

Community Planning & Capacity Building/Infrastructure Working Group

Meeting Notes

Recordings and additional information can be found at www.seccog.org/recovery and www.neccog.org/demhs-recovery-work

Date/Time: March 16, 2021, 9:00am.

Location: Zoom teleconference/videoconference.

Members in attendance: Sandra Allyn-Gauthier (Town of Preston), Jennie Arpin (Town of Willington), Todd Babbitt (Town of Griswold), John Beck (Eastern Connecticut State University), James Bee (Groton Police Department), Matthew Bordeaux (Town of Colchester), Paige Bronk (Town of Groton), Mike Carroll (Southeast Area Transit District), Leslie Creane (City of Groton), Jack Cross (LEARN), Peter DeBiasi (The Access Agency), Carly Holzschuh (SCCOG/Town of Franklin), Phillip Johnson (Windham Regional Transit District), Mike Licata (Town of Windham/DEMHS Region 4 Regional Long-Term Recovery Coordinator), Deborah Monahan (Thames Valley Council for Community Action/DEMHS Region 4 Regional Recovery Steering Committee), CAPT Todd Moore (U.S. Naval Submarine Base New London), Jen Muggeo (Ledge Light Health District), Kristen Pisani (Mitchell College), Deanna Rhodes (City of Norwich), Timothy Sharkey (Borough of Jewett City), CAPT Will Smith (United States Coast Guard Academy), Janene Vandt (UConn Avery Point), Norton Wheeler (Southeastern Connecticut Housing Alliance), Dawn Works-Dennis (U.S. Naval Submarine Base New London).

Staff in attendance: Sam Alexander (SCCOG), James Butler (SCCOG), Mike Caplet (DEMHS Region 4), Carla Iezzi (DEMHS Region 4), Amanda Kennedy (SCCOG), John Filchak (NECCOG), Darlene Richards (DEMHS Region 4).

1) Call to Order.

Sam Alexander (Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG)) called the meeting to order at 9:01am. Mr. Alexander thanked those in attendance.

2) Roll Call.

All members in attendance stated their names and affiliations.

3) Review of Meeting Notes from 2/16/21.

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Community Planning & Capacity Building/Infrastructure Working Group
Economic/Natural & Cultural Resources Working Group
Health & Social Services/Housing Working Group

Meeting notes from February 16th were distributed to members by e-mail. No adoption is necessary.

4) Unmet Needs Discussion.

a. Status of Previously Identified Unmet Needs

The following Unmet Needs identified in past meetings are under review by the Statewide Steering Committee:

- FOIA issues related to e-mail collection (Chaplin).
- No continuation plan for replacing/updating tablets and laptops given to students (LEARN).
- Rural broadband infrastructure stretched thin. Economics prohibit ability to upgrade (Killingly).

Also, staff spoke with transit districts regarding the cascading impacts of fare revenue reduction and outside funding. An Unmet Need was identified and recorded.

Deb Monahan (TVCCA/DEMHS Region 4 Regional Recovery Steering Committee) noted that the American Rescue Plan was recently signed by the President. This process helps ensure that funds are going to appropriate places.

b. Possible Outcomes from Unmet Needs Identification

Once Unmet Needs are identified they are recorded. If no immediate solutions are identified, the Unmet Needs are “escalated” to the Statewide Steering Committee, where the Steering Committee contacts appropriate State agencies and others to determine immediate solutions to the need. The Statewide Steering Committee may also use the information to seek out funding sources, or propose policy changes and legislation. Receiving Unmet Needs from the State’s five DEMHS regions also allows the Statewide Steering Committee to collate information from across the state, and form a better pandemic response.

c. Identification of any Remaining Unmet Needs in Eastern CT

Sam Alexander asked for remaining Unmet Needs from members. Although no Unmet Needs were brought forward, the Working Group took up a discussion of pandemic recovery in general.

Deb Monahan stated that organizations and business have adapted over the past year, but Working Group members need to watch out for the changing needs of clients and constituents.

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Paige Bronk (Town of Groton) stated that municipalities and organizations largely reacted well; however, the State and municipal governments should focus on formalizing and hardening communications channels, particularly for the next disruptive event.

Deb Monahan stated that as municipalities and organizations shift toward a focus on recovery, it will be extremely important that everyone is pulling in the same direction, and that resources make the greatest impact possible.

John Filchak (NECCOG) stated that the region and state should not lose the adaptations to the pandemic that have resulted in improved processes and transparency (e.g.: the Department of Motor Vehicles offers online license renewal).

5) Next Steps and Potential Future Meetings

The charge of the Working Group, under the State of Connecticut's disaster response framework, is to identify Unmet Needs related to the pandemic, so that those needs can be addressed and elevated for review and documentation by the State of Connecticut. This is an important process, but future meetings on the same topic may be unnecessary; staff may follow up individually with members instead. There may be another recovery-related purpose for the Working Group moving forward.

Mike Caplet (DEMHS Region 4 Coordinator) thanked Working Group members for their involvement and joining the conversation around Unmet Needs; this is the first step in any disaster response. There will likely be more conversations as the DEMHS Region 4 Regional Recovery Steering Committee looks at later stages of the recovery.

6) Other.

The State of Connecticut contracted with the Global Resilience Institute (GRI) out of Northeastern University to produce Regional Resilience Baseline Assessments for the five DEMHS regions of the state. The DEMHS Region 4 report is available at www.seccog.org/recovery and www.neccog.org/demhs-recovery-work. One important function of the Regional Resilience Baseline Assessment is to identify "fundable projects" in DEMHS Region 4. The document contains regional priorities and detailed discussion of the various impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on eastern Connecticut.

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) was recently passed by both houses of Congress and signed by the President. The ARP will be another resource like the CARES Act and others for organizations and municipalities. Some relevant features of the ARP include:

- Broadband to schools and libraries (~\$7 billion)

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- Public transportation (\$30.4 billion)
- Mortgage and utility assistance (~\$10 billion)
- Energy and water utility bill assistance (\$4.5 billion)
- Expanded PPP eligibility (~\$7 billion)
- Workforce protections
- IT & cyber security (~\$2 billion)

Organizations and municipalities can use the information contained in Regional Baseline Assessment to support applications for funding under the ARP.

Sam Alexander will pass along copies of the GRI Regional Resilience Baseline Assessment report and a summary of ARP programs.

Deb Monahan stated that TVCCA encounters challenges of families without internet access or devices, for whom remote learning is difficult or not possible. Ms. Monahan added that energy assistance programs have existed for a long time, but the water utility assistance provided under the ARP is new and may be of interest to some of the Working Group members.

Mike Licata (Town of Windham/DEMHS Region 4 Regional Long-Term Recovery Coordinator) stated that he and Mike Caplet had tried for a long time before the pandemic to stand up the Regional Recovery Steering Committee. It is a benefit to the region and it would be great to see the effort carried forward after the conclusion of the pandemic.

Peter DeBiasi (The Access Agency) stated that Connecticut has recently rolled out the Unite CT program for renters and landlords. The Access Agency and others will soon be administering the program in eastern Connecticut.

Sam Alexander once again thanked members of the Working Group for taking part in the process.

7) Adjournment.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:36am.