

**Commission on Economic Competitiveness**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday, September 27, 2016**

**10:00 AM IN ROOM 2A OF THE LOB**

**I. CONVENE MEETING:**

**The meeting was called to order at 10:06 AM by Chairman Rep. Tong.**

**The following commission members were present:**

Rep. William Tong, Joseph McGee, Commissioner Catherine Smith, Rep. Cristin McCarthy Vahey, Seth Ruzi, Matthew McCooe, Sen. Joan Hartley, Rep. Fred Camillo, Sen. Scott Frantz, Rep. Chris Davis, Rep. Jeffrey Berger, Lori Pelletier, Heather Somers, Rodney Williams, Steven Glazer, Rep. Chris Perone, Henry Teskey, Bonnie Stewart for Joseph Brennan, Dr. Daniel Long for Ellen Shemitz

**Absent were:**

Sen. John Fonfara (in district commitments), Commissioner Kevin Sullivan (attending tax conference), Jeffrey Hyde (out of state business)

**II. REMARKS BY THE CHAIRS:**

Rep. Tong welcomed new commission member, Henry Teskey.

The co-chairs explained that today's commission meeting will consist of presentations from 3 of the 9 COGs (Council of Governments) that currently exist in the state of Connecticut regarding the past and current work they have put into developing their regions comprehensive economic development strategies (the Northeastern Connecticut Council could not attend today as originally scheduled). The co-chairs expressed hope that the presentations by the COGs will provide the commission with a better understanding of the work and planning that is being done on a regional level to address the issue of economic competitiveness and that these presentations should help provide members of the commission with a solid foundation upon which the commission can build their agenda and initiatives.

**III. PRESENTATIONS FROM COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (COGs) REGARDING THEIR REGIONS COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES:**

**1. WESTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**

The presentation was given by Executive Director, Francis Pickering and Associate Planner Elizabeth Esposito of the Western Connecticut Council of Governments.

A copy of the this presentation can be found on the commission's website by clicking on the link entitled "Western CT Council of Governments-Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy" under the September 27, 20016 meeting tab or by using the following link:

[https://www.cga.ct.gov/fin/tfs/20150904\\_Commission%20on%20Economic%20Competitiveness/20160927/Western%20CT%20Council%20of%20Governments-Comprehensive%20Economic%20Development%20Strategy.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/fin/tfs/20150904_Commission%20on%20Economic%20Competitiveness/20160927/Western%20CT%20Council%20of%20Governments-Comprehensive%20Economic%20Development%20Strategy.pdf)

The presentation began with a general background discussion about WestCOG including the demographics, trends, leading industries, transportation, and the CEDS process of the area. It was noted by Ms. Esposito that the WestCOG was formed in January 2015 as a result of a merger between the South Western Regional Planning Agency and the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials and that there is no active CEDS process taking place within the COG. The presenters noted that WestCOG is a leader in many areas including population growth, income, home value, and number of educated citizens compared to other regions in the area and the state as a whole. It was also noted that Fairfield County's top 5 industries are healthcare and social assistance, retail trade, finance and insurance, professional, scientific, and technical services and arts, entertainment and recreation and accommodation/food services. A chart is included in the presentation breaking down the number of jobs, number of establishments, and annual payroll of each industry.

As the presenters discussed the top 10 largest employment industry sectors in the area it was noted that WestCOG experiences a different shaped economy than that of the nation as certain sectors such as finance and insurance are above the state and national averages while other sectors such as accommodation and food services are below.

A discussion then took place between the presenters and commission members regarding the regional advantages and disadvantages of WestCOG. Among the advantages are its location to New York/New England metro area. Concerning disadvantages it was discussed that an improvement of the transportation network, improving the small business climate, diversifying the economy, improving digital infrastructure, reducing the cost of living and diversifying the housing market, and advocating for municipal revenue other than property tax would all positively affect the region from a competitive standpoint.

Chairman McGee questioned Mr. Pickering on the COG's decision to exclude Bridgeport from its economic plan which going back to 2008 it was included. Mr. McGee warned the presenter's that the exclusion of Bridgeport was a mistake and its ramifications on a policy level will be profound.

The presentation concluded with a discussion regarding the COG's CEDs status. WestCOG applied for EDA funding in August 2015 to complete a CEDS. No decision on the application was made as a result of HB 6259 & an inactive EDD. It was explained that WestCOG began the

CEDS process in May 2016 without funding assistance and that regional analysis is pending review.

## **2. CONNECTICUT METROPOLITAN COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**

The presentation was given by Deputy Director, Michael Pavia and Planning Director Meghan Sloan of the Connecticut Metropolitan Council of Governments.

A copy of the this presentation can be found on the commission's website by clicking on the link entitled "CT Metropolitan Council of Governments-Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy" under the September 27, 2016 meeting tab or by using the following link:

[https://www.cga.ct.gov/fin/tfs/20150904\\_Commission%20on%20Economic%20Competitiveness/20160927/CT%20Metropolitan%20Council%20of%20Governments-Comprehensive%20Economic%20Development%20Strategy.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/fin/tfs/20150904_Commission%20on%20Economic%20Competitiveness/20160927/CT%20Metropolitan%20Council%20of%20Governments-Comprehensive%20Economic%20Development%20Strategy.pdf)

The presentation focused on the background of the MetroCOG, the comprehensive economic development strategy of the region, the economic competitiveness in the greater Bridgeport region, the challenges that exist in the region towards improving such competitiveness, and lastly Connecticut's strengths which can be built off of towards improving the economic competitiveness of the COG.

During and following the presentation there was a discussion between the presenters and commission members regarding the need for a more streamlined process between the businesses in the area and the state agencies that administer business assistance programs. It is the COG's experience that the process is too complicated and takes too long for the businesses to navigate the system which costs them valuable time which needs to be spent at their businesses.

Regarding the CEDs process MetroCOG expressed their desire to be more connected to WestCOG throughout the process so that they can work together on a plan for both regions as they are in MetroCOG's opinion interconnected.

Commission member Rodney Williams stressed the importance of the COG to focus on educating the residents of the region so that those that choose to stay in the area will be qualified for available jobs. In his opinion focusing on that will greatly impact the economic competitiveness of the region in a positive way.

Commission member Rep. Camillo responded to Mr. Williams's comments by explaining that the General Assembly has taken steps to assisting those that are educated in the region to stay in the area upon graduation by passing legislation to offer programs which would help them purchase a home in the area. He also explained that unfortunately this program has not been implemented yet.

During and following the presentation it was noted that all of the towns that make up the MetroCOG work in a truly collaborative fashion with limited selfishness which provides a great sense of optimism in the region. Several commission members appreciated the positive tone of the MetroCOG and they are encouraged that the region is on the right track to revitalizing what was once a region that was viewed as an economic engine across the country.

### **3. SOUTH CENTRAL REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**

The presentation was given by Barbara Malmberg Director of Marketing, and Ginny Kozlowski Executive Director of REX Development.

A copy of this presentation can be found on the commission's website by clicking on the link entitled "South Central Regional Council of Governments-Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy" under the September 27, 20016 meeting tab or by using the following link:

[https://www.cga.ct.gov/fin/tfs/20150904\\_Commission%20on%20Economic%20Competitiveness/20160927/South%20Central%20Regional%20Council%20of%20Governments-Comprehensive%20Economic%20Development%20Strategy.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/fin/tfs/20150904_Commission%20on%20Economic%20Competitiveness/20160927/South%20Central%20Regional%20Council%20of%20Governments-Comprehensive%20Economic%20Development%20Strategy.pdf)

Ms. Malmberg and Ms. Kozlowski began their presentation by providing a brief background of their organization. They explained that REX Development, formerly known as the Regional Growth Partnership (RGP), was formed in 1996 as the economic development public/private corporation of the South Central Regional Council of Governments, serving the 15 municipalities in the Greater New Haven Region. The primary mission of RGP was to encourage cohesiveness between the public and private sectors in the development of policies and programs designed to make the South Central Region a vibrant, sustainable and competitive economy. In regards to their region's CEDs they explained that RGP developed the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in 2003 and 2008. And in 2013 REX completed a 5 year CEDS update to include a Regional Action Agenda with lead implementers.

While describing the evolution of REX Development the presenters pointed to the fact that in 2010, the role of REX shifted from encouragement and policymaking to program execution. The 2010 expanded scope for REX included active management of the execution of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Action Plan. The presenters pointed to REX's plan to vigorously market the region to attract and retain businesses; perform business recruitment & retention activities beyond marketing, especially in navigating financial and regulatory processes; serve as an essential conduit for connecting individuals, businesses and resources to efficiently guide projects and initiatives forward; identify stakeholders and use data and research to support our programming

Achievements of the region were also touched upon including the fact that it is the first state & federal Economic Development District in Connecticut – which provides all 15 municipalities access to federal funds typically restricted to federally defined distressed communities. The regions ability to attract and retain businesses in manufacturing (med device, food, aerospace pipeline), wholesale, retail and bio were also discussed as achievements of the economic plans developed in the region.

It was discussed that while REX considers its public relations and marketing sectors to be accomplishments commission members feel that it is important that the economic development plan of the region continue to focus on “getting the word out” and training the citizens of these areas for the jobs that are being formed in the region. The importance of REX being more of a presence in the community and improving their outreach and communication with those that live in the area was also discussed.

A further discussion took place concerning the importance of establishing cohesiveness between the public and private sectors in development, which REX has done. Several members commented on how unlocking a partnership between the two groups is critical to developing a lasting sustained economic development strategy.

#### **IV. ANNOUNCEMENT OF TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

Friday, October 14, 2016 at 10:00 AM in Room 2D of the LOB to hear a presentation from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Panel regarding the Fed’s initiatives to revitalize cities with the goal of providing research-based recommendations and best practices that inform the Commission’s work on revitalizing Connecticut’s urban cores, including promoting social equity, as a path to strengthening the state’s long-term economic competitiveness. Official agenda will be forthcoming.

#### **V. ADJOURNMENT:**

**The meeting was adjourned at 12:16 PM by Chairman Rep. Tong.**

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**Tom Spinella**

**Administrator**