

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Capitol Region Education Center
111 Charter Oak Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut

Thursday, April 14, 2011, 10:00 A.M.

MINUTES

Members Present: David LeVasseur (Chairman), Sen. Steven Cassano, Ronald Harris, Linda Krause, James O'Leary, Joe Oros, Mark Paquette, Leo Paul, Joyce Stille and Margaret Wirtenberg, PhD.

Members Absent: Mark Allaben, James Finley, John Finkle, Barbara Henry, Alice Meyer (Vice-Chairman), Virginia Seccombe, Scott Shanley, Timothy Stewart, Adam Stolpen

Staff: Bruce Wittchen.

Opening Remarks: Commission member LeVasseur called the meeting to order at 10:10

- 1. Consideration of Minutes of January, 2011 Meeting:** Commission member Wirtenberg made a motion to accept the minutes as presented and Commission member Stille seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.
- 2. Consideration of ACIR reports:** There were no new reports.
- 3. Old Business:** Commission member LeVasseur said the goal for this meeting is to conclude the discussion begun in January and to identify an issue for the ACIR to delve into. He asked Commission member Cassano to tell everyone about the forum to be held at the Legislative Office Building on Monday. Commission member Cassano said the Planning & Development Committee is hosting an informational forum on regions as partners. They will describe examples from around the state, including revenue sharing and a regional revaluation initiative in northeastern CT. The dominant word is voluntary.

Commission member Cassano said a panel will include Ben Barnes of OPM, Jim Finley of CCM and a third person. The driving force is that Connecticut can't continue in the same manner with each of 169 towns trying to do everything on its own. It will be an open discussion and, even though the forum is only run from 9:00 to 11:00, the room is reserved until 12:00.

Commission member Cassano mentioned HB 5782 and noted that, although it currently would have regional planning organizations (RPOs) align with economic development districts (EDDs), that might not be the best strategy. EDDs won't lead to a fair distribution of funding and we have to consider other alignments, such as with other kinds of districts. Commission member Oros said that some of those are required to conform to federal definitions. There was a discussion of workforce boards and how they differ from other districts.

Commission member Krause mentioned the regional boundary report OPM will complete this year and asked if it would be better to let that be completed first. Commission member said they can be done simultaneously, because the costs of not doing this are so high. Commission member Krause said her RPO has voted to merge with a neighboring RPO, but the process is on hold because of the possibility of new requirements, such as requiring they conform with EDD boundaries. Commission member Cassano said he had spoken with Lyle Wray of the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and he has a similar concern. CRCOG is concerned about the possibility of border towns like Coventry being pulled in two directions.

Commission member Paul asked why such an important issue is included in a hotel tax bill. Commission member Cassano said it should not have been handled like that, but there is a tendency to do something now and fix it later. Commission member Paul said the Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials (LHCEO) will send a letter to express its opinion. Commission member Paul also said he was not aware of any EDDs being place yet and there was a discussion of the status of EDDs.

Commission member Paquette asked if the forum will also address inter-regional initiatives and there was a discussion of these. Commission member O'Leary said the RPO-based regions established by the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) provided an opportunity for RPO networking and the results have been outstanding. There had been disagreement over what to use as the building block for the DEMHS regions and they chose to use RPOs. There are four RPOs in DEMHS' Region 5 and the proposal to consolidate RPOs along EDD boundaries would damage the relationships they have developed.

Commission member Cassano said the DEMHS regions are effective because they rely on police departments, fire services, public works and others who have their feet on the ground. A system like that can take strong, quick action and, if regions also include the appropriate professionals, they can do the same with some of the planning and permitting currently handled by DOT and DEP. Connecticut can do more regionally

Commission member Krause said planners believe planning should be based on geography, not on a single function, because geography can integrate many functions. Her area's DEMHS district would not be a good match template for economic development. Commission member Cassano said a regional entity needs funding to be able to do anything. Little sales tax can be generated in a rural EDD and a large RPO has a much larger checkbook than a small RPO.

Commission member Krause said three things need to be considered in establishing a regional entity. The first aspect is the form, which includes the geography and governing structure. The second thing to consider is the function. The final thing is funding and the state's commitment to funding has been a problem. The CEOs of her region worry about state funding to regions dwindling after the state delegates its responsibilities to the regions, creating a new burden on the towns.

Commission member Cassano said all aspects of regionalization have to be considered as a package, with adequate funding. Commission member Paquette the proposed funding

mechanism would have to be changed because his region has few hotels. Commission member Cassano said the hotel tax revenue would be distributed among regions on the basis of the amount collected state-wide, not the amount generated within each region.

Commission member Paul said CEOs in his region share the concern of CEOs in Commission member Krause's region that the state might cut regional funding in the future. Commission member Cassano said they cannot make a permanent commitment. Commission member Paul also said the small towns of his region do not want to be swallowed into a region dominated by a big city. Commission member Stille said her small town would not want to leave CRCOG because of what CRCOG is able to provide. She also asked if the Council of Small Towns (COST) will participate in next week's panel and Commission member Paul said he will be on the panel, representing COST.

Commission member Cassano noted that Hartford gave some homeland security funding it received to CRCOG. There was a discussion of the relationship that must develop to allow the level of trust necessary to do that. Commission member LeVasseur noted that, although the DEMHS regions are primarily based on RPO boundaries, three towns are in a different DEMHS region than the rest of their RPO, because of emergency services relationships they had previously developed with other towns.

Commission member Wirtenberg said she is pleased the Planning & Development Committee will be holding Monday's forum and noted that her region in southwest CT also work across the border with counterparts in New York. Commission member Cassano said that also occurs across the Massachusetts border and federal agencies encourage it.

Commission member O'Leary said the trust within RPOs is based on the relationships that have developed among CEOs. We can't re-assemble them in the footprint of a DEMHS region or some other district and just assume that it will work as well. Some towns along the east side of the LHCEO relate with CRCOG more than with RPOs south of LHCEO. Commission member Cassano said CEOs change, while police and fire services carry a lot of weight and will not want to change. A lot of funding passes through the DEMHS regions.

Commission member Krause said that she knows of police and fire services who do not get along in their own town that do get along at the regional level. Still, that is a single function and it probably will not work as well for other services that lack the same interrelationship. Someone needs to think big. CT does not have a state planning commission and, although CRCOG does some big things, it benefits from special support. Commission member Cassano mentioned that there is some resentment against CRCOG.

Commission member Oros followed up on the earlier discussion of EDDs by saying that applications for two EDDs have been forwarded to Philadelphia for approval and funding. They are waiting for a response and it's important to remain flexible. He will get back to everyone with more information about the process. Commission member Stille said two districts are fighting over Bolton. Does the town have to agree for it to be placed in an EDD? Commission member Oros said they do.

Commission member Krause mentioned that her region does not have a distressed municipality and there was a discussion of HB 5782's language that would require RPOs to conform with an EDD. Commission member Paquette asked about changing the language in the bill and Commission member Cassano said it should be changed because relatively few would benefit from the current wording. People can advocate for it to be changed.

Commission member Paul said he agreed with Commission member Krause's concern about using DEMHS regions. They only work so well because they do things everyone agrees with. Commission member Cassano said CEOs have little responsibility in DEMHS regions and Commission member Wirtenberg said she would not want to promote those regions to do something beyond what they can reasonably do.

Commission member LeVasseur said transportation is already a core function of the RPOs, so organizing along the lines of transportation planning would make sense. Commission member O'Leary said DEMHS has allowed flexibility, so there are different organizational structures in different regions. It works well. Commission member Cassano mentioned that it will be included in John Filchak's presentation on Monday.

Commission member LeVasseur mentioned OPM's 1993 report, *Strategy to Establish Uniform Regional Service Delivery Areas For All State Agencies*, and added that former Rep. Sonny Gogins had a map showing all the different regional alignments existing in Connecticut and the map was completely black. Commission member Stille mentioned that there is a large number of fire districts in Connecticut and there was a discussion of how many fire companies there are in some towns. Commission member Stille said we have to change how we do business.

Commission member Krause said regionalism is like a tsunami coming in. The process began fifty years ago and it is more important to make the right changes, not the fast ones. Commission member Cassano said there will be more support from this governor.

Commission member Paquette asked about the view of regionalism from the education perspective. Commission member Harris said local control is key and that local politics is still important even if the state is funding a regional school project. No one wants to be the town leader who closed the local school. Some towns actually prefer sending their kids out to other towns' schools rather than to commit to joining a regional school district. The state has broadened the allowance for establishing cooperative schools without establishing a regional school district.

Commission member Cassano mentioned that there was a bill to consolidate the state's public school system into 59 districts and Commission member Harris mentioned that Maine had made such a change. Commission member Krause noted that Maine towns in those newly consolidated districts that want more spent on education are being voted down by other district towns. Commission member Harris said the same happens in Connecticut districts. Commission member O'Leary mentioned that Litchfield had more control and Goshen less control of their regional district, but they were able to resolve it.

Commission member Cassano noted that the ACIR does not meet again until July and, with things happening so quickly, the group should meet again before then. Commission member LeVasseur said we will try to schedule a special meeting and added that is good to have a Planning & Development Committee chairman in the ACIR. Commission member O'Leary suggested dusting off previous ACIR studies regarding recommended changes.

4. New Business: Commission member LeVasseur said that, as also happened in January, the discussion that began with Old Business had run through New Business. The next item on the agenda is to note that the next regular meeting is scheduled for 10:00 on July 21, 2011, at CREC. A special meeting will be scheduled in the interim. The meeting was adjourned at 11:25.