

DEMHS Region 4 Recovery Steering Committee Meeting

Thursday January 21, 2021 9:00 a.m.

Conducted via Zoom

Recordings of this meeting are posted at www.seccog.org and www.neccog.org

Draft Minutes

Members Present: Mayor Fred Allyn, Town of Ledyard/SCCOG Chairman (Co-Chair); Wendy Bury, Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition; Jim Butler, Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments; Maryam Elahi, Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut; John Filchak, Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments; Tracey Hanson, Town of Voluntown/NECCOG Chairman (Co-Chair); Mark Hill, EWIB; Deborah Monahan, TVCCA (Co-Chair); Dr. Elsa Nuñez, Eastern Connecticut State University; Mark Oefinger, seCTer; Reverend Benajmin Watts, Shiloh Baptist Church of New London; Reverend Catherine Zall, New London Homeless Hospitality Center.

Others Present: seCTer: Nancy Cowser; SCCOG: Sam Alexander, Carly Holzschuh, Amanda Kennedy; NECCOG: Hoween Flexer; DEMHS: Darlene Richards, Mike Caplet; Mike Licata, Region 4 Long-term Recovery Coordinator.

1. Call to Order

Co-Chairman Deb Monahan called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

2. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

3. Minutes of November 19, 2020 Meeting

MOTION: To approve the minutes (Bury, Nuñez). Motion passed with Allyn, Hanson, Oefinger abstaining.

4. Update on Regional Resiliency Analysis

Amanda Kennedy reported that the latest update on the status of the regional resiliency analysis being prepared by the consultants GRI and McChrystal Group is that the draft report is currently under review by the State and should be released shortly. Members asked that the survey results from the last meeting be sent out again to all members. Mr. Filchak expressed disappointment that the regions would not have an opportunity to review the document before finalization and in the level of outreach conducted by the consultants.

5. Update on State Recovery Framework and Local/Regional Unmet Needs Reporting Process

Mike Caplet reported on the State Recovery Framework, explaining that the structure to date has remained largely the same: there is a Statewide Recovery Steering Committee and ESF 6/ESF 14 task force/working group. The structure for local/regional input exists with a Steering Committee set up in each region and working groups set up under each regional steering committee. A goal is to identify high-level unmet needs at the local and regional level and transmit that information to the state level for attention.

To respond to individual unmet needs being experienced by individuals who must quarantine and isolate, the State has contracted with agencies to serve as Community Resource Coordinators (CRCs). In Eastern CT, that agency is TVCCA. CRC case workers assist with individual needs during the quarantine and isolation period.

The State holds an ESF 6/14 call every Monday afternoon with representatives from the CRCs and Councils of Government to identify and address needs being experienced at a broader community level and to transmit best practices between the regions and the State. A process for regions to report these high-level unmet needs to the state committees and agency representatives has now been stood up, with the intention that state staff will review reported unmet needs on at least a weekly basis and look for solutions that address those needs. The Unmet Needs reporting process will function to document needs for which existing resources and programs are not available or sufficient and to propose solutions. Needs reported under this process should be those created or exacerbated by COVID-19. Supporting documents can be provided. The goal is to raise the issues for attention, advocate for the region, and propose solutions. Information about unmet needs will come from Steering Committee and working group members and coordinated and reported by Council of Governments staff. The Steering Committee will oversee the information being reported.

Ms. Bury asked whether previous unmet needs should be reported: Caplet and Kennedy responded that there is value in documenting this and the system provides for submitting “closed items” that would be documented for posterity and for sharing best practices. Ms. Bury suggested a separate session gathering info about previous unmet needs. Ms. Elahi commented that housing/evictions will be major issue, and that the region should push for government response that preserves access to housing, and not push responsibility to philanthropy to respond.

Dr. Nuñez asked for better communications about the Connecticut response process that can be transmitted to the public, and said that she could connect information to Spanish speakers and the Windham community. Mr. Caplet said he would share this feedback with the communications group involved in the state response process. Ms. Monahan added that it is important that appeals for funding emphasize the need for flexibility to respond to changing needs. Ms. Zall and Mr. Licata discussed the need for communications to convey to the public and participants that actions are being taken to respond to needs.

6. Initial Discussion of Unmet Needs

Participants discussed several top-of-mind issues:

- Coming eviction crisis and the inability/unwillingness of landlords to respond to unsafe conditions.
- Food insecurity, especially for people who lack private transportation or are ineligible for existing programs.
- Additional services for seniors who are sheltering at home.
- Clear guidance and assistance on registering for and obtaining vaccines, especially for those that cannot use the internet, lack transportation, or need personal assistance. Participants discussed some of the difficulties of using the current VAMS system, the call center, and the state of appointment availability. Mayor Allyn shared that his Senior Center has been closed since the beginning of the pandemic but that staff has been tasked with calling seniors weekly to check in and make sure all needs are being met. He also added that the Health Districts are aware of the challenges and have been vocal in pressing the State for improvements. Mr. Caplet added that these issues are being filtered up through other means as well. Mr. Watts shared that some elderly need additional assistance beyond scheduling help—they need help in reminding individuals of their appointment

dates and/or transportation. Ms. Bury added that in addressing the challenges of working with elderly, we need to also develop a system that will work with the technology that younger generations rely on.

7. Updates re: Establishing Economic/Natural & Cultural Resources Working Group and Community Planning & Capacity Building/Infrastructure Systems Working Group

Ms. Kennedy reported that the Health, Social Services & Housing working group will meet for the second time later on January 21st, and that the first meetings of the Economic/Natural & Cultural Resources Working Group and Community Planning & Capacity Building/Infrastructure Systems Working Group would occur on Tuesday, January 26th. Ms. Kennedy will send links to the meeting agendas to the Steering Committee in a follow-up email.

8. Next Steps

There was discussion about when and how often to convene the Steering Committee. Participants requested a regular meeting date, potentially monthly. Ms. Kennedy will work with the co-chairs to schedule the next meeting, in approximately one month.

9. Other

Mr. Filchak asked that the report-outs be formatted in a consistent manner. Mr. Butler stated that staff would like to reach out to members who did not attend to confirm their continued participation. Mr. Filchak mentioned that prospective funding from the US Economic Development Administration, which would have supported SCCOG and NECCOG work on this project, did not come through and that NECCOG and SCCOG do not currently have funding dedicated to this work.

10. Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting (Allyn, Nuñez). So moved.