

**Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations  
Monday, January 31, 2011 - 10:00 A.M.  
Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents  
26 Caya Ave., West Hartford, Connecticut**

**January 31, 2011 meeting**

**MINUTES**

**Members Present:** David LeVasseur (Chairman), Mark Allaben, Sen. Steven Cassano, Ronald Harris, Linda Krause, James O'Leary, Joe Oros, Mark Paquette, Virginia Seccombe, Timothy Stewart, Joyce Stille, Adam Stolpen, Ron Thomas (for James Finley) and Margaret Wirtenberg, PhD.

**Members Absent:** Rep. Christopher Donovan or designee, John Finkle, Ken Flatto, Barbara Henry, Amey Marrella or designee, Alice Meyer (Vice-Chairman), Leo Paul, Scott Shanley

**Staff:** Bruce Wittchen.

**Opening Remarks:** Commission member LeVasseur called the meeting to order at 10:00 and, because of two new members being in attendance, everyone introduced themselves.

**1. Consideration of Minutes of October 2010 Meeting:** Commission member Paquette made a motion to accept the minutes as presented and Commission member Wirtenberg seconded it. The motion passed unanimously, with Commission members Allaben, Cassano, O'Leary, Stewart, Stille and Thomas abstaining.

**2a. Consideration of 2011 Compendium Supplement:** Commission member O'Leary made a motion to accept the minutes as presented and Commission member Stille seconded it. Commission member LeVasseur asked Bruce Wittchen to provide a brief background of the report. Bruce explained the difference between the full compendium issued the previous year and supplements like this that will be issued in the three years before another full compendium is issued again in 2014. He also mentioned how the supplement differs from the annual mandates report issued every year in the fall.

Commission member Seccombe asked Bruce to explain how the impact of mandates is determined to be minor, moderate or major. Bruce said that the full compendium says that the determination is based on specific dollar figures, but that the evaluation is subjective. What might be a minor mandate to a town with a full-time planner could be a major mandate for a town without a planner. He tried to characterize each mandate in accordance with its effect on the most heavily-impacted town.

Commission member Wirtenberg said that if she had been able to attend this meeting, Commission member Meyer would point out at this moment that seemingly minor mandates can combine to be a major burden on a town and that we must consider their cumulative impact.

Commission member Cassano asked who would be able to identify the most crucial mandates for reconsideration and there was a discussion of how mandates have been evaluated by different entities. Commission member LeVasseur pointed out that the CT Council of Municipalities (CCM) had looked into this and Commission member Thomas said CCM had organized a group to do that some time ago and he will distribute the findings to the rest of the commission members. There was no further discussion of the report and the motion passed unanimously.

**3. Old Business:** Commission member LeVasseur said we are approaching the time of year when the ACIR would traditionally identify a topic for study, but noted that we do not have the same funding as before. There was a discussion of past events that promoted municipal sharing and Commission member LeVasseur described the Municipal Shared Services that ACIR co-hosted a year ago. He noted that some of the initiatives described at such events have been implemented successfully, in part because of funding by Regional Performance Incentive Grants. There was a discussion that this would be an opportune time to inform new leaders of such opportunities.

Commission member O'Leary said that outreach efforts such as these tend to lack the details necessary to justify the ideas presented. He added that it would be much more helpful if presentations included a discussion of specific cost savings. Referring to the previously cited example of regional tax collection, he pointed out that such an idea would be controversial. Recommendations for such a change must be supported with specifics about potential costs and savings, as well as potential unintended consequences. Commission member LeVasseur said last year's conference was set up to do that, relying on presenters who could speak of their experience with specific initiatives. He added that the ultimate success of an initiative depends on the towns involved and pointed out that regional 911 centers have been in place for decades and have been a success.

Commission member Stewart said towns still want to be fiefdoms and Commission member Harris said it is important to focus on the sharing of ministerial, not policy functions. He noted the example of tax collection as being a ministerial function, while other tax functions are an expression of town policy and shared services initiatives should not target such activities. It is important to avoid strong negative reactions to proposals.

Commission member LeVasseur said the regional revaluation program of the North East Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) addresses a ministerial function and, by achieving an economy of scale and staggering town revaluations, it has succeeded at saving money without affecting the assessment function. He noted that some of the member towns had to obtain state approval for a one-time change to their revaluation schedules in order to allow for the staggering of schedules that helps the regional system succeed.

Commission member Cassano said there have been many such successes and there should be a compilation. He added that the Planning & Development Committee will look into the incentives for such initiatives this session. Commission member LeVasseur mentioned that ACIR did compile such a document, the 2000 report, *Local Government Cooperative Ventures in Connecticut*, but noted that it would require updating because of the number of new initiatives,

such as those funded with Regional Performance Incentive Grants. He said it might be worthwhile to circulate and begin updating it.

Commission member Seccombe returned to the concern Commission member O'Leary had raised regarding the need for hard data. She said towns in her area aligned their school calendars with each other because they knew how much their transportation budgets would be reduced by doing so. Knowing the cost made it an easy change in this economic climate. She said they are also working on a regional plan to create savings in their insurance purchasing. Commission member LeVasseur pointed out some of the shared services programs of the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and Commission member Paquette said the Connecticut Association of Regional Planning Organizations (CARPO) can compile a list of such initiatives.

Commission member O'Leary noted that the Connecticut Council of Municipalities had sponsored a shared services symposium and distributed a booklet. Commission member Thomas said the booklet has not been updated since then, but CCM can reach out to mayors and first selectmen to obtain current information. Commission member Krause pointed out that although certain regions get most of the attention for their initiatives, other regions are accomplishing a lot too.

Commission member Krause reminded the other members of a question she had raised at the last meeting, *what should be the shape and function of the regions?* She considers this to be an appropriate topic for the ACIR. She mentioned a town leader in her region who says he is all for regionalism, but is opposed to regions. He doesn't favor fixed regional boundaries because it might be best to do one thing with one group of towns and to do another thing with another group of towns. Fixed boundaries inhibit that. Some municipalities share services without being counted in shared services statistics.

Commission member Krause wondered if the state would surrender its oversight and cut its own staffing level for activities delegate to regions or towns. Commission member Cassano said that if there will ever be a change, it will be in the next couple years. If regions were to do transportation planning and design, for instance, would the state Department of Transportation (DOT) have a smaller staff? If some sales tax revenue would go to regions for design and planning activities, it could work.

Commission member Cassano pointed out that Rhode Island essentially has one region for planning purposes and said Connecticut regions should act on a broader scale than they do. Commission member Wirtenberg said the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA) does things with Westchester County, New York and Commission member noted that CRCOG works across the border with the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts. He said they are trying to revive and the New England Compact, but it will be difficult with recent changes in leadership.

Commission member LeVasseur said the right pieces need to be in place for each new effort and there will be different motivations for each. Commission member Krause noted that she had participated in a 1994 legislative effort, led by representatives Davis and Simmons, which raised a number of questions about planning in Connecticut and now is the time to follow up with the

answers. Commission member LeVasseur said he would talk with Bruce about the ideas raised at today's meeting and will identify some to circulate among ACIR members for further consideration.

There was further discussion of how much towns can save and how the savings potential needs to be quantified to help support such initiatives. Commission member O'Leary said town leaders are aware of the possible savings, but they want to get re-elected and a small group opposed to a change can get a lot of media attention. Commission member Seccombe said it is not necessary for every town to join a particular regional effort at the same time and Commission member Krause added that a different group of towns participates in each of CRCOG's initiatives.

Commission member O'Leary mentioned that they were able to borrow the CRCOG model in organizing their emergency planning region and created divisions within the region to reflect RPO boundaries. It was arduous, but a one-size-fits-all approach would not have succeeded. Commission member Cassano said larger cities get funding separately, but they will participate in regional initiatives if funding is channeled through the RPOs. Commission member Wirtenberg said they might need to be told to do it and Commission member Thomas said it will work if there are incentives.

Commission member LeVasseur said that one stumbling block is that municipalities have a hard time committing to something when they can't wrap their arms around the process or if one arm is tied behind their back. Commission member O'Leary said that he has found during his participation with the emergency response region that he has gained a level of mutual trust with people he didn't previously know and that is an important component of any regional initiative. Commission member Krause said, as a counterpoint to that, she knew of a well-functioning regional waste collection facility that was undermined when one town's CEO decided to no longer pay his town's share. That kind of history hurts the prospects for other regional efforts.

Commission member LeVasseur said there had been a lot of difficulty in even starting the regional facility Commission member Krause had mentioned. Commission member O'Leary said progress had been slow for his emergency response region because everyone has to cooperate and there can be a monkey wrench at any time. He added that he used to be highly protective of the independence of individual towns. He still is, but he now realizes that there is a better way to deal with some things.

Commission member Krause said one of the problems they face is that if a former municipal administration favored a regional initiative, a new administration might be inclined to oppose it to highlight their differences. Commission member Cassano said he has seen what's being done in 21 states. He noted that southern California has only two regions. There was a discussion of Connecticut's current regional efforts and the possibility of sharing sales tax revenue with towns or among regions.

Commission member Seccombe said it is important to recognize the local and regional implications of large developments and mentioned how they influence the need for and location of services and businesses. Commission member O'Leary cautioned that very little sales tax is

generated within a town like Goshen because people in his town do most of their shopping elsewhere. Any proposal to redistribute sales tax revenue must take that into account.

Commission member Oros was asked about the status of economic development districts. He said he will distribute an update. Commission member Stille asked if there are any data on the state's savings due to probate court changes. She said Bolton does not pay a large amount for probate court, but its cost has increased 50%. Commission member LeVasseur said it will take some time before the savings can be evaluated. Commission member O'Leary said it is not a simple question and pointed out that Torrington pays into the system like other towns in its probate district, but Torrington also collects rent for the court. What is its actual cost for the new probate system? Commission member Krause mentioned a town she knows that now pays 3X more for probate court, but lost the probate judge it used to have. Commission member LeVasseur said there are one-time costs of making the change and Commission member Cassano said the change resulted in savings for the state, but costs for the towns.

#### **4. New Business:**

Commission member LeVasseur said the discussion that began with Old Business had run through New Business. The next item on the agenda is to note that the next meeting is scheduled for 10:00 on April 14, 2011, at CREC. He asked Bruce Wittchen to distribute the 2011 schedule again for the benefit of new members. The meeting was adjourned at 11:03.