

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

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Friday, April 3, 2020

Members present: James Albis, Carl Amento, Maureen Brummett, Kathy Demsey, John Elsesser, John Filchak, Betsy Gara (alt.), Mary Glassman (alt.), Brian Greenleaf, Rick Hart, Martin Heft, Marcia Leclerc, James O'Leary, Francis Pickering, Lon Seidman, Scott Shanley, Brendan Sharkey, Ron Thomas, Bob Valentine, Lyle Wray (Vice Chair)

Others participating: Jennifer Berigan (CT AFL-CIO), Joe DeLong (CCM), Rep. Christin McCarthy Vahey, Danny Medress (CSEA, SEIU Local 2001)

Members absent: Sen. Stephen Cassano, Sam Gold, Tommy Hyde, Neil O'Leary

ACIR staff: Bruce Wittchen

1. Call to Order

Commission vice-chair Wray called the meeting to order at 10:35 and called roll to verify that a quorum was present.

2. Membership changes

Commission member Heft said the final remaining vacancy has not been filled, noting that the Governor's Office is focused on the pandemic. He also said that Mayor O'Leary has resigned as chair, but will remain on the ACIR. A new chair has not yet been named.

3. Approval of Draft Minutes

A single motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of the ACIR's 3/6/2020 and 3/24/2020 meetings. The motion was approved unanimously, with Brian Greenleaf and Kathy Demsey abstaining.

4. Governor's Executive Orders

Commission member Heft provided an update regarding executive orders issued since the previous meeting and said the Governor's Office is reviewing municipal obligations through July 1 at this time. He described some that are under review and Commission vice-chair Wray noted that the Governor's Office is dealing with the most pressing first.

5. Municipal Operations Best Practices Update – John Filchek and Brendan Sharkey

Commission vice-chair Wray thanked Commission members Filchak and Sharkey for the work they have been doing and requested an update. Commission member Sharkey described the goal of providing guidelines for best practices to be used by local offices and town halls and said the ACIR should solicit that information from the experts in our towns. He described the questions to be asked about what municipal and school officials are doing to handle issues that are arising.

Commission member Sharkey said people appreciate guidance and noted that some approaches might be viewed differently later. Recommendations should be vetted by the Office of Policy & Management

(OPM) and the Governor's Office. He said 40 or more people have volunteered to help gather information and referred to the list of association that are to be contacted.

Commission member Sharkey said subcommittee members will contact a representative of an association to ask three questions and provide responses to Commission member Filchak for compilation:

1. *How are your members managing the daily operation of their offices?*
2. *What statutory requirements are your members dealing with right now, and how?*
3. *What suggestions or needs do your members have for solutions that you can't already provide on their own?*

Commission member Sharkey said OPM and the Governor's Office will vet the options and those that are acceptable will be posted online. It should be a quick process and iterative, some suggestions might come down and more will be added.

Commission member Filchak said small towns have immediate needs due to small offices and part-time staff; what do they do if someone becomes sick? He said there is a range of issues to assess and Commission member Sharkey said the goal is to have a stable, long-term process with an initial product that is usable as soon as possible. Commission member Filchak recommended mirroring the website of Washington's [Municipal Research and Services Center](#) (MRSC).

Commission member Leclerc noted that the spreadsheet under discussion was not circulated with the agenda and mentioned issues that can arise if a town clerk, permitting, or tax collector office is disrupted. She noted that her city has been able to identify staff who can be the primary, secondary, or tertiary backup for key services. Not all can. The ACIR should focus on approaches that can provide relief. She added that issues have arisen with staff's unexpected childcare needs.

Commission member Filchak provided an overview of the spreadsheet and said it will be resent. There was a suggestion to also ask association contacts about any regional or shared solutions to towns' needs. Commission member Sharkey noted his interest in those but said we should not presume any particular approach in framing the questions. It is important to address how operations can be maintained when employees are unable to work. A council of governments (COG) might be able to provide services, but we want to learn if it makes sense to town officials.

Commission member Filchak said it is important to identify impediments. He mentioned [CGS 7-148cc](#), which authorizes municipalities to provide services jointly, but a waiver might be needed to expand its use. He noted that many town operations are routine things, but they add up and functions must continue. Commission member Sharkey added that the discussions must include representatives of labor. What will they accept?

Commission member Hart mentioned COGs' involvement with public safety and highlighted the mutual aid approach. COGs could coordinate mutual aid for municipalities needing assistance in other areas and the Governor can waive impediments.

Commission member Valentine mentioned his town's agreement with Litchfield for town clerk services, but some operations issues are unresolved. He described the requirement to hold a town meeting to enable the 1st Selectman to authorize spending. It cannot be done now. He added that his town has a vacancy on the regional board of education and is required to vote. The loss of the town meeting will lead to an increasing number of problems.

Commission member Shanley said he is interested to see how Vernon's experiment in drive-through voting will turn out. The state must heed the warnings about having 169 towns acting independently. We are executing and then trying to make things right. In a few weeks, there will be questions about

how to bring back workers. We will look to see what others do. Joe DeLong said the Governor's Office is working now to resolve the problems that Commission member Valentine identified. Commission member Valentine mentioned that municipal land deals are also impacted and Joe DeLong said that issue is also under review. There was further discussion of the issues raised by Commission members Shanley and Valentine.

6. Develop Online Clearinghouse of Best Practices for Maintaining Operations in Pandemic

Commission vice-chair Wray said we would like to have the ACIR adopt the approach presented today. He added that the information received through the subcommittees' work can be made available more quickly if it can be placed on the ACIR's website without full vetting by OPM and the Governor's Office, but with a disclaimer.

Commission member Sharkey said there has been some heartburn at the Governor's Office about municipalities using approaches inconsistent with the Governor's approach. He mentioned municipalities that have shut down daycare operations and said state vetting is an important aspect of this effort. Commission member Filchak agreed with the desire to provide information quickly, but also agreed regarding the importance of vetting. He added that a recommended approach that works for Goshen might not work for Hartford, but it is important that recommendations be vetted.

Commission vice-chair Wray said all the information received should be made available. Jennifer Berigan expressed concern about inconsistencies between different municipalities' approaches and also between suggestions made on behalf of municipalities and on behalf of labor. Someone mentioned that one of the executive orders has eliminated a municipal chief elected official's discretion under [CGS 28-8a](#).

Commission vice-chair Wray suggested that information be made available on the ACIR's site prior to vetting and that it only be posted on the state's site once vetted. There was further discussion of providing the information gathered as a listing of different approaches that have been taken and that they not be identified as best practices until vetted. Concerns were expressed about delaying the availability of information while waiting for vetting.

Commission member Filchak said the goal is to provide options for maintaining continuity of operations. What works for Goshen might not work for Coventry. He noted the example of sharing ambulances and said a lot of options are in use in and outside of CT. Commission vice-chair Wray added that a town considering a listed option can contact the other town and ask how it works. Commission member Filchak said COGs and Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) can help with back-office operations.

Commission vice-chair Wray said he supports getting the information out on a website sooner and invited other people's thoughts. Commission member Glassman suggested the creation of a reserve corps of retired officials, such as town managers and superintendents. The subcommittees might ask for recommendations when reaching out to people. Commission member Elsesser noted the possibility of reimbursement by the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) (FEMA) if such services are contracted through a COG or RESC.

Commission alternate Glassman said that working with COGs and RESCs provides access to professionals and to potential reimbursement of costs by FEMA. Commission vice-chair Wray recommended a separate conference call to discuss such human resource issues. Commission member Thomas said this is a good idea and noted that CCM has a program for providing temporary personnel. He will provide more information.

There was further discussion of this approach. Commission alternate Gara described other examples and highlighted that agreements must be in place to be eligible for FEMA reimbursement. Commission

member Leclerc pointed out that it will be important to know which platforms financial managers are using. Commission vice-chair Wray said a conference call will be arranged and should include himself, Commission member Thomas, Commission alternate Gara, Bruce Wittchen, and any others who would like to join. He said he does not see the need for a formal vote but asked if ACIR members support proceeding with the approach discussed under Agenda Item 6. There was a consensus in support.

7. Other municipal, regional, or state matters for ACIR consideration, if any

Commission member Elsesser highlighted the importance of the statewide 911 system and providing support for hospitals and dispatch centers. He noted that New Haven's dispatch center was shut down for deep cleaning and calls were able to be diverted to other centers during that time. A lot can be done remotely.

Commission member Elsesser said another possible project for the ACIR is to look into how the state can expedite the release of grant funds. Grants are available and how can we get the funds out the door? The state has access to new funds and what outstanding grants are still being processed? Releasing funds can start the recovery. He mentioned the state's [Local Capital Improvement Program](#) (LoCIP) and [Small Town Economic Assistance Program](#) (STEAP) grants and said the state should get out of the way so municipalities can use the funds or assign them to others. We should spend on construction.

Commission vice-chair Wray said we are still in the first stage of the emergency and more funding will be necessary for recovery. When do we start on that? Commission member Heft said it is an excellent idea, but recovery is not part of the conversation yet. He is happy to take it on and start filtering it up at the Governor's Office. Commission member Valentine noted that Goshen is waiting for state [Town Aid Road Program](#) (TAR) reimbursement for a \$500,000 street project. That approval process should be streamlined; what was a 4-6 week process is now a 2-3 month process. There was further discussion of streamlining state grant processes.

Commission vice-chair Wray recommended distributing information about [Utah's Utah Leads Together recovery plan](#) and there was further discussion of next steps. Rep. McCarthy Vahey mentioned that she will be discussing possible state actions in the coming months with Commission member Heft. Commission alternate Gara said the [Dept. of Emergency Management and Homeland Security](#) (DEMHS), the [Dept. of Economic & Community Development](#), and others are working on various things. She offered to ask DEMHS's Brenda Bergeron.

Commission member Shanley said thousands of state employees are at home and how effectively are they able to perform their work. What kind of backlog will we experience after that? We will need the streamlined review then. Danny Medress noted that many public employees still must go in to work and agencies were backlogged before. The state should make a new commitment to hiring so we don't face that again. Commission member Filchak pointed out that the delay described by Commission member Valentine was in place before this.

There was further discussion of state agency processes and Commission member Shanley said the state has not invested adequately in technology. Commission member Demsey said the [Dept. of Education](#) (SDE) has committed to paying grants as scheduled. She explained that the agency is rotating staff at the office and described other agency efforts.

8. Future Meetings

There was no further discussion.

9. Adjournment

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting and it was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 11:52.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM