



MINUTES OF THE NHCog MEETING

9/10/2026

Remote Only

Member/Representative Attendance:

✓	Barkhamsted , Meaghan Cook	☐	Harwinton , Michael Criss	✓	Roxbury , Patrick Roy
✓	Burlington , Doug Thompson	☐	Kent , Eric Epstein	✓	Salisbury , Curtis Rand
✓	Canaan , David Barger	✓	Litchfield , Denise Raap	✓	Sharon , Casey Flanagan
✓	Colebrook , Bradley Bremer	✓	Morris , Tom Weik	✓	Torrington , Molly Spino
✓	Cornwall , Gordon Ridgway	✓	New Hartford , Dan Jerram	✓	Warren , Greg LaCava
✓	Goshen , Seth Breakell	✓	Norfolk , Henry Tirrell	☐	Washington , Jim Brinton
☐	Hartland , Magi Winslow	✓	North Canaan , Jesse Bunce	✓	Winchester , Todd Arcelaschi

NHCog Staff: Robert Phillips, Annmarie Ryan, Erik Shortell, Leo Ghio. Sarah Better, Grace Rennison.

Others: Paul Harrington (Winchester Town Manager), Atty Ed Spinella (USA Hauling), Rachel Oster & Erin Merrill (Diversion Strategies), Ted Shafer (NW Chamber of Commerce), Jen Pacacha (CT DOT), Chris Bernier (DEMHS).

1. Call to Order

Chair Gordon Ridgway called the meeting to order at 10:01AM. He noted that the Executive Committee had been working on changes intended to make Council meetings more relevant and useful to member municipalities, including use of the member roundtable format.

2. Member Roundtable

Council members provided updates from their respective municipalities.

Litchfield – Denise Raap

Raap reported productive discussions regarding potential redevelopment of the underutilized Bannon Mannix property into approximately 14 affordable housing units through reuse of the existing building. Litchfield is also preparing to roll out its voluntary pay-as-you-throw program in November utilizing a Connecticut DEEP grant and has selected a consultant for its 2027 Plan of Conservation and Development.

Norfolk – Henry Tirrell

Tirrell reported that the major State retaining wall/road project remains underway, with hopes of reopening the roadway by the end of the year. Norfolk is monitoring Winchester's implementation of automated speed enforcement cameras as it considers whether a similar program may be appropriate along Route 44. Construction of the new firehouse is also underway, along with several future bridge projects.

Sharon – Casey Flanagan

Flanagan reported that Sharon contributed \$10,000 to the Regional Opioid Response Fund and encouraged other municipalities considering uses for opioid settlement funds to explore the regional program. He also thanked Paul Harrington for sharing Winchester's experience with implementation of automated speed

enforcement, which helped inform Sharon's decision to postpone pursuing such a program until additional staff time could be devoted to it.

Morris

Morris reported receiving direct communication from the U.S. Postal Service regarding the possibility of establishing a new post office location in town. Work on the John Wyke Road Bridge, supported through a STEEP grant, is scheduled to begin during the month.

Goshen – Seth Breakell

Breakell reported that the 113th Goshen Fair attracted more than 31,000 paid attendees over the three-day weekend. An RFP is underway for replacement windows at Town Hall, with bids due the following week. He also reported strong community opposition to automated speed enforcement cameras following local discussion of the issue.

Roxbury – Patrick Roy

Roy reported continuing work on the approximately \$12 million Weller's Bridge project, completion work at the senior center following damage caused by a vehicle, an RFP for Town Attorney services, and grant applications for paving. Automated speed enforcement has also resurfaced for local discussion after previously being rejected.

Salisbury – Curtis Rand

Rand reported approximately 34 affordable housing units in the development pipeline, including 14 funded units ready to proceed. Environmental remediation associated with historic underground fuel contamination is expected to add approximately \$175,000 in project costs. Sidewalk projects, including improvements connecting Salisbury and Lakeville and the Hotchkiss School area, are also progressing, along with the Salisbury School tunnel beneath Route 44.

Falls Village/Canaan – Dave Barger

Barger reported continued work on a STEEP-funded salt shed, DEEP permitting, the Cobble Road TRIP project, culvert design, and a federal bridge project. The Town is also considering tax-abatement ordinances addressing elderly and disabled residents and taxpayers experiencing financial hardship. Barger requested examples and feedback from other municipalities.

North Canaan – Jesse Bunce

Bunce reported work with engineers on a TRIP-funded project and an associated bridge project. The Town is also considering transfer station improvements, including a roof over the bulky-waste area, new equipment, and potentially a scale.

Colebrook – Brad Bremer

Bremer reported a successful 81st annual Colebrook Fair and resolution of an emergency water-line leak at Town Hall.

Burlington – Doug Thompson

Thompson thanked NHCOC staff for assistance explaining the regional health initiative to Burlington staff and expressed appreciation for the upcoming State transportation meeting regarding municipal projects, engineering, contract administration, and billing.

Winchester – Paul Harrington

Harrington reported that installation of Winchester's two automated speed enforcement cameras on Route 44 was underway, with a 30-day warning period anticipated before enforcement. He offered to share lessons

learned with other municipalities. Harrington also raised the recently authorized Homestead Act and requested information from municipalities that had researched or implemented it.

Council members discussed implementation and administrative challenges associated with the Homestead Act. Denise Raap and Meaghan Cook offered to share research compiled by their municipalities. Members noted that implementation may require substantial Assessor's Office resources and that tax relief provided to one class of property owners shifts tax burden to other taxpayers.

New Hartford – Dan Jerram

Jerram reported ongoing road and park improvements, including additional pickleball courts and tennis facilities, and continued work with DEEP on the Pine Meadow sewer extension grant. The Town is evaluating the Homestead Act, considering changing the Treasurer position from elected to appointed, and reviewing potential efficiencies within its elementary school system. Jerram noted that New Hartford operates three separate elementary schools comprising approximately 100,000 square feet for approximately 425 students. The Town will also begin another superintendent search following notice from its superintendent shortly before the start of the school year.

Torrington – Mayor Molly Spino

Mayor Spino reported extensive municipal and State roadway work, including paving, East Main Street bridge work, and upcoming rail-crossing replacements. Torrington has begun its Plan of Conservation and Development process with IMEG and continues work on charter revisions. She also announced that the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs plans to establish a regional satellite office in Torrington within the next several months.

Barkhamsted – Meaghan Cook

Cook reported completion of paving and chip-sealing work, progress on a TRIP grant with assistance from Apex Engineering, installation planning for an EV charging station at Town Hall, and preparations for the Riverton Fair. Speeding remains a local concern, and the Town is working with UConn on traffic counts, portable flashing speed-feedback signs, and pavement markings. Work also continues on the Old New Hartford Road waterline project intended to support affordable housing and commercial development. Barkhamsted's Assessor has also reviewed the Homestead Act and concluded that the Town's existing elderly tax-relief program may provide greater benefit without shifting additional burden to younger residents.

Cornwall – Gordon Ridgway

Ridgway reported preparations for Cornwall's agricultural fair, ongoing Town Hall renovations, and completion of summer projects. He noted that the roundtable discussion regarding speed enforcement, the Homestead Act, and other shared municipal issues demonstrated the value of municipalities exchanging information and experience.

3. Public Comment

Chair Ridgway opened the floor for public comment.

No public comment was received.

4. Approval of July 9 Meeting Minutes

Doug Thompson moved to approve the July 9, 2026 meeting minutes. Jesse Bunce seconded the motion.

Members expressed general satisfaction with the detail and thoroughness of the minutes.

The July 9 meeting minutes were approved.

5. Monthly Financial Report

Annmarie Ryan presented the monthly financial report and a new executive summary intended to provide Council members with a clearer overall picture of NHCOC's financial position.

Ryan reported that unrestricted General Fund reserves were approximately \$2 million. She explained that while this level exceeds reserve percentages commonly maintained by municipalities, NHCOC's heavy reliance on grant funding creates additional operating risk if a major grant is delayed or discontinued. She suggested that maintaining approximately three to six months of operating expenditures may be an appropriate benchmark and recommended future discussion regarding establishment of formal minimum and maximum reserve levels and potential uses of excess reserves.

Ryan also reported that she is developing a comprehensive financial management policy addressing matters including internal controls and credit-card practices, with the intent of presenting a draft to the Executive Committee in October.

Discussion included the amount held in the Public Works savings/equipment account and whether a portion could be moved to a higher-yield account. Ryan agreed that funds not needed for near-term expenditures should be evaluated for improved earnings, while staff noted that some liquidity should remain available for maintenance and other ongoing equipment expenses.

Paul Harrington recommended that the financial policies include a formal purchasing policy and offered to provide examples developed for Windsor Locks and Winchester.

Dan Jerram asked about NHCOC credit-card practices. Ryan reported that a majority of employees currently have cards and stated that the number of cards will likely be significantly reduced, potentially to a single organizational card, as part of efforts to strengthen security, internal controls, and risk management. Updates will be provided as that process moves forward.

6. Bylaws and Personnel Policies and Procedures Update

The Council considered personnel-policy amendments previously reviewed by the Bylaws and Personnel Committee and Executive Committee. Staff explained that this portion of the Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual was being advanced separately because of new employees scheduled to begin work in early October. The remaining proposed manual revisions were undergoing labor-attorney review and are expected to return to the Executive Committee.

Original Motion: Jesse Bunce moved, seconded by Dave Barger, to approve the recommended policy changes establishing a **10% employee contribution toward medical insurance premiums for employees hired on or after September 10, 2026**, with NHCOC paying the remaining 90%.

Council members discussed the implications of providing different benefit structures based upon employee hire date. Paul Harrington expressed concern that differing benefits could negatively affect employee morale. Doug Thompson expressed concern regarding the generosity and long-term cost of the existing benefit structure and suggested that a phased approach for existing employees could ultimately be

appropriate. Dan Jerram noted that increasing healthcare costs would remain an ongoing budget issue and would likely need to be revisited.

Other members emphasized that existing employees were hired under a particular compensation and benefit structure and expressed concern about changing those expectations after hire. Members also discussed examples from municipalities where employees hired at different times receive different pension, step, or other benefit provisions.

Harrington subsequently moved to amend the motion to require existing employees to begin contributing 10% toward medical insurance premiums effective July 1, 2027. Doug Thompson seconded the amendment.

Following additional discussion, the Council voted on the amendment.

The amendment failed, with more members opposed than in favor.

The Council then returned to the original motion establishing the 10% contribution for employees hired on or after September 10, 2026. Chair Ridgway emphasized that the action addressed the immediate issue involving new hires and did not preclude further consideration of health insurance contributions for existing employees during future budget and committee discussions.

The original motion passed by majority vote.

7. Executive Director's Report

The Executive Director referred members to the written activity report and highlighted the following items:

- Work is underway on the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development, including development of a community-engagement plan.
- NHCOC continues to seek municipal representatives for a Planning Advisory Committee that would initially assist with the Regional POCD and subsequently the Regional Housing Growth Plan.
- If sufficient participation cannot be secured in the near term, staff and consultant IMEG will pivot toward a broader community-engagement approach while continuing to keep the Council informed.
- Members were encouraged to identify community events and individuals who could assist with public engagement and short-form informational videos.
- Approximately 50% of Council members had completed the Member Services Initiative Survey. Members were encouraged to respond so staff can better identify future municipal-service priorities.
- The next Household Hazardous Waste collection is scheduled for October 24 at the Bogue Road Transfer Facility in Torrington from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- Upcoming Lunch and Learn topics are expected to include cooperative purchasing opportunities through CREC, a PACE mobile health/urgent-care concept, and ADA/digital-accessibility compliance for municipal websites.
- Members were reminded of the Litchfield County Housing Affordability Summit scheduled for September 24 in Kent.

8. NRRA Update

By motion, the Council agreed without opposition to take the Northwest Regional Recycling Authority report out of agenda order.

Curtis Rand introduced Rachel Oster, Acting Strategic Advisor to NRRA. Oster summarized her professional background in solid waste and recycling and reported that NRRA will undertake a strategic planning process over the coming year focused in part on optimizing the Torrington Transfer Station as a regional asset.

Oster reported that NRRA assumed ownership of the Torrington Transfer Station effective July 1. Initial work has focused on transition activities including vendor management, establishment of an agreement with an operating partner, forms and authorizations, and appropriate insurance coverage. The strategic planning process is supported through a Connecticut DEEP grant.

9. Economic and Community Development

The Economic and Community Development staff representative, Rista Malanca, was unavailable. Members were referred to the written report provided with the agenda materials.

10. Housing and Town Planning

Regional Planner Grace Rennison referred members to her written report and emphasized NHCOC's ongoing municipal outreach regarding Public Act 25-1. Municipalities were encouraged to schedule individual conversations with NHCOC staff regarding the Act and local housing conditions.

11. Special Projects / DEMHS / Natural Hazard Mitigation

Sarah Better referred members to her written report and highlighted the following:

- Fiscal Year 2025 DEMHS Memoranda of Agreement had been distributed and must be completed annually. Municipalities were asked to sign and return them promptly.
- NHCOC will be working with CIRCA on the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, and municipalities should expect invitations for individual meetings.
- The regional municipal salary survey is ready for distribution, with the goal of returning completed results to municipalities in November.
- CCM is developing a more streamlined statewide system for municipal salary and employment data, which NHCOC will continue to monitor.

12. Transportation and Public Works

Erik Shortell reported that the Road Supervisors Advisory Group had reviewed regional equipment needs and recommended purchase of two pieces of shared equipment:

- Six-ton asphalt hot box and recycler – **\$69,490**
- Vibrotech screener – **\$87,225**

The vendor will take NHCOC's existing 2015 screener as part of the transaction and provide a \$22,000 credit. Shortell reported that multiple quotes had been considered by the Road Supervisors Advisory Group.

Denise Raap moved to approve purchase of both pieces of equipment for a combined cost of **\$156,715**. Doug Thompson seconded.

Discussion included equipment storage, existing equipment reserves, potential policies governing municipal use of shared equipment, and the need for better reporting regarding equipment utilization, rental charges, revenue, and disposition of those revenues. Staff reported approximately \$500,000 available in the equipment account.

Chair Ridgway requested that Shortell provide a report at the next meeting addressing rental charges, utilization, and revenues associated with the shared-equipment program.

The equipment purchase was approved unanimously.

Shortell also reported:

- New State bridge and culvert requirements will require additional municipal and COG work, including GIS location of bridges and culverts by May 1, 2028. Additional State guidance is expected.
- Canaan, Kent, North Canaan, and Washington were selected for funding through the latest TRIP round.
- Additional State Local Bridge Program awards were received in the region.
- Combined TRIP and bridge-program funding was reported at **more than \$6 million** for regional road and bridge projects.
- A Connecticut DOT District 4 municipal meeting is scheduled for September 23 at 10:00 a.m. and will include discussion of contract administration, construction inspection, and related issues.
- Positive feedback has been received regarding the Vialytics roadway-management program.

13. Rural Health Transformation Program

Leonardo Ghio presented the proposed job description for a **Regional Grant and Project Development Specialist**, to be funded through the Rural Health Transformation Program. Funding for the position is anticipated through the end of Federal Fiscal Year 2031.

Doug Thompson moved to approve the job description as recommended by the Executive Committee. Dave Barger seconded.

The motion was approved unanimously.

Ghio also reported that offers have been extended to three Community Health Navigators, with an anticipated start date of October 5. Initial work will include onboarding and outreach to municipal officials, social-services personnel, and EMS providers to develop referral pathways and identify residents who may benefit from navigator services.

14. DEMHS Region 5 Update

Chris Bernier provided several emergency-management updates:

- Don Boyce has begun serving as the new Deputy Commissioner.
- Ed Urbanski has been hired as the DEMHS Region 3 Regional Coordinator.
- Fiscal Year 2025 Homeland Security Grant Program Memoranda of Agreement have been distributed and should be signed and returned to NHCOC.

- Fiscal Year 2025 EMPG deliverables are due September 30, 2026; an extension has been provided for local Emergency Operations Plans.
- Region 5 municipalities recently participated in the Governor's emergency preparedness exercise. Exercise materials remain available for municipalities wishing to conduct the exercise separately.
- Information from the Secretary of the State's Office regarding law-enforcement considerations and the 250-foot rule has been distributed and is available for further discussion.

15. Public Comment

Chair Ridgway again provided an opportunity for public comment near the conclusion of the meeting.

No public comments were received.

16. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made. Jesse Bunce seconded the motion.

The motion was approved, and the meeting adjourned at approximately 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Northwest Hills Council of Governments