

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Mountain Laurel Room, Memorial Hall, CCSU
New Britain, Connecticut

Thursday, June 28, 2012 - 10:00 A.M.

Members Present: Dave LeVasseur (Chairman), Ryan Bingham, Ronald Harris, Barbara Henry, Robert Kaliszewski, Linda Krause, Frank Nicastro, James O'Leary, Leo Paul, Virginia Seccombe, Joyce Stille, Michael Stupinski and Kachina Walsh-Weaver

Members Absent: Mark Allaben, Sen. Stephen Cassano, John Finkle, Alice Meyer (Vice-Chairman), Mark Paquette and Scott Shanley

Staff: Bruce Wittchen

Other Attendees: Rick Lynn

Opening Remarks:

Commission member LeVasseur called the meeting to order at 10:15 and, due to the presence of new member Ryan Bingham and guest Rick Lynn, commission member LeVasseur asked everyone to introduce themselves.

1. Consideration of Minutes of January 26, 2012 and April 19, 2012 Meetings:

A motion was made and seconded to approve the [January 26, 2012 minutes](#). There was no further discussion and the minutes were approved unanimously, with commission member Bingham abstaining because he had not attended the meeting. A motion was made and seconded to approve the [April 19, 2012 minutes](#). There was no further discussion and the minutes were approved unanimously, with commission members Bingham and Seccombe abstaining because they had not attended the meeting.

2. Consideration of ACIR report:

- a. [2012 Session Mandates Report](#): Bruce Wittchen provided a brief overview of the report, which was distributed to members by email last week. A motion was made and seconded to approve the report. There was no further discussion and the report was approved unanimously.

3. Old Business:

Commission member Paul said he invited Rick Lynn, Executive Director of the Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials (LHCEO) to attend today's meeting to discuss funding problems encountered by the state's [regional planning organizations](#) (RPOs).

Commission member Paul distributed charts showing how LHCEO's funding sources changed from FY 89-90 to FY 11-12. Local dues, DOT planning funds and the [state grant-in-aid](#) (SGIA) provided relatively equal portions in FY 89-90. That is in contrast with FY 11-12, when SGIA provided only 5% of income. He drew everyone's attention to "Other Contracts", which

generated 29% of FY 11-12 income. He explained that, to gain needed funding, the LHCEO has to farm out a portion of Rick Lynn's time to administer grants for other organizations.

Commission member Paul said RPOs have a critical role and the state should provide more funding to ensure that RPOs can be effective. He noted that the LHCEO has eleven towns and the neighboring Northwestern CT Council of Governments (NWCCOG) has nine. If the two RPOs were combined to reduce costs, there would be only one executive director, whose time would be divided between 20 towns. The combined RPO could not be as effective as the two separate RPOs had been.

Commission member Harris asked what the "Other Contacts" are comprised of and Rick Lynn said [CT Dept. of Emergency Services & Public Protection](#) (DESPP) funds are the largest category. He said the total includes other, smaller projects too, such as administering a facade improvement grant in Torrington. Rick said he and the LHCEO members are concerned that such might not be sustainable.

Commission member Seccombe asked if other RPOs are experiencing similar problems. Linda Krause said this is typical and they no longer have funding for general planning and administration. Her RPO, the [CT River Estuary Regional Planning Agency](#) (CRERPA), has been able to access a range of environmental grant funding and cities have access to urban project grants. Overall, targeted grants have replaced general funds. An RPO like the NWCCOG has little transportation funding and little else. Urban regions, however, can do well.

Rick Lynn agreed with Commission member Krause and said the [Council of Governments of the Central Naugatuck Valley](#) (COGCNV) receives approximately \$400,000 per year of transportation funding, while the LHCEO receives only \$67,000. Commission member Krause added that cities dominate grant-dependent RPOs because of the urban focus of many grants. If there are fewer RPOs, they will be increasingly urban and transportation centric. Commission member Paul noted that the municipalities of his region would be the fringe of a region drawn around Waterbury.

Commission member Krause said CRERPA and the [Midstate Regional Planning Agency](#) (MRPA) made their decision to consolidate in large part to avoid having a different regional alignment imposed on them. The new entity is the Lower CT River Valley Council of Governments and, because of the hold harmless language in this year's bill (Sec. 189 of [June Special Session PA 12-1](#)), the state cannot impose a different boundary on them.

Commission member Paul said the LHCEO and NWCCOG have the hold harmless language in mind to during their discussions. They would prefer to maintain the current arrangement, but current funding might not allow that. Commission member Henry agreed. Commission member LeVasseur said his program is trying to find a way to support RPOs and mentioned that some have suggested that grant administration currently done at the state level should be done by RPOs. However, a number of people believe CT has too many RPOs and he often hears people say that Southern California needs only one.

Commission member Henry pointed out that an advantage to smaller RPOs is that members do not have to travel as far and there are fewer people at the table. Commission member Krause said the current system has met our needs for fifty years and we should maintain its capacity to meet our needs. Commission member Seccombe asked if there is a middle ground and Commission members Henry and Paul said their regions are looking for it.

Commission member Paul said he agrees with efforts to reorganize regional planning agencies into councils of elected officials or councils of governments. The benefit is that the members will be chief elected officials and their input is important. Commission member Paul asked what the ACIR can do to help the RPOs and asked what they can do politically.

Commission member LeVasseur noted that the new public act has slowed the pace of changes that concern the RPOs and expanded the appeal period. He added that it also requires OPM do the boundaries study in consultation with RPOs, the [Planning & Development Committee](#) chairs, CCM and the [Council of Small Towns](#) (COST). The ACIR can work through them. He also reminded everyone that the boundaries of RPOs that voluntarily consolidate are protected for twenty years. Commission member LeVasseur added that last year's [Voluntary Regional Planning Organization Consolidation Bonus Pool](#) has been moved into the [Regional Performance Incentive Program](#), which will likely be better funded than previously expected.

Commission member LeVasseur said voluntary mergers occurring in the next three years will be eligible for reimbursement of 150% of actual expenses, which should help minimize other transition costs. He noted that JSS PA 12-1 also eliminated the earlier language calling for eight RPOs.

Commission member Krause mentioned the email she had sent members prior to the April meeting and that Bruce Wittchen redistributed for this meeting. The email mentioned that DESPP intended to retain more federal emergency planning funding at the agency level and provide less to the regions. She said more should be done regionally, not less. RPOs provide good service and DESPP's reallocation goes against the interests of regions and against the federal interest that this planning be regional.

Commission member Krause said the state needs to provide a consistent message – do they want a regional focus or not? Commission member O'Leary said this takes us back to Commission member Seccombe's comment about finding the middle ground. He said three of the RPOs are regional planning agencies. As Commission member Paul pointed out, chief elected official involvement is important for an RPO to be effective. The Governor comes from one of those regions, so is not experienced with an RPO that is based on chief elected officials.

Commission member O'Leary said the emergency planning done by DESPP's [five regions](#) has been a model for regional planning. His town is one of 43 in DESPP's [Region 5](#) and it includes portions of five RPOs. The COGCNV has been acting as fiduciary and that role will soon pass to the LHCEO. Regional structures have also blossomed at DPH and DOT. Now the state, through DESPP, is pulling back from this model.

Commission member Stille described the [Capitol Region Council of Governments](#) (CRCOG), which her town belongs to, and said her town is not the smallest, but it is one of 30 towns. They get out of the region what they put into it. The policy includes some chief elected officials, but some towns are represented by administrative or managerial staff. In her opinion, homeland security funding has often been used to buy toys when what they really need is training. A volunteer fire department received a fiber optic line, the town hall did not. Commission member LeVasseur said much of the difference between RPOs arises from the mindset of the groups involved. If members do not recognize the potential benefits of a strong RPO, they will not have one.

Commission member Nicastro mentioned the state's workforce boards and said the board serving his city was merged into the capitol region, despite his region covering more area. After that,

more of the funding started going to the larger cities. There is no going back after such a change, so it is important to speak up when it is first proposed.

Commission member O'Leary said RPOs can cooperate when it is beneficial, without merging. Commission member Seccombe said it is worthwhile to look at other states to learn if alternative systems offer any advantages. Commission member Bingham said we should consider the incentives offered by different structures. LHCEO and NWCCOG serve similar constituencies and DESPP and Workforce Board regions function well. However, there seems to be more variation in transportation needs. Perhaps the ACIR can make recommendations for new regional incentives and towns and RPOs can decide what is right for them.

Commission member LeVasseur mentioned that Commission member Cassano, who was unable to attend this meeting, asked about inviting all the RPO directors to an ACIR meeting to discuss such concerns. There was not enough time to do so for this meeting, but perhaps the ACIR can schedule a special meeting after the summer or can do that for the ACIR's November meeting.

Commission member LeVasseur said that, with the previously discussed RPI funding changes, this could be an opportune time for a discussion of appropriate roles for RPOs. A number of agencies rely on RPOs and not just for the activities connected that provide specific funding. That worked well when the SGIA was well-funded and the decline in funding since the level of the mid-2000s is regrettable.

Commission member Paul said this concept for the use RPI funding is a good idea. Commission member Bingham pointed out that this discussion will have more influence with the legislature if it can happen in September instead of November. Commission member Krause said this is the most intergovernmental topic of all and it's important to look at the big picture like we are doing. She noted that this can lead to consideration of regional taxation.

Commission member Henry asked if there is a limit to RPI funding. Commission member LeVasseur said there is not and he will provide additional information. He added that he will talk with Commission member Cassano to work out the details of the proposed special meeting with RPO directors.

4. New Business:

Commission member O'Leary said he had attended a disaster recovery committee meeting at the [CT Insurance Dept.](#) earlier this morning and this is a topic that the ACIR should pay attention to. DESPP and others are also involved and this will also require local and RPO participation. He noted that they have to consider the issues that would be raised, for instance, if a complex of 500 emergency housing units were needed in an area. Post-disaster rebuild can also create problems if appropriate procedures are not in place. He pointed out potential conflicts with local zoning ordinances, and noted that aboveground water distribution and sewage collection systems do not comply with public health codes. Commission member O'Leary said such problems arose in Massachusetts after last year's tornado.

Commission member O'Leary said the state has a disaster recovery plan and the committee wants to coordinate this with municipalities. It wants to do this by working with the ACIR. Commission member LeVasseur asked if the federal government representatives are involved and Commission member O'Leary said they have specified the structure for long-term recovery, but without funding it. The committee is looking for advice from the ACIR.

Commission member Kaliszewski asked what the committee's deliverable will be. Commission member O'Leary showed a copy of a Maine's draft Interagency Disaster Recovery Plan and said they are looking at establishing regional long-term recovery support groups during the next 3-10 years. Commission member LeVasseur asked if he can distribute the draft to ACIR members and Commission member O'Leary will look into it. He added that the committee is modifying that plan to function for CT.

There was a discussion of the disaster recovery committee's membership and Commission member Kaliszewski said there are similar committees, such as one focused on Long Island Sound. Commission member O'Leary said it is only a small group now, with 6-8 people, but they intend to become more inclusive. He does not know whether this initiative will become a mandate for municipalities or whether it will rely on voluntary participation by municipalities. Commission member Kaliszewski said they will need to make connections and Commission member O'Leary noted the climate change considerations. Commission member Kaliszewski said the questions of when and where post-disaster rebuild occurs is a long-term project.

5. The next meeting is scheduled for 10:00 AM, November 15, 2012, in the Student Center's 1849 Room at CCSU, New Britain.