manager or the chairman or the first selectman.

The libraries seem to be a magnet for mental health issues. Maybe they are seeing more than their share, but that they're dealing with now. They have to be almost social workers in a sense. Most of the time it's been nonviolent, but some of them become unruly and police are called. He thinks they get more calls in terms of interactions on the library than the tax office window.

They may be the exception, but he thinks that's most communities are probably dealing with the same thing.

Matt Hart followed up with the union colleagues asking from their perspective if they want to explore any questions from our guests on the labor management perspective?

Troy Raccuia commented it was nice to hear that the unions worked well in other communities with the shortened week and would bring that information back to his representatives.

Michael Paulhus commented that one of the things he forgot to mention from the public survey was the fact that they were not reducing hours. They were keeping the same hours.

For the taxpayer then the taxes would be reduced. Or the employees' benefits be reduced. Instead, it was repackaging it.

Cara O'Sullivan stated she certainly pass that on to my units that do the administrative work. She represents more public works both on the state and municipal side and found interesting the comments that our guests said they weren't getting a lot of push back. She shared that in the meetings they had with those member types, there is some disgruntlement.

On the public works side she encouraged them to look at other avenues for their work life balance when possible.

She suggested more meetings down the line with public works staff. That there are other avenues to pursue to give to balance for recruitment. Especially those struggling in some of those trades' environments.

Michael Paulhus responded that the point was well taken.

He will continue to poll them on work environment and or modification. It's as a part of retention and recruitment as well. And he commented on how difficult it is to fill any position, building official, engineer, assessor, finance director, across the board. He's all in for retaining what they have and if it means he needs to take a poll or talk to them about modifications, he's all in. And he appreciates the feedback and points were well taken.

Elizabeth Sanderson asked if they had considered hybrid schedules or hybrid work, and also two shifts early team start or a later team start for the municipal?

Matthew Reed was open to bringing forward those alternate ideas. He's spent several years working at a couple of different state offices, in another capacity and the state is very generous. They have a lot of opportunities; a lot of flexibility and their union contracts tend to be open with some of the flexibility on scheduling.

One of the options was to set your own work week, as long as your supervisor approves. There were opportunities for alternate working hours as long as you work during certain core hours.

He's talked about that but of course, in a smaller staffed town it's hard to split. For example the town clerk's office, where there's two people, one could come in and you do 7m to 3pm, and then the other person will come in for a later shift 10-8PM. Their staffing is so small that it may or may not be conducive, but he's made it very clear he has been pro employee and wants to make sure they get the best benefits and that they have the best opportunities and that if they had some alternate schedule or ideas for scheduling, they could certainly bring that forward.

Michael Paulhus noted on their side they did not consider that as they felt they were too small to try the hybrid piece. It was not part of our discussion. They just focused on trying to make a four-day work week work for them.

Review Progress of Regional Performance Incentive Program grants (RPIP) and recent grants awarded.

The Subcommittee returned to the prior agenda item to review progress the of Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) which was outlined by Christine Goupil.

The Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) was created to encourage municipalities to participate in a voluntary regional services that have the potential to produce measurable outcomes for economy of scale and desired or required public services and lower costs and tax burdens. With the time allowed for the remainder of the meeting there was a brief overview of the changes to RPIP from [Public Act 24-132](#).

Changes to Eligible Purposes

The bill expanded the eligible purposes that the Office of Policy Management could award RPIP grants for services that two or more participating municipalities or boards of education could provide on a regional and ongoing basis, rather than services that one or more of these entities currently provide but not on a regional basis.

Changes to Application Requirements

By law, applicants must include certain information about the proposal and its projected benefits and implementation plan as part of their RPIP applications. The bill made changes to this required information to require applicants to include an estimate of the proposal's anticipated savings or costs that will be avoided during the grant award period and in future fiscal years, rather than the amount by which participating municipalities will reduce their mill rates as a result of these savings.

Required that the implementation plan for the proposed regional service or initiative address any potential growth or reduction in participation rates during the grant award period and specify that it include a copy of an acknowledgment, rather than an acknowledgment itself, from any employer organization potentially impacted by the proposal that it was informed and consulted about it.

By law, the proposal must also include a resolution endorsing the proposal from the COG's or RESC's governing body. Under current law, this resolution must state that the entity will fund at least 25% of the proposal's first year costs and all of its costs by the fourth year. The bill instead required that the resolution affirm that the entity will fund an increasing proportion of the proposal's costs during the grant award period, including 50% of the proposal's costs by the end of the period and all of its costs afterwards.

Changes to Selection Criteria

Current law requires the Office of Policy Management secretary to award grants to proposals that best meet specified criteria, including that the project demonstrates, compared to existing service delivery, increased capacity and efficiency, a cost benefit to members, increased cost savings, and a diminished need for state funding. The bill instead required that the secretary award grants to proposals that best reduce municipal and state costs, enhance service delivery capacity, or improve the level of service provided compared to having it delivered at the local level.

It also makes a conforming change by eliminating the criteria that the proposal includes a statement that the applicant will fund at least 25% of the proposal's first year costs and all its costs by the fourth year.

Changes to Required Report to the Legislature

The bill requires the OPM secretary, in his annual report to the legislature on RPIP, to describe the local or state cost savings, rather than property tax reductions, achieved by the program.

RPIP Funding is from a portion of the revenue generated by both the hotel tax and the motor vehicle rental surcharge to the OPM-administered Regional Planning Incentive Account.

Since opening Round 6 in 2022, the Office of Policy Management has received nine applications, with only one of those submitted by a RESC. Five awards have been made which focused primarily on shared municipal functions such as code enforcement. The status of awarded projects are shown in the [2024 Annual Report on the Regional Performance Incentive Program Prepared by the Office of Policy and Management in accordance with CGS Sec. 4-124s\(e\)](#) under Table 7: FY 2023 Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) Grant Awards as of 2/28/23 and Table 8: FY 2024 Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) Grant Awards as of 2/28/24

Matt Hart provided CRCOG's recent experience with the RPIP program where they had to return two grants. One for building code inspection and one for tax assessment because after they had received the awards, they weren't able to obtain firm commitments from participating towns. They will be reapplying trying a different

angle. For the building code inspection program, they are reapplying with a trainee angle and with firm commitments from two of our towns that are willing to share an assistant building code inspector in training. RPIP is a good vehicle for towns to develop trainee programs for any number of disciplines, whether it's building code inspection, tax assessment, you name it.

It was also mentioned that recently Northeastern *Connecticut* Council of Governments (*NECCOG*) is looking to provide a program for a shared town administrator for up to three of the smaller towns on a pilot basis with the costs split between towns. This could address the challenge of filling small town administrators' positions. This subcommittee will be interested in hearing about the progress of that program.

Discussion items for the next meeting and interim work:

- Future guest speakers:
 - CTDOT apprentice program with an update on the use of federal funding
 - Best practices from municipal leaders
- Schedule meeting with Connecticut's Public Employer Labor Relations Association (ConnPELRA) to discuss retention and recruitment
- Looking for existing reports on trainee, apprentice programs from the subcommittee to be shared.
- Interim report for ACIR:
 - focus on training programs
 - recommend enhancements to RPIP
 - potential state grant to incentives other programs or possible subsidies for municipal trainees which fall outside of RPIP limitations which COGs could be the fiduciary of those program funds.

For October agenda:

- Status of recent grant awards for the Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP)
- Guest speaker from DOT or other organization to discuss trainee program.

Before the meeting adjourned Matt Hart extended an invitation to [CRCOG's interactive Shared Services Workshop & Forum](#) October 8 @ 9:00 am - 11:30 am

Meetings will be held on the 3rd Thursday of the month, 9:00AM – 10:30AM

- October 17th
- November 21st
- December 19th

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:24AM

Minutes notes prepared by Christine Goupil, OPM