Region 4 Recovery Steering Committee Meeting

Date: Tuesday, June 24, 2020

Time: 8:30 a.m.

Location: Via Zoom video/teleconference. A recording of this meeting will be posted to the SCCOG and NECCOG websites: www.seccog.org | www.neccog.org.

Members Present: Jim Bellano (Eastern Regional Tourism District/Town of Windham), Chuck Bunnell (Mohegan Tribal Council), Wendy Bury (Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition), Jim Butler (Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG)), Allan Cahill (Town of Hampton/NECCOG Chairman), Mike Caplet (DEMHS Region 4 Coordinator), Maryam Elahi (Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut), John Filchak (Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG)), Mike Licata (Regional Long-term Recovery Coordinator/Town of Windham), Dr. Kyle McClaine (Hartford Healthcare), Alejandro Melendez-Cooper (Hispanic Alliance of Southeastern Connecticut), Deb Monahan (Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA)), Mark Nickerson (Town of East Lyme/SCCOG Chairman), Elsa Nuñez (Eastern Connecticut State University), Bishop Benjamin Watts (Shiloh Baptist Church of New London), Reverend Catherine Zall (Homelessness Hospitality Center New London).

Others Present: Sam Alexander (SCCOG), Amanda Kennedy (SCCOG), Darlene Richards (DEMHS Region 4).

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1) Welcome: Reminder of Committee Mission/Objectives.

Mike Caplet (DEMHS Region 4 Coordinator) welcomed the Region 4 Recovery Steering Committee. Mr. Caplet began a slide show, overviewing the role and mission of the Steering Committee. Mr. Caplet noted that unlike other disasters, recovery from COVID-19 would run concurrent to response efforts. Regional Recovery Steering Committees in the state will: Solicit input from impacted constituencies to identify short- and long-term needs and resource gaps; Coordinate efforts to assess local and regional recovery needs and develop response plans; Ensure communication with local recovery committees regarding plans, resources, and guidance; Develop recovery support function working groups, identifying key leaders and organizations; Develop and implement recovery progress measures in coordination with the State Recovery Steering Committee, and; Develop a long-term strategy to ensure the region can mitigate future risks.

Mr. Caplet noted that developing recovery support function working groups will be one of the most important tasks of the Steering Committee, and this will be discussed further in the meeting.

2) Introductions.

Mr. Caplet explained that there are 18 voting members on the Steering Committee. Mr. Caplet introduced himself, Mike Licata (DEMHS Regional Long-term Recovery Coordinator), and Darlene Richards (DEMHS Region 4 Secretary), and asked the three co-chairs to introduce themselves. Mark Nickerson (First Selectman, Town of East Lyme), Allan Cahill (First Selectman, Town of Hampton), and Deb Monahan (Executive Director, TVCCA) introduced themselves. The other members of the Committee introduced themselves and briefly explained their roles and affiliations. Mr. Caplet listed the names and affiliations of members who were not present.

3) ESF-14 Recovery Updates.

Mr. Caplet briefly explained the State's high-risk population identification and testing strategy. A number of priority towns and cities (New London, Norwich, and Windham) for testing are located in DEMHS Region 4.

4) Working Items:

a) Role of working groups.

Mr. Caplet stated that the numerous Recovery Support Functions of the Steering Committee will be likely consolidated into a smaller number of working groups. The first working group that the Steering Committee should stand up is the Health and Social Services/Housing Working Group. The Steering Committee will get together a broad spectrum of individuals with various roles in social services and housing. Each Working Group will follow a framework provided by the State Recovery Steering Committee, the group will identify all unmet needs and resources available.

b) Regional work processes update.

Mr. Caplet discussed the roles of the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) and Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG). SCCOG and NECCOG will provide staff support to the Steering Committee and the Working Groups, applying the statewide frameworks. Mr. Caplet stated he is available on-going, if needed.

c) Priority Discussion: Health and Social Services / Housing Recovery Support Function (RSF) Working Group.

Mr. Caplet briefly went through the draft list contact organizational contacts for the Working Group invitees. The list is largely, now made up of the Regional Human Services Coordinating Councils (RHSCCs) of SCCOG and NECCOG.

Jim Butler explained the role of the two RHSCCs; Councils of Governments are required by statute to establish RHSCCs. Mr. Butler and John Filchak (NECCOG) briefly explained the role and makeup of the RHSCCs in their respective regions.

Cathy Zall (Homelessness Hospitality Center New London) expressed concern about the anticipated impact that rent freezes have on landlords and that expiring rent freezes have on tenants.

Mr. Filchak asked about being able to communicate directly with the Statewide Recovery Steering Committee or with the Governor's office. Mr. Caplet explained that the Steering Committee would be able to send communications and relay emergent issues to the Statewide Recovery Steering Committee or other state officials. Later, Mr. Caplet added that he is happy to send any formal correspondence.

The Steering Committee discussed populating the list of possible contacts for the Working Group. The list of members could be organized by keyword, for the type of interest they represent. The SCCOG and NECCOG RHSCC can convene to offer input, if necessary. Steering Committee members will e-mail additional suggestions for invitees and contact information to Mr. Filchak and Mr. Butler.

The Steering Committee discussed additional invitees for the Working Group and ways to gain input from hard-to-reach interests: Invitees may not necessarily be affiliated with an organization; it would be helpful to engage landlords, and a landlord association if one exists, as well as housing authorities; the Southeastern Connecticut Housing Alliance (SECHA) may have interested members; membership should be inclusive and include faith communities, youth groups, social workers, and visiting nurses; NECCOG staff are able to engage with Northeastern Connecticut Transit District patrons; TVCCA is able to gain input from their clients and has connections to the Haitian community in the Norwich area;

Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods may be able to engage with non-English speaking employees and provide translation.

Bishop Benjamin Watts (Shiloh Baptist Church of New London) echoed Ms. Zall's previous comments regarding the seriousness of impending rental crisis.

d) If capacity in region: Discussion of additional working groups.

Mr. Caplet explained that there are other working groups of the Steering Committee. These will be established at a later date; however, the Health and Social Services/Housing Working Group is the current priority.

e) Future meeting scheduling/frequency.

Steering Committee members discussed a next meeting date and time and determined to hold a meeting on July 8, 8:00 a.m. via Zoom.

SCCOG and NECCOG staff will swap responsibilities for taking meeting minutes and both organizations will host meeting agendas, minutes, and recordings on their websites.

Mr. Filchak suggested that SCCOG and NECCOG could share data (e.g.: population, poverty, etc.) with the Steering Committee if requested.

5) Closing & Next Steps:

a) Recap key action items and owners.

Mr. Caplet stated that members will be getting various communications moving forward from both himself and Mr. Butler and Mr. Filchak, for organizing the Working Group and for other Steering Committee business. Mr. Caplet will forward information from the State and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

6) Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:47 a.m.