

SCCOG NEWSLETTER

Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments

February, 2008

5 Connecticut Avenue
Norwich, CT 06360
860-889-2324
860-889-1222 (Fax)
Office@seccog.org
(Email)
www.seccog.org

Member Towns:

Bozrah
Colchester
East Lyme
Franklin
Griswold
City of Groton
Town of Groton
Ledyard
Lisbon
Montville
New London
North Stonington
Norwich
Preston
Salem
Sprague
Stonington
Borough of Stonington
Voluntown
Waterford

Regional Emergency Continuity of Government Training Exercise

Using funds from a Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) grant, SCCOG hosted a Regional Emergency Management Continuity of Government Operations tabletop exercise on January 18th. The exercise was one component of a three-part project for which SCCOG received DEMHS funds on behalf of the municipalities of Bozrah, Ledyard, Lisbon, Montville, New London, North Stonington, Salem, Waterford, and the Mohegan Tribe. The training exercise was conducted by Sonalysts. The exercise was held at the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation Public Safety complex, and was attended by 34 individuals, including 13 SCCOG chief elected officials or chief executives.

The exercise focused on Continuity of Government Operations (COGO) plans, which are prepared to enable jurisdictions to preserve, maintain, and reconstitute governmental operations and services during an emergency. During the first half of the exercise, two teams were established, with a facilitator assigned to each group. An emergency scenario, involving a worldwide influenza outbreak, later complicated by a large snowstorm that hits shortly after influenza cases are reported in Connecticut, was used as a basis for participants to build assumptions, identify challenges, and later to recommend actions that must occur in such an emergency.

One of the most important assumptions made, impacting the critical steps a municipal government might have to make in such an emergency, was that outside aid would be limited. Challenges included preventing public panic; food distribution; availability of municipal staff; caring for special needs personnel; and implementing social distancing due to the contagious nature of this threat. Some of the courses of action suggested were to use the SCCOG as a forum to address contingency planning; to work with food stores before the outbreak to establish means to distribute food and to insure adequate inventories of food; and to identify critical governmental services that must be maintained at all times.



DEMHS Commissioner James Thomas at SCCOG's COGO Training Exercise

A highlight of the training exercise was the keynote address during a working luncheon by DEMHS Commissioner James Thomas. Each exercise participant received a certificate signed by Commissioner Thomas.

SCCOG staff is grateful for the efforts of City of New London Fire Chief Ron Samul, Waterford Police Chief Murray Pendleton, and former Mashantucket Pequot Fire Chief Roger Sylvestre, all who assisted in preparing the grant application and in guiding the development of the training exercise.

2007 Regional Plan of Conservation and Development Adopted

On October 17, 2007 the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments unanimously adopted the *2007 Regional Plan of Conservation & Development* (RPOCD). The preparation of this document spanned two years and involved four public workshops, numerous RPOCD Steering Committee meetings and a public survey. During the process, the Plan was available for review in its different draft stages on the SCCOG website. The final draft was forwarded to the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) for review and was the subject of a public hearing on October 15, 2007. The adopted plan is available to view and/or download on the SCCOG website at www.seccog.org. Additionally, the Town Clerk of each member municipality and the region's libraries have been provided copies of the Plan. A limited number of copies of the Executive Summary of the Plan, which includes a CD of the full plan, are available at the SCCOG office at 5 Connecticut Avenue, in Norwich.

Recognition of Environmental Stewardship

Whether the focus is on sources of energy, water quality or future water supply, the concept and promotion of using renewable resources is essential in the region's effort to meet growing demands while helping to conserve and sustainably manage its vital natural resources. The SCCOG would like to recognize the City of Groton Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA), the Norwich Public Utility Wastewater Treatment Plant, and the Drinking Water Quality Management Plan Committee for their recent accomplishments and continued efforts to help achieve some of the conservation goals and objectives outlined in the 2007 Regional Plan of Conservation and Development.

City of Groton Water Pollution Control Authority Achievement Award

On January 24, 2007, the City of Groton Water Pollution Control Facility received regional recognition for its ongoing commitment to improve water quality with the receipt of the 2007 Operations and Maintenance Wastewater Excellence Award. The following October, the facility went on to receive the second place award of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 2007 National Clean Water Act Recognition Award. The selection is based on demonstrated creative and outstanding practices in the Medium Advanced Treatment Plant category.



From left to right: Bruce LaBelle, James Bowdy (Lab technician) Stewart Peckham, Craig Motasky (DEP), Kevin Cini (Chief Operator), David Chin (EPA), Tyler James, Dale Marion, Josh Rendez, Steve Scarpa

The facility, located on Thames Street, has not been cited for a violation in eight years. Their efforts to improve water quality also include the operation and maintenance of a marine pump-out station; the design of creative, cost effective solutions to difficult treatment issues; a strong dedication to incorporate new technologies and implement best practices techniques in wastewater treatment; and even conducting experimental projects with hydroponics as a means to further reduce the nitrogen levels in Long Island Sound. Additionally, plant workers direct numerous facility tours for many schools within the region and develop and participate in a variety of projects or studies with Grasso Southeastern Technical High School and the Coast Guard Academy to ensure continuing awareness of the importance of wastewater treatment and water re-use as part of a larger goal of natural resource protection.

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Norwich Public Utilities Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade Project

In early September, nearly 100 local residents attended an open house at NPU's wastewater treatment plant. There, attendees received information on a 15-year, \$100+ million project plan to upgrade Norwich's wastewater treatment facilities and an opportunity to see the plant first hand. Norwich's Wastewater Treatment Upgrade Project includes plans to capture the methane gas released during the treatment process and use it to generate electricity that will power the wastewater plant. Other key objectives of this project are the removal of nitrogen from treatment plant discharge and the elimination of 15 combined sewer overflows that cause the discharge of diluted, but untreated, waste into the Thames River basin.

Support for this type of infrastructure improvement is vital in our ongoing efforts to conserve and sustainably manage our vital natural resources while also improving the high quality of life we enjoy in the region.

Community Drinking Water Quality Management Plan

At the January COG meeting, Groton Utilities staff member Al Dion briefed SCCOG members as to the work of a committee tasked with preparing a Drinking Water Quality Management Plan for the towns of Waterford, Montville, Norwich, Groton Town and City, Ledyard, Preston, and North Stonington. This plan is being funded by the State Department of Public Health, and should be completed in December of 2008. Future SCCOG newsletters will report on the progress of the Plan's preparation.

SCCOG to Prepare Three-Part Study

SCCOG staff is undertaking a three-part project that will include a Non-Tax Revenue Study, Joint Purchasing Study, and Shared Services Study. The purpose of the first part of the study is to inventory all non-tax revenue sources in SCCOG's twenty member municipalities. The second study will explore opportunities for joint purchasing, and will provide an update of a 1994 SCCOG review of this subject. The third study will explore whether there are any municipal services that could be shared among towns in southeastern Connecticut over and above what is currently taking place, and whether or not such arrangements could achieve cost savings. It is hoped that the results of this three-part project will be available this summer.

Progress and Funding Equal a Good Start for SECHA

The region has seen much activity on the affordable housing front in the last several months. Jane Dauphinais joined the Southeastern Housing Alliance (SECHA) as Director in May, 2007 and has made progress working with both towns and with developers. At the State level, SECHA has available to it a new incentive program for our towns to approve affordable housing developments.

Ms. Dauphinais has visited with almost every town leader, planner and land use commission in the region to explain the need for and the nature of affordable housing. The primary challenge is to dispel the myths that affordable housing is low income housing and will cause school enrollments to jump. Neither is true. Affordable housing is for households that make up to 80% of median income, which is \$74,600 in this region. This group includes healthcare workers, teachers, municipal workers, our own grown children in their early careers and many of our seniors. This type of housing generates very few school children. It can be attractive and enhance our communities' character. It does provide "feet on the ground" to support retail and commercial development. It grows the grand list. It can be the means of revitalizing empty buildings, cleaning up contaminated sites, turning renters into stake holding homeowners, and keeping our grown children nearby and our employers supplied with an adequate workforce.

Ms. Dauphinais is working with Stonington and North Stonington to help draft Affordable Housing Plans that will gauge the need for this type of housing among their residents and suggest to the Boards of Selectmen and P&Z Commissioners strategies for meeting it. Montville has just approved an affordable housing development for 182 units (30% affordable). East Lyme has one under construction. As more towns learn about the new (HOME) Incentive Housing Zone Program, several in southeastern Connecticut have requested technical assistance funds to help with planning for affordable housing. Town leaders recognize a good thing when they see it – financial assistance to do what is best for their communities. The program is catching on and SECHA is working hard to make sure our southeastern Connecticut towns make good use of the program.

If there is a silver lining to the weakened real estate market, it is that there is new interest in the affordable market. On October 17, 2007, SECHA hosted a forum for developers, builders and realtors, entitled *Financing Affordable Housing*. As a result of that and other local contacts, SECHA is currently working with eight developers in five municipalities on projects in the pipeline. Importantly, only one of these five towns, Groton, is among the three urban areas that currently carry the burden of affordable housing.

SECHA is grateful to the Mohegan Tribe and to the Dime Bank for their recent financial contributions of \$25,000 and \$10,000 respectively. A 2nd year grant from the CT DECED is expected soon. On December 24, 2007, SECHA received its 501-c-3 exemption from the IRS which will allow future applications to private and non-profit foundations.

SCCOG Applies for RPIP Grant Funds

In late November, SCCOG applied for \$309,430 in grant funds under the state's Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP). If the grant application is funded, SCCOG intends to create a web-based Regional Geographic Information System (GIS). The RPIP grant program was created in Public Act 07-239, adopted by the General Assembly last spring. Section 8 of this Public Act entitled, *An Act Concerning Responsible Growth*, establishes that this program be administered by the State Office of Policy and Management (OPM). Before an application deadline of December 1, 2007, regional planning organizations could submit applications to fund "a proposal for joint provision of a service or services that are currently provided by municipalities within the region of such agency or council contiguous thereto, but not currently provided on a regional basis." Projects submitted must demonstrate an increase in participating municipalities' purchasing power or a decrease in expenses including lower property taxes should the regional project be implemented. It is estimated that the provision of this service regionally will save each SCCOG town at least \$36,865 or \$737,300 regionally, by avoiding the cost of each SCCOG town establishing systems like this on an individual basis.

The SCCOG application proposes to establish a web-based Regional GIS. Currently, sixteen of the twenty SCCOG member municipalities have some form of GIS. A web-based Regional GIS would include data from all twenty SCCOG municipalities and if established, would provide quick access to each town's GIS database and allow some GIS capability to towns that currently have none. SCCOG would contract with a consultant to create and maintain the system, while SCCOG staff would be responsible to its member municipalities for managing the system. SCCOG's grant application includes funding to operate this system for five years.

In order to encourage multi-town participation, OPM informed regions that applications which included participation of more than 50% of the member municipalities would be given priority. All twenty SCCOG municipalities have indicated a desire to participate in this web-based GIS, and nineteen of the twenty towns were able to adopt required legislative body endorsing resolutions before the grant application was due to OPM.

It is anticipated that notice of grant awards will be made by OPM in February.

FY 2008 Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) Program and Master Plan Development Project

Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) is a federal program established in August 2005 in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users ([SAFETEA-LU](#)) transportation bill. In November, the SCCOG approved a resolution that would allow SCCOG to enter into a contract with ConnDOT to conduct a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Study in the region. In order to promote the Connecticut SRTS Program, ConnDOT will provide approximately \$12,000 in SRTS funding to the SCCOG for providing technical assistance in developing and adopting a SRTS Master Plan for eligible schools in the region.

Juliet Leeming, of the SCCOG Staff, has been designated the SRTS Regional Coordinator and will provide technical assistance to school(s) in developing SRTS Master Plan(s). Recently, schools within Colchester and Griswold expressed interest in participating in the SRTS Master Plan Development Project.

After the Master Plan has been submitted to ConnDOT, schools may apply to participate in the SRTS Infrastructure Program where they can receive federal funding for eligible infrastructure improvement projects intended to make the identified walking and biking routes to school safer and more appealing to schoolchildren.



SCCOG Staff:

James S. Butler, AICP Executive Director
S. Richard Guggenheim, Assistant Director
Thomas Seidel, Planner III,
Richard Serra, Planner III
James Rabbitt, AICP, Planner III
Juliet Leeming, Planner II
Wendy Leclair, Executive Secretary
Claudia Tamayo, GIS Coordinator
Jane Dauphinais, Director of SECHA