

DRAFT - Meeting Notes

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

Municipal Workforce Development Subcommittee

Thursday, October 17, 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, John Filchak, Bridget Fox, Matt Hart (Chair), Cara O’Sullivan, TSteve Stephanou, Ron Thomas (Co-chair)

Other participants: Elizabeth Sanderson CRCOG, Marcus Yancoskie, Rome, Smith & Kowalski, John Harkins

OPM staff: Rebecca Augur, Christine Goupil

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

Recap of Work program, Timeline, and Membership

The subcommittee reviewed the scope of the Municipal Workforce Development 2024-25 Work Program with focused on two items within the timeline for deliverable of draft proposals in December and continue the work into next year with another set of recommendations

1. to explore and recommend actions regarding non education, public sector hiring challenges, training diversity and retention that have put local government's ability to deliver services at risk
2. examine opportunities and the barriers for shared services and regional approaches to address public sector workforce challenges.

Continued discussion on the progress of Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) recent grants awarded

Christine Goupil continued the discussion from the prior subcommittee meeting on the progress of Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) recent grants awarded. The prior meeting focused on the history of the program and legislative changes. This meeting we reviewed the [2024 Annual Report on the Regional Performance Incentive Program](#) prepared by the Office of Policy and Management Pursuant to Section 4-124s(e) of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Two programs were awarded in 2023 and two in 2024 were reviewed:

Southeastern CT Council of Governments (SCCOG) for Regional Code Enforcement Services with a grant award of \$395,079.00 and matching \$395,079.00 to develop a shared Building Official, Zoning Enforcement, Wetlands Enforcement and Blight Enforcement services on a contractual basis with member municipalities. The anticipated savings vary over time and among participating municipalities, but are estimated at about \$200,000 in the first year of service

Western CT Council of Governments (WestCOG) Western CT Firearm Training Facility with a grant award of \$1,500,000.00 and a match of \$2,052,300.00 to construct a regional firing range for public safety personnel

training. The estimated savings of \$15 million in construction costs and \$100,000 in additional annual maintenance costs.

South Central CT Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG) Cyber Security with a grant award of \$2,205,066.00 and a match of \$2,205,066.00 to develop a regional cyber security program for 15 member municipalities. The anticipated savings are estimated to be \$305,000 across municipalities, plus the cost avoidance of developing robust security programs individually.

Most recent an awarded project for approximately \$342,000 is in process for the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) for Regional Town Administrative Services. The project will provide shared professional town administration on a regional basis, through NECCOG, for the three participating rural towns with a combined population of 11,565 (2022 DPH Population Estimates) – Canterbury, Chaplin and Pomfret to address the growing complexity of town administration. The program aim is to address the ongoing issues of administrative turnover in the small towns and the lack of candidates to run for the elected positions. Smaller towns do not have extensive staffing capacity and are dependent almost exclusively on the CEO chief-elected official who provides the day-to-day administration within municipal, state and federal regulations, as well as handle legal and personnel issues, solicit and manage grants, make departmental decisions, recommend fiscal strategies and implement best practices to avoid risk.

Part of the structure of the program was developed from a 2016 study on shared administration in western Massachusetts articulates NECCOG will employ an employee and then provide to the participating towns a common town administrator. A professional service agreement will be entered into collectively by NECCOG and the participating towns.

The subcommittee returned to a discussion of three Regional Performance Incentive Program from 2023 which unfortunately had to be closed out for various reasons from cost and the challenges of getting local commitment.

- Shared Regional Animal Control Officer(s)
- Shared Assessment/Assessor Services
- Shared Building and Code Enforcement Services

With the building and code enforcement they were not able to get candidates willing to cross multiple towns. Matt Hart noted the process was instructive and CRCOG is hoping to retool and reapply for the RPIP perhaps as more of a trainee model and having binding commitments in advance. Steve Stephanou also proposed further discussion on how to structure the assessment function through RPIP after looking at the process of revaluation and the grand list. Especially if the state is incentivizing it.

The origin of the RPIP program was raised by John Filchak and the hope that the seed money would create a renaissance in thinking and acting regionally. Unfortunately, it didn't work out that way over time. A lot of the initial round went to setting up GIS programs amongst the nine Councils of Governments. The vision was we would have nine robust regional GIS systems which did not happen. It did generate a lot of data.

The Northeast started out with an 11 town. It's down to six towns out of the 16 towns that are in the COG. The towns with the wherewithal kept their own GIS systems. In many cases in other regions the individual GIS is more robust and have better capacity than the region. The application is specific to their towns, and it meets their needs.

RPIP was a way to start getting parcel data, but then it was shipped off. We were just getting requests from different vendors to give them the data and then they were out of the picture.

The most successful programs were when the town's had skin in the game such as the regional paramedic program, they needed to demonstrate the numbers worked. With animal control, which started with three towns and is now 22 towns and both tribes in the Navy with no state money. The same with the revaluation program.

The COGS now with the funding have the ability to make the case for regional programs, but its up to the towns. Unfortunately, we may need to really take a look at the roots of RPIP and see is it doing what it was intended.

It's the long-term commitment that wasn't there at the beginning with these with those projects, whereas in some cases the regional paramedic program goes back to 1998 and is still saving hundreds of thousands of dollars to the region and providing a service they otherwise couldn't afford.

Steve Stephanou discussed the regional opportunities such as assessment making perfect sense whereas an engineer would be more challenging due to the project scope. The question was posed whether it's worth our group looking to explore state legislation that's more of a stick than a carrot.

Does the RPIP program need to realign the incentives to orient municipal officials to be more open to shared services. Looking at the smaller towns and the official building function which follows a state code makes sense, but not trying to convince Bridgeport, Manchester or Hartford to run a regional program.

Best Practices Shared Services

Matt Hart continued the conversation into the next agenda item on Best Practices for Shared Services on the key obstacles being local control of the municipal functions and key constituents such as the professional associations; building official, assessors fear the shared services model from a result in loss of jobs and impact to autonomy. There are ways to engage to overcome it and work alongside labor partners.

He shared the presentation for discussion from the [10/8/2024 Capitol Region Council of Governments Shared Services Workshop & Forum](#) with participation from the Office of Policy Management, Peter Souza, Town Manager, Town of Windsor, Maria Capriola, Chief of Shared Services & Administration, Town of Mansfield, Andy Cirioli, Assistant Town Manager, Town of Plainville, Jim Rupert, Town Administrator, Town of Bolton, and Pauline Yoder, Chief Operating Officer, CRCOG.

The presentation and panelists focused on common models for shared services, benefits to shared services, keys to success and how to get started with some additional suggestions for the ACIR and OPM. There was additional discussion within the subcommittee on opportunities in line with the presentation.

Benefits to building relationships between Municipal CEO, Board of Education and Superintendent: For a first selectman or town manager, sharing services with your local school district enables you to develop a more effective working relationship with your superintendent of schools and other district staff. This can be invaluable when facing financial and other challenges. Maria Capriola, Mansfield's Chief of Shared Services & Administration, notes that it is important to have champions along the way. The benefits to continuity of operations such as with shared payroll staff and knowledge when there is turnover in staff. Those concerns about loss of autonomy and control of the budget and finance fall away in the long-term model. Plainville is another more recent example of bringing in the partners, addressing trust and making it work.

Assessment: For the new CEO/First Selectman stepping into the role, they may not have the bandwidth to take on the commitment or the risk from political consequences. The risk of sharing an assessor may be outweighed by the 5-10 hours utilizing someone who is moonlighting.

The recommendation was made to engage with the Assessor Associations similar to the work conducted by CRCOG's working group to have further discussions on their concerns, ranging from loss of autonomy, job security and varying methods of assessment and compensation capped by contracts in Connecticut. Further discussion should focus on the opportunities for streamlining data collection (CAMA) as opposed to just the assessment position.

Paraprofessionals: Our labor representatives raised the issue that compensation is being capped by contracts with paraprofessionals. Those who represent them share they are chronically understaffed and underpaid.

Focus should be on fair compensation across districts which would open the opportunity for shared services. Unlike other municipal roles paraprofessionals can't chase salaries in other towns.

School districts cycle through staff and paraprofessionals experiencing low pay and climate issues are experiencing burnout. As a group model there is an opportunity to improve work environment standards and pay, unlike the challenges of assessors which can't necessarily be addressed as a group approach.

Stormwater Management and Municipal Water Treatment roles: We should explore new opportunities with emerging services and disciplines, for example, stormwater management. Now is the time to address the opportunity with municipal water treatment operators looking at compensation and defined benefit pensions. They are being poached from municipal roles to the power plants and public utilities. Similar to building officials, but they are not codified in statute. Ron Thomas noted the recent CCM study on [Strategic Flooding Mitigation for Connecticut: Challenges and Solutions](#) and the need for flood management and investment is going to increase for municipalities.

OPM Role and Funding: A suggestion was made during the CRCOG Shared Services Forum that opportunities could be addressed through OPM where gaps exist in roles or with data collections such as CAMA and cybersecurity. Rebeca Augur noted funding from other agencies exists for storm water and solid waste and housing through other agencies, not just OPM via RPIP. Matt Hart made the suggestion that we consider periodic adjustments in funding based on CPI or utilizing another index.

Additionally, OPM form a shared services working group with representative members of the COGs and RESCs. This would allow for a feedback loop to the municipal leaders, especially new ones on the opportunities. Also, convening an annual workshop or every two years where we can highlight best practices around the state coordinating with CCM, COST the town managers associations, boards of Ed, the superintendents and engage with the major public sector labor unions.

In summary of the presentation Matt Hart noted CRCOG has created a toolkit on their website outlining ["What are Shared Services"](#) which includes: examples in our Region, Example Agreements with School Districts, Example Agreement Between Municipalities, Example Agreements with Health District, Example Agreement with Downtown Non-Profit and Relevant Statutes and Laws

Recap of ConnPELRA

The co-chairs of the two subcommittees met with Caroline Beitman, President of ConnPELRA whose core mission is to provides professional development, networking, and advocacy services to Labor Relations and Human Resource professionals and Margaret Luerda, Human Resources Director for the Town of Branford to discuss what their members thoughts on recruitment and retention of employees in those difficult to fill positions.

Two areas of importance noted were streamlining recruitment and responding to candidates faster. While they haven't had a wholesale conversation with the membership, they are willing to do a survey of best practices. They would also be willing to come to the full ACIR for further discussions and getting involved in systematic change. There was also discussion on addressing climate as an issue. They reported that they have not looked into climate issue, but have provided training at different levels to respond.

Drew Bakilk sharing a graph that illustrated responses to a survey of our NVCOG Chief Elected Officials regarding their interest in shared services raised that Executive Director Rick Dunne conducted a straw poll of staff noting that the main element valued by workers was salary and a very close second was workplace culture.

Elizabeth Sanderson raised that the conversion is timely in that at the COST conference the prior day the final presentation from an organization called [One Digital](#) focused on healthy workplace and the issues of toxicity in local government.

Discussion items for the next meeting:

Focus will be subcommittee recommendations for full ACIR.

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

- December 19th

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:32AM

Minutes notes prepared by Christine Goupil, OPM